



MODULE 6

PLANNING FOR RECREATION





PLANNING FOR RECREATION

MODULE 6 OUTCOME:

*Recreation leaders contribute to the planning
and evaluation of relevant community
programs, services, events and initiatives.*

MODULE 6 – PLANNING FOR RECREATION

- 6.1 Introduction
- 6.2 Roles in Community Recreation Planning
- 6.3 A Community-Driven Planning Process
- 6.4 Accessible and Inclusive Recreation
- 6.5 Evaluation and Planning

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- Clarify the role of community recreation boards, community organizations and community members in planning for and evaluating recreation.
- Describe a process for recreation planning that utilizes a community-driven approach.
- List barriers to participation in recreation and strategies for eliminating barriers in Northern communities.
- Describe the purpose and importance of feedback and evaluation.
- Recognize the importance of planning for a broad range of skills, ages, interests and abilities.

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Whether it is preparing a to-do list, developing a program or writing a proposal for a new project, everyone plans. While there are many complex definitions of planning, it really can be thought of in simple terms. Planning starts with getting a good understanding of where you are and determining where you want go. It requires you to determine the steps that will help you get from where you are now to where you want to go. A plan addresses the gap between now and the future requiring an understanding of what we want to accomplish (goals) and how we think we can do this (actions).

Evaluation is closely connected to planning because it helps us reflect and understand how well we accomplished what we wanted and whether or not different actions could have helped us better reach our goals.

Recreation planning and evaluation is an important task for community recreation boards and committees. In particular, recreation leaders must consider how to involve community members and key stakeholders in planning. Doing so establishes common direction, prioritizes competing demands, determines strategies and identifies upcoming financial requirements. Perhaps more importantly, involving others encourages their ownership in making sure the plan is actually implemented.

A lack of involvement in planning is often the result of two common problems. First, there are some who view it as a waste of time. Some people and groups find it easier it to act rather than strategize. Second, traditional ways of planning do not always work in our rapidly changing world. When groups do not take time to plan for recreation in a way that includes the diverse concerns and interests in a community, it becomes difficult to fully realize the benefits that recreation has the potential to deliver.

When done properly, recreation planning engages both the community and key stakeholders. It increases the strength of the participants' commitments as well as their motivation. Furthermore, benefits such as improving quality of life, protecting the environment, strengthening families, supporting healthy and active lifestyles and ensuring safer communities become a reality.

Planning needs to be inclusive because today's issues are complex. Recreation has the potential to respond to issues such as poverty and obesity. However, as these concerns are typically overwhelming and require long-term initiatives that involve multiple stakeholders and sectors, it can be easier to work alone on smaller projects and assume that someone else will deal with the big issues.

As recreation leaders we all want the citizens, organizations and communities we serve to be strong, healthy and vibrant. Since research shows that happiness and well-being are improved when stakeholders are empowered (Hoth, 2010), we need to do more to involve, engage and empower citizens. Everyone needs to accept this responsibility and by sharing the load we can work together, maximize our potential and use recreation as a vehicle to tackle the big issues facing many communities today.

This means that for every planning effort, we should ask three key questions:

1. How do we provide opportunities for citizens and organizations to influence decisions that affect them?
2. How do we facilitate regular contact and communication between stakeholders?
3. How do we help stakeholders gain confidence and competence to take charge of their circumstances?

These three questions help design a meaningful recreation plan and evaluation. Plans still need to include a vision, values, goals and action steps, but these are determined with the community rather than without.



6.2 ROLES IN COMMUNITY RECREATION PLANNING

Recreation planning happens at various levels. We plan events, programs, facility improvements and trail development, and we may do this with a small group, with multiple groups and community stakeholders, or regionally with several communities.



Most recreation leaders understand their role in planning meetings, programs and events in addition to developing plans for their organization or a recreation facility. However, they also have a role to play in community-wide planning and the development of recreation master plans, community strategic plans, sustainability plans, official community plans, health plans, etc.

At a broad level, a community recreation plan can provide guidance for decision-making. It justifies the investment of resources for recreation infrastructure, services, programs and events. A plan prioritizes actions based on the current state of recreation while incorporating a vision of the future.

A community recreation plan should describe:

- The current situation in a community (e.g. volunteers, programs, facilities),
- The desired future for programs, facilities, etc., and
- The actions or steps that will lead to these changes.

