Towards a National Agenda for Recreation

The Nova Scotia Response

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Summary

In mid February, Recreation Nova Scotia received a request from Canadian Parks and Recreation Association (CPRA) to develop a consultation process to gather data from stakeholders in the province, in response to reported outputs from the National Recreation Summit held at Lake Louise in October 2011. The purpose of the consultation process was to ‘advance the thinking toward the eventual evolution of a National Recreation Agenda which would receive Pan Canadian endorsement’. The results will feed into the deliberations being planned at the National Round Table dialogue to be held in Fredericton, New Brunswick in late May, 2013.

In Nova Scotia, considerable time has been spent throughout this process, determining the role of public recreation, that is services at all levels of government that are publically funded. It has been acknowledged that ‘public recreation’ is one component of the larger recreation sector network, and has a mandate to serve the greater good of society given that it is publically funded. As such, there is a distinct role that public recreation is positioned to play for which no other agency has the capacity. Considerable concern was expressed over the lack of apparent clarity of roles within recreation and the need to determine those roles before proceeding. Throughout the process, care was taken to try and identify which issues have regional relevance and that appear to be national in scope.

The core business of public recreation is believed to fall into four categories: community building, creating awareness and building understanding about the power and potential or recreation, the provision of opportunities for people to engage in recreation, and building recreation literacy that enables people to avail themselves of the opportunities. This work is very much informed by a set of core beliefs and many positive outcomes accrue as a result. This varies somewhat from the proposed model that emerged from the Summit that defines the three cornerstones or drivers as holistic human development, community building, and environmental sustainability, with the addition of economic development as a fourth outcome. As stated in the discussion paper from the Summit, although there may be economic spin offs from public recreation, this is certainly not considered to be its core business. Similarly, public recreation seeks to ensure that Canadians have access to the natural world, and develop a connection to nature through recreation, however ensuring environmental sustainability is not generally considered a primary function of public recreation.

It has been stressed throughout this process that public recreation is one component of a larger recreation delivery system. It has been challenging to look at public recreation somewhat in isolation of other service providers. Developing a National Recreation Agenda is an important process that could produce outcomes for the field in the future, however, it has been acknowledged that it is also important that others such as CPRA and Provincial/Territorial Recreation Associations consider their respective roles in addressing the identified issues and not rely solely on government for the vision and leadership to advance the agenda.
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The recreation community in Nova Scotia appreciates the opportunity that this process has afforded us to come together. We've looked up from our daily work and thought about its meaning and relevance. We've discussed possibilities and priorities for the future. Within the province, we are a close knit community, different segments of which occasionally come together to future gaze on a specific aspect of the field but rarely in such a holistic way.

It is important to clarify that this process and this report are about public recreation, that is, services provided by government agencies, as distinct from other service providers in the recreation sector. Service providers from all parts of the recreation sector have had input into the process, not simply public service providers.

Consultation Process:
Nova Scotia employed a multi phased process to gather/review data for inclusion in this report. This included a content analysis of data gathered through other recent consultation processes, the results of which have relevance to this initiative; 2 electronic surveys; and a round table workshop. The electronic draft response has been circulated with an invitation for feedback, which has been considered prior to finalizing the submission.

a) Content analysis: The results of 10 data gathering processes that have taken place in Nova Scotia over the past few years were reviewed and summarized. Key issues identified in those initiatives were included for consideration by those involved in the current consultation process in terms of their relevance to the National Recreation Agenda process. The specific initiatives included:
- The Physical Activity, Sport, and Recreation (PASR) Framework
- The Core and the Edges of Recreation: A Call to Action
- Recreation Nova Scotia Strategic Framework
- Recreation Nova Scotia Advocacy Initiative
- RNS Power and Potential Strategy
- Building Community Level Coaching Capacity Study
- Role of Women as Volunteers in Sport and Recreation Organizations Study
- Engaging Women and Girls in Physical Activity, Sport, and Recreation Forum
- Examining Municipal Recreation Study
- Recreation Rising Summit