When connected to other community plans, a recreation plan reflects values, interests and resources, and answers three key questions:

1. Where are we now? (What is the current situation?)
2. Where would we like to be? (What future opportunities do we want?)
3. How are we going to get there? (What strategies, actions and resources are needed?)

Representing the community's voice is a critical role for members of a local recreation board or committee as well as for board of directors within a community organization.

Local recreation boards and committees are advisory boards made up of a cross section of community members who advise elected officials and staff regarding community issues. In order to create meaningful, relevant recommendations for recreation activities, community organizations need to ensure that planning at all levels involves the community.

Community-driven planning ensures the issues, assets and challenges voiced through community boards and recreation groups are reflected in the plans. This is especially important because recreation is always in high demand, but there are rarely enough resources (human, financial or physical space) to address every wish and desire. Recreation leaders need to identify and address priorities while ensuring diversity in programs, events and services thereby guaranteeing something for everyone.



It is important to consider what people say they want and need. However, to maintain a balanced perspective, it is equally important to consider community characteristics including:

- demographic and cultural composition,
- values, ages and interests,
- ability to pay for services,
- existing skills, strengths and ideas,
- current programs and their fit with the organization's mandate, and
- the capacity to deliver programs and services.

Providing everything for everyone is never possible. However, when more people are engaged in the decision-making and delivery, outcomes are improved and more resources (e.g. donations in-kind) may become available.

Recreation leaders need to be aware of all the planning initiatives that impact their community. They need to step forward and participate with confidence, promoting the importance of recreation and its potential to address individual, social, environmental and economic issues.

Yukon Government's [Community Recreation Planning Toolkit \(pdf70\)](#) is a resource designed to help rural Yukon communities identify local recreation priorities and create a community recreation plan. The toolkit suggests a community-driven process for gathering information and planning and includes sample templates and tools.

For more information on how to lead complex community change, view seven essential elements ([url30](#)) that need to be in place and find out what happens when they are not.



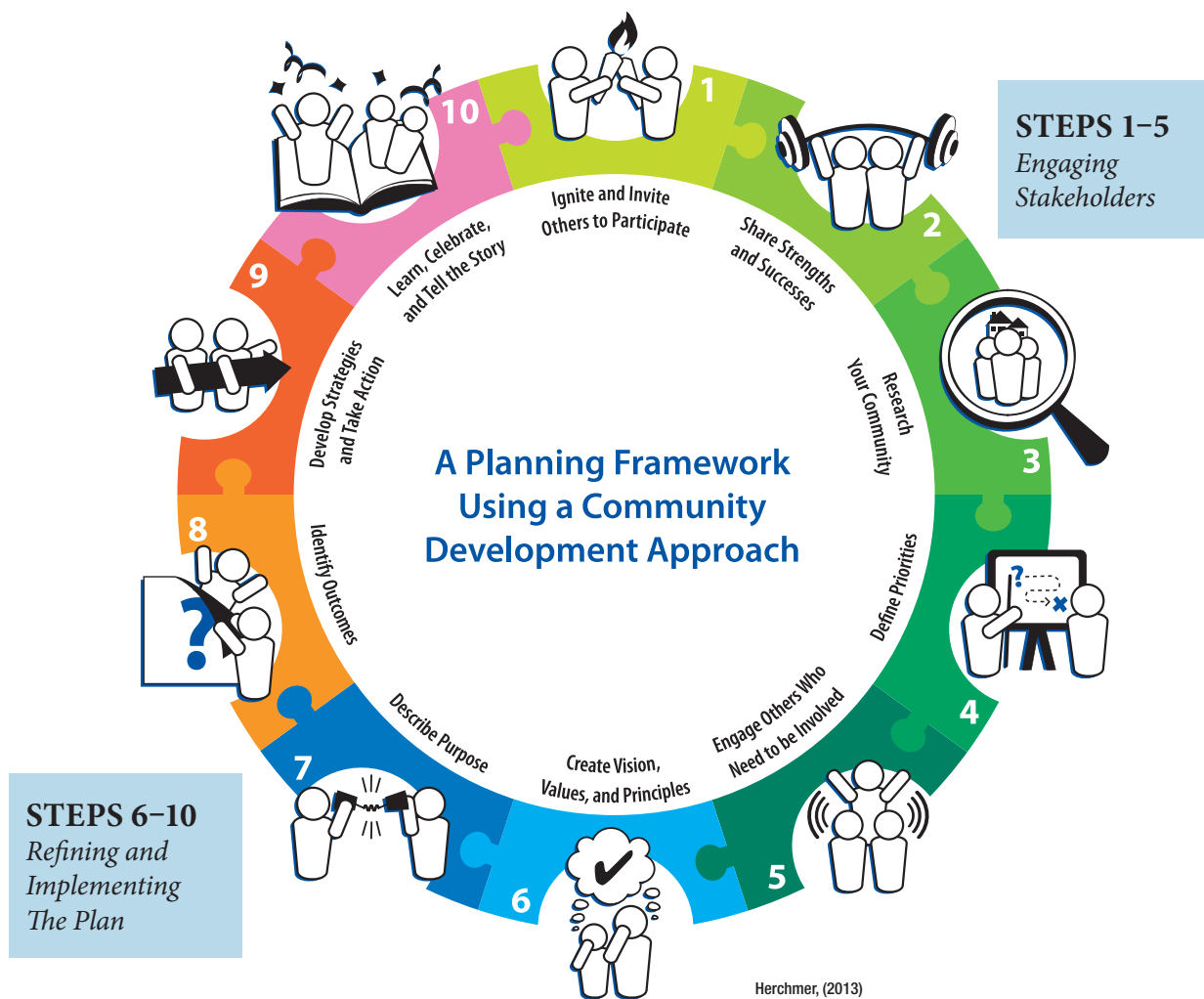
6.3 A COMMUNITY-DRIVEN PLANNING PROCESS

Plans come in a variety of shapes and sizes. Some may have a broad focus (e.g. community strategic plans or municipal sustainability plans) while others may be more narrowly defined (e.g. program, project or event plans).

While the players involved in planning and why it is being done may differ, the framework described in this module can typically be applied at all levels, for all types of plans, and with all target audiences (Herchmer, 2013).

A community development (CD) approach to planning includes five initial steps not typically found in planning models or frameworks. Common approaches may begin at step six of the CD planning framework without having used the first five steps.

A PLANNING FRAMEWORK THAT UTILIZES A COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT APPROACH



Engage the community beginning with steps 1–5:

- Step 1: Ignite and Invite Others to Participate
- Step 2: Share Strengths and Successes
- Step 3: Research Your Community
- Step 4: Define Priorities
- Step 5: Engage Others Who Need to be Involved

Refine and implement your plans with steps 6–10:

- Step 6: Create Vision, Values, and Principles
- Step 7: Describe Purpose
- Step 8: Identify Outcomes
- Step 9: Develop Strategies and Take Action
- Step 10: Learn, Celebrate, and Tell the Story

The first five steps of this planning framework ensure the development of meaningful and relevant strategies by successfully engaging individuals and groups. Involving others in planning results in community ownership and an active interest to help with the implementation process.

These steps may not always occur in the order presented. However, if planning stalls, it is likely because a step has been missed and it will be necessary to go back and work through it. More explanation about each of these 10 steps as well as a planning worksheet can be found at ([url31](#)).



6.4 ACCESSIBLE AND INCLUSIVE RECREATION

We know that recreation delivers benefits for individuals, families and communities. To maintain a commitment to outcome or benefits-based recreation, leaders in the field need to serve as ambassadors. They promote an awareness and understanding of the importance of active healthy living and of participation in sport, culture and recreation among all ages, interests, genders, cultures and abilities.

When planning and delivering recreation programs, consider how leisure education that leads to leisure literacy will be incorporated. This can involve identifying and addressing barriers that may include financial limitations, accessibility issues, a lack of experience, isolation, gender stereotypes, disabilities, bullying, and others. Any number of these factors may limit participation. Unfortunately, not all Yukoners have easy or equal access to recreation opportunities. Some activities cost too much, some families do not have transportation, some people may not feel welcome, and in some communities, there may not be equipment available to participate.

'Inclusive' and 'accessible' describe an important goal of community recreation which is to ensure everyone can participate.

Inclusive recreation means it is easy for everyone to participate should they choose to do so. Social inclusion refers to social, economic, and systemic barriers (e.g. policies and rules) that prevent people from engaging in recreation. For example, if program fees are high or equipment is expensive, these costs make it difficult for people living with low incomes to participate.

Barriers related to living conditions are referred to as the social determinants of health (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2011). Some examples of what may limit participation are income, education, employment, housing, gender, Aboriginal status or disability.