Definition of key terms used in this report:
- Quality of Life: an overall appraisal of life satisfaction based upon personal needs and expectations within a cultural context.
- Physical Literacy: ability to move with competence and confidence in a wide variety of physical activities in multiple environments.
- Public recreation: the work carried out by those responsible for the public good and expenditure of public funds at all three levels of government.
- Leisure education: the process through which individuals acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that facilitate their participation in recreation.
- Recreation (Leisure) Literacy: having the knowledge, skills, and motivation to engage in a wide selection of recreation activities, at varying skill levels, in order to satisfy a broad range of psychological needs in pro-social ways, across the lifespan.
- Recreation: freely chosen participation in socially acceptable pursuits that revitalize the mind, body, and spirit, promoting societal wellbeing.
- Wellness: an active process where individuals become aware of, and make choices that develop, specific aspects of their lives including mental, physical, emotional, social, and spiritual as well as the balance between them.
b) Survey #1: An electronic survey was distributed to 100 randomly selected individuals with a connection to the recreation field, asking the following questions: *What 3 key issues if addressed through a National Recreation Agenda, could most greatly enhance recreation?; What 3 specific items would you most like to see included in a National Recreation Agenda?, and What do you consider to be the most important work of the recreation sector today?* Fifty responses were received which included the identification of thirty five issues along with 18 items suggested for inclusion in the national agenda.

c) Survey #2: A second electronic survey was distributed to 60 key stakeholders identified by provincial government representatives and Recreation Nova Scotia. Respondents were asked to review data generated from the first survey, as well as from the review of previous work, and provide input to the following: Complete the statements *Public recreation in Canada exists to...; Public recreation is essential because...; and Public recreation’s greatest contribution to Canadian society in the next decade could be...* In addition they were asked to identify additional issues and items for inclusion in the agenda, indicate whether any of the items proposed for inclusion in the agenda should be removed from the list, identify the priority items for inclusion in the agenda, and provide feedback on the relevance of the 12 items identified at the Summit as being important to include in the agenda.

d) Round Table: Thirty key stakeholders, identified by provincial government representatives and Recreation Nova Scotia, were invited to participate in a round table consultation session. Discussion focused on the following: identifying the core business of public recreation, items for inclusion in the agenda, establishing priorities, and additional feedback for those responsible for drafting the agenda.

The Collaborative Nature of Public Recreation
Public recreation has always worked collaboratively with a broad spectrum of partners both within the recreation sector and allied fields. Not only has this been a desirable approach but also an essential one in order to achieve desired results relative to enhancing the lives of individuals and communities. Over the past century, public recreation has been called upon to accomplish many tasks, in large part due to the variety of skills as well as both the breadth and depth of knowledge that recreation professionals possess about individuals and communities. We have perhaps lost sight of what the core business of public recreation is and should be, and find ourselves somewhat adrift in a sea of possibilities. There is agreement in the province that it is time for those in the sector to work towards real change and making significant differences. We need to define a preferred future and commit to aligning our work to achieve this change.

As the future unfolds, there will be even greater opportunities for, and need to, work with other sectors in carrying out the essential work of public recreation and in supporting the work of others. Throughout the consultation process, there arose a call for greater clarity between public recreation and other sectors in terms of roles. Specifically mentioned were: a) the respective roles of three levels of government with regards to public recreation; b) the relationship between public recreation and health/health promotion, education, environment, justice, and social services; c) how public recreation interfaces with sport; and d) the role of public recreation relative to the other partners in the broader recreation sector.

The development, implementation, and monitoring of policy, as a means of affecting whole populations, social environments and entire communities, is an important means by which public recreation providers make decisions and establish priorities for allocation of resources. The development of policy that acknowledges the core business of the sector, working in collaboration with various partners, is an important means through which the public recreation can serve the good of society as a whole.

The National Recreation Summit and the subsequent consultation process provides a unique opportunity to focus attention on understanding/determining the core business of public recreation in order to ensure that resources of the sector are directed to achieve specific ends.
Understanding the Core Business of Public Recreation

The conclusion of the consultation process is that public recreation seeks to enable Canadians to experience enhanced wellness and quality of life, through creating communities that empower individuals to make informed decisions about use of their time. Empowerment occurs when people acquire sufficient levels of literacy to create, or avail themselves of, opportunities to participate in satisfying and meaningful forms of recreation. The priority is to provide access to as broad a range of opportunities for as many people as possible, with a particular emphasis on those who have traditionally been underserved. By doing so, communities will become stronger, more cohesive and more vibrant and sustainable.

This is a daunting task in the current economic climate, requiring clarity of purpose and the need to focus resources on work that will best achieve specific tangible outcomes. Such a reality seems contrary to the desire to provide greater opportunities for more people thus requiring us to think and work differently than in the past. The potential benefits associated with engagement in recreation have been well documented and are readily available through sources such as the Benefits Hub, yet there exists great disparity between those whose lives are enhanced through recreation and those for whom that is not the case.

Three basic conditions are required for individuals to engage in meaningful recreation; 1) societal knowledge, and acknowledgement, of the value of recreation; 2) a broad range of accessible opportunities must be available; and 3) individuals must possess appropriate levels of knowledge, skills, and motivation (literacy) to enable participation in the opportunities. Traditionally, the field has tended to put its greatest effort into the provision of opportunities, paying less attention to who was participating (or not) and to why that might be the case. In addition to enhancing the lives of individuals, public recreation has contributed greatly to the overall wellbeing of communities by working closely with other sectors such as education, health promotion, and justice.

We can build pools, parks, and playgrounds and develop a menu of programs, all well lead and managed, but if the people who can benefit the most do not understand the benefits of participating, or are systemically excluded from doing so, the opportunities are not actually accessible to them. Certain segments of the population have benefited from engagement in recreation to a far greater extent than others, because they possess the interest, knowledge, competence, experience, equipment, financial resources, transportation, confidence, support, motivation, and efficacy to take advantage of existing opportunities.

Documentation for the National Recreation Summit included the following 2 models which attempt to capture the essence of the core business of public recreation.

Understanding the core business of public recreation is essential to the process of establishing a National Recreation Agenda. As well as providing input to the model, Provinces/Territories were asked to contribute “positioning” statements to the process. It is somewhat unclear as to the relationship between positioning statements and core business. In order to attempt to provide clarity, a model emerged through the consultation
process in Nova Scotia that identifies three closely inter-related components: 1) Core beliefs/positioning statements that define and frame the work of public recreation; 2) the nature of the core work of public recreation sector; and 3) the outcomes that accrue from work of public recreation. Such a model is useful as a context for determining what needs to be addressed within a National Recreation Agenda for there are issues related to each of the three components which should be addressed.

Certainly the proposed concepts of holistic human development and community building are central to the Nova Scotia findings. Environmental sustainability is extremely important to the recreation field but not universally considered the primary responsibility of public recreation. It has been identified however that public recreation needs to ensure access to natural spaces for recreation, to ensure that individuals acquire the knowledge and skills to enjoy various forms of nature based recreation, and to operate in an environmentally sustainable manner. In terms of economic development, it can be an important spinoff benefit of public recreation through such means as economic impacts of festivals and events, reduced health care spending, lowering of crime and recidivism rates, and attracting businesses to establish in a particular area but this is not generally considered by those working in the sector to be the core work of public recreation.

Below is the model that has emerged throughout the consultation and data review process in Nova Scotia which provides a context for discussion and determining key items for the National Recreation Agenda.

**The Core Beliefs/Positioning statements:** These are the foundational beliefs that underlie and more importantly guide public recreation work. They determine how the core business functions are carried out thus determining the nature of the outcomes. For example, if recreation for all is not considered as central in the provision of opportunities, then certain groups will not experience active holistic lifestyles.