Accessibility is related to inclusion. Sometimes these terms are used interchangeably. In recreation, we use the term accessible in reference to the physical environment and the characteristics that make it possible for people to participate regardless of ability.

A disability should not limit the opportunity to be involved in recreational activities. A disability may be visible (e.g. a physical disability) or less evident (e.g. a mental health disorder or intellectual disability). Disabilities may have a sudden onset (e.g. spinal cord injury), exist from birth (e.g. Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Effects) or occur with aging (e.g. arthritis or dementia).

A community recreation approach involves programs, services and events that are inclusive and accessible for all individuals, families and groups. It is essential to create opportunities for people of all ages, interests, genders, cultures and abilities in order that they experience the benefits of active healthy living and the value of participation in sport, culture and recreation.

6.5 EVALUATION AND PLANNING

What does evaluation have to do with planning? What does it accomplish? How and when should it be done? Evaluation, while not always a popular activity, is an important part of effective planning.

It is a way of gathering information and forming decisions. Assessments allow recreation leaders and stakeholders to track, form opinions and make decisions based on measurable information. An evaluation lets us see where we have come from and understand what we might want to do differently in the future. It aids in dealing with uncertainty and change.

Evaluation helps recreation leaders to:

- Understand what is working well and why. This is called process evaluation.
- Identify the results, benefits and impacts of recreation projects, programs, etc. This is called outcome evaluation.
- Learn about community values, needs, assets and interests. Although this is a needs assessment, it is about gathering information.
- Demonstrate effectiveness and ensure accountability to funders, stakeholders and community. This may be in the form of a report that describes outcomes and outputs.

Evaluation needs to be part of the planning process as it helps us gather information that is used to make good decisions.

Community-based evaluations gather information about the value and impact of recreation programs and services for residents and the community. This requires more than simply collecting and recording quantitative data, which is information that can be counted and measured (e.g. number of participants, dollars collected, etc.). Qualitative data is a better indicator of the impact and value of recreation. Qualitative information involves feelings, thoughts and behaviours, and is captured through conversations, photos, interviews and stories.



Evaluation can be done using a variety of methods. These may vary depending on the reason for evaluating and the decision to collect qualitative or quantitative information. Methods can include feedback forms, interviews, surveys, community meetings, [Photovoice \(pdf20\)](#), comment cards, social media, etc. [The Evaluation Toolbox \(url32\)](#) is an online resource that describes community-based evaluation methods. It provides tools for gathering feedback and carrying out a simple or more complex evaluation.

When planning, start by identifying the outcomes you want. Knowing your outcomes helps you figure out what and how to evaluate. It is impossible to assess everything, so focus on one thing at a time such as recreation programs and services, the effectiveness of your board of directors, employee performance, marketing efforts, or the effectiveness of staff training and development.

Regardless of what we decide to evaluate, it is important to think about and apply several principles and practices.

- Figure out how you will evaluate and measure from the very beginning, rather than leaving it to the end.
- Measure physical, intellectual, social and spiritual well-being, quality of life, the environment, and our economic impact and sustainability.
- Use a variety of approaches, methods and tools such as those included in Australia's Evaluation Toolbox.
- Design evaluation to address real community issues.
- Make evaluation a participatory process by involving citizens, stakeholders and funders.
- Ensure evaluation is a priority by building it into budgets and work plans.

[Asking Questions that Matter... and Some Tools to Answer Them \(pdf21\)](#)

is an easy-to-use resource developed for Yukon Government. It describes the basic concepts around evaluation and offers tools to develop and carry out an evaluation of a community-based program.

Surveys are an excellent way to gather useful information. Refer to page 19 in [Asking Questions that Matter...](#) for helpful tips on how to design a simple survey that best meets your needs. Adapt survey questions from this sample [Yukon Community Survey \(pdf22\)](#). Online survey tools include Fluid Survey and Survey Monkey.

As we have seen, planning is a critical process that helps us identify where we want to go. It requires an understanding of what we want to accomplish (goals) and how we think we can do this (actions). Planning is most effective when key stakeholders are involved from beginning to end. Gathering information about how we are doing can help us reflect and understand if we accomplished what we planned and whether or not different actions could have helped us better reach our goals.

Planning and evaluation are essential in community recreation. They help bring people together around shared goals that ultimately make the community a better place for everyone.