**Quality of life:** Public Recreation enhances the mental, physical, emotional, social and spiritual wellness and overall sense of wellbeing of Canadians throughout the entire lifecycle. Quality of life is enhanced through participation in a wide range of satisfying and meaningful recreation activities including the arts, outdoor pursuits, sport and physical activity, and hobbies;

**Recreation for all:** Public Recreation is based on the belief that every Canadian has the right to receive the benefits associated with participation in positive forms of recreation and no person shall be excluded based
upon factors such as age, sex, race, ethnic origin, religion, economic circumstance, occupation, mental/physical
disability, or where one resides;

**Leadership and professionalism:** Public Recreation makes use of a specialized and highly skilled body of
knowledge, and subscribes to high standards of practise and ethics (for both paid and volunteer leaders), in
providing leadership on all matters related to, and advocating on behalf of, recreation;

**Societal trends/issues:** Public Recreation plays various roles in fulfilling its responsibility to aid in addressing
societal issues by monitoring and responding to emerging trends and evolving societal conditions that threaten
the quality of life of Canadians;

**Partner in a network:** Public Recreation is a key player in a network of governmental, quasi-public, non-profit,
private, and commercial service providers with a responsibility to support others in the network and to pay
particular attention to the needs of those who have been traditionally underserved, and those least able to
facilitate recreation themselves;

**Community development:** Public Recreation utilizes and contributes to community building practices to mobilize
the assets of citizens, working together, for the benefit of all. The development of volunteerism is a primary
means through which this occurs.

**The Core Business:** Despite the myriad of functions that public recreation is called upon to perform, there are four
basic functions that define the core business of public recreation, that no other profession, agency, or component
of the broader recreation network is equipped or mandated to provide. These include: 1) utilizing the assets of
public recreation (i.e. human, facilities, equipment) to work with other sectors and partners to build communities;
2) collecting and disseminating information that creates an awareness about the power and potential of recreation
so that the potential benefits and outcomes are well understood and acknowledged; 3) ensuring the provision of a
broad range of diverse opportunities for people to engage in recreation; and 4) building recreation literacy in order
that individuals are able to participate in the opportunities.

**Community Building:** As is the case with any expenditure of public funds, the greater good of society should always
be an important consideration. Since recreation is concerned with how people spend their time, the work of public
recreation permeates many aspects of community. Guided by the core beliefs, public recreation engages in a broad
range of initiatives with others in the broader recreation sector as well as with other sectors that build and
strengthen communities.

**Create Awareness of the Power and Potential of Recreation:** Guided by the core beliefs, public recreation
undertakes initiatives to gather research-based as well as anecdotal evidence of the impacts and outcomes of
recreation on individuals and on communities. It is imperative that this information be disseminated, using
appropriate language and means of transmission, to a wide variety of audiences such as other government
departments and agencies such as education, health, justice, and natural resources; to municipal councils; others
working in the recreation sector; and to the general public.

**Provision of Opportunities:** Guided by the core beliefs, public recreation has a primary responsibility to ensure
that opportunities for recreation exist to meet the needs of citizens. In particular, public dollars are required to
enable opportunities that serve the public good and that may not be feasible to provide without government
funding assistance. Enabling does not necessarily imply direct provision but can also include such means as
negotiated access/use agreements, funding to non-government service providers, assistance with promotion of
services provided by others in the network, development of inclusion policies, and creating tax incentives to name but a few.

Recreation literacy: Guided by the core beliefs, public recreation has a primary role in providing and enabling education/instructional opportunities to enhance recreation literacy levels in order that individuals can actually participate in a broad range of recreation opportunities. Literacy not only includes proficiency, but also interest, confidence, entitlement, and the ability to create or access recreation opportunities. Although there is a key role to play in providing educational opportunities, it is equally important that public recreation lead in collaborating with sport, schools, social service providers, and a host of other groups who work with specific target populations considered most in need of recreation literacy development.

The Outcomes: When public recreation is effective in carrying out its core functions guided by its core beliefs, many positive societal outcomes are realized for individuals and communities. In general terms these include people living more satisfying active holistic lifestyles, a stronger connection between Canadians and the natural environment, reduction in the prevalence of social issues, and the creation of more vibrant and inclusive communities. However, evidence exists that suggest that many more outcomes accrue from participation in positive forms of pro social recreation (see the Benefits Hub).

Active holistic lifestyles: Individuals who engage in a meaningful and satisfying recreation live happier, healthier and more balanced lifestyles than those who do not. Participation in a range of activities aids in mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual wellness, and overall sense of wellbeing;

People connected to nature: Through gaining nature literacy (an aspect of recreation literacy) and having opportunities to experience the natural world through engagement in recreation, individuals gain a greater appreciation for the environment and that connection with nature often fosters more positive environmental practises;

Reduction in social issues: Many social issues stem from either inactivity, or choices made to satisfy needs in ways in ways harmful to the individual or others (e.g. obesity, bullying, addictions, vandalism). When people become empowered to make more informed decisions about possible uses of their time and the associated benefits, and acquire the means to do so through increased levels of literacy, they often make more pro-social choices resulting in a reduction in the prevalence of certain social issues;

Vibrant inclusive communities: Public recreation connects people to others in their communities thereby strengthening social cohesion; building social capital; and helping to transform communities into places where people want to live, work, play, and visit.

In summary, working within a network of partners, public recreation exists to provide leadership and resources that will enrich quality of life for all Canadians throughout the entire lifecycle by ensuring access to a wide range of recreation options, paying particular attention to addressing the needs of those who have been traditionally underserved and least able to facilitate recreation for themselves. Quality of life is enhanced through active engagement in personally meaningful and satisfying forms of recreation that enhances mental, physical, emotional, social and spiritual wellness and overall sense of wellbeing. The primary work of public recreation is to: build awareness and understanding of the power and potential of recreation; provide recreation opportunities for Canadians; enable recreation literacy through educational opportunities in order that individuals can take advantage of available recreation opportunities; and contribute to building strong healthy communities. Through its core work, public recreation has a role and responsibility as part of the broader community to aid in addressing
societal issues by monitoring and responding to emerging trends and evolving societal conditions that threaten the quality of life of Canadians.

**Input into the proposed Definition of Recreation**

From an individual perspective, recreation is engagement in pursuits that are chosen by the individual and personally satisfying, during one’s free time. Recreation positively contributes to healthy growth and development, as well as to one’s mental, physical, emotional, social, and spiritual wellness and overall sense of wellbeing. The broader the range of recreation pursuits that individuals are able to participate in, the more likely they are to satisfy their recreation needs in a pro-social manner. This involves developing knowledge, skills, and interest and having opportunities to engage in arts and culture, outdoor pursuits, sport, physical activity, and hobbies.

From a community perspective, recreation contributes in a myriad of ways to creating healthy and vibrant communities where people want to live, play, work, learn and visit. Community building refers to: a core belief that underlies our work; an integral and essential aspect of that work; and an important outcome of the work. Recreation contributes to communities by fostering civic engagement and pride, building community connections and cohesion, helping to address social issues, and enhancing the overall quality of life of residents and visitors.
A Canada where there would exist...

1. Widespread awareness of the power and potential of recreation to enhance the lives of individuals and the sustainability of communities, as well as to address societal issues related to overall quality of life;

2. Widespread appreciation and support for the distinct Canadian leisure culture/identity that reflects the breadth of recreation opportunities afforded by the great diversity in topography and climate, our heritage, and the cultural mosaic of the people;

3. Widespread acknowledgement/acceptance of a lifestyle centred on engagement in meaningful forms of recreation is as valued;

4. Plentiful and equal access of all persons to opportunities to develop recreation literacy though the obtainment of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required for participation is a wide range of recreation activities of expertise regardless of sex, race, ethnic background, ability, residence, or level of parental engagement (in the case of children);

5. Plentiful and equal access to opportunities for of all persons to engage at various levels (beginner to expert) in high quality recreation experiences that foster mental, physical, emotional, social, and spiritual wellness including arts and culture, outdoor pursuits, sport and physical activity, and hobbies;

6. A comprehensive network of recreation providers (e.g. public, quasi-public, not for profit, private, commercial, institutional) able to work collaboratively, share resources, mobilize assets, and advocate effectively for recreation;

7. Full compliance with Article 31 of the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* by recognizing, “the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts” and “that parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity”;

8. Existence of a policy that outlines the goals and objectives for recreation in each province and territory, emphasizing the value and importance of recreation as a social service with a high priority commitment of sufficient resources to the policy to ensure successful implementation, as agreed to by the P/T partners in the National Recreation Statement;

9. Recognition of the role of recreation as an important and essential social service in compliance with the National Recreation Statement which states that “recreation is a social service in the same way that health and education are considered as social services and that recreation’s purpose should be (a) to assist individual and community development; (b) to improve the quality of life; and (c) to enhance social functioning. Such recognition will indicate the constitutional responsibility of the Provinces and Territories in recreation services”;

10. Pan Canadian standards that recognize the knowledge and skills of those working in the field, either as professionals or volunteers, and the existence of high quality academic and professional development opportunities to ensure that the standards can be met;

11. Gender equity that accommodates past inequities, taking into account years of socialization and historical traditions that have created the imbalances, and subsequently marginalized girls and women will be achieved. This includes organizational policies and practices; resource allocation; and participation as participants, professionals, coaches/leaders, and administrators;

12. Play and recreation are embraced as ends in themselves and that the pursuit of *fun* is considered to be a noble and worthwhile use of one’s free time.
Priorities for Inclusion in the National Recreation Agenda

Based upon the results of the consultation process that has helped to define our core business, eight key areas have emerged as priorities to be included in the development of a National Recreation Agenda. These include:

1) leadership development, 2) monitoring emerging trends and address evolving societal issues; 3) creating understanding and awareness of the power and potential of recreation, 4) disparity reduction, 5) recreation literacy, 6) access to nature, 7) breath of opportunity and 8) rural recreation.

Leadership Development

At this point in the evolution of the field, strong visionary leadership is required, at all levels of government, to advance the recreation agenda. Other players in the sector look to government for leadership in certain areas. With the baby boomers retiring, and with some university programs closing that traditionally prepared public recreation professionals, it is critical that consideration be given to where professional training will occur in the future and for whom. This will require effort at the high school level recruiting young people into the profession and greater effort helping new professionals transition into the field. Other specific aspects of the leadership issue that require attention include: a) the identification of core competencies of those working in the field along with a mechanism to monitor compliance; b) the establishment of standards to ensure that colleges/universities are delivering curriculum based upon the current and projected needs of the profession; c) the need to focus on the decline in volunteerism and gain a clearer understanding of why this is occurring, who prospective volunteers for the future may be, what are their needs, how are they best recruited, what training/professional development do they require, and how can they be supported and recognized in such a way as to sustain their interest; and d) given the complexity of the field today and the need for breadth and depth of knowledge, as well as to remain current with rapidly evolving research and practises, a mechanism is required to develop and deliver high quality professional development opportunities in a systematic way, to professionals and volunteers.

Monitor emerging trends and address evolving societal issues

It is perhaps our ability to carry out this task effectively that enables public recreation to contribute most to the greater good of society. Public recreation has the capacity to do this in a way that no other player in the sector does, and others such as non-profit groups, look to government for this trends information and for action. Factors in Canada that impact recreation are changing at a rapid pace often creating large gaps between need and action. The profession is in need of ready access to quality trends data to inform its core work and set priorities. A few examples of such trends include: a) in the next 10 years, thousands of baby boomers will be retiring and living lifestyles dominated by recreation for the final quarter of their lives; b) Canadian youth spend an average of 7hrs 48mins on sedentary screen based activity which includes television, computer and video games which far exceeds the Canadian Pediatric Society recommends no more than 2 hours per day which less than 20% of children currently meet; and c) illness was once considered something beyond the control of an individual and that needed to be dealt with by medical professionals but today many forms of mental and physical illness are caused by lifestyle choices and need to be dealt with through lifestyle change, including recreation choices.

Create understanding and awareness of the power and potential of recreation

If decision makers (e.g. municipal councils, school boards, provincial/territorial cabinets) are to allocate resources in support of recreation services, and include recreation professionals in setting and carrying out agendas, they must be informed about the potential of recreation and its benefits. Without resources, public recreation has limited capacity to carry out any agenda. Recreation will never be considered essential, and the quality of life of so many will continue to be diminished by such factors as boredom, social isolation, physical inactivity, ill health, excessive screen time, and engagement in deviant pursuits, until society realizes the inherent value of recreation.
Considerable data exists about the benefits of recreation that are available through sources such as the Leisure Information Network and the Benefits HUB, but are presently underutilized. Much of the existing data are generated from scholarly research yet there is a wealth of data yet to be mined from participants sharing their stories about the role and meaning recreation has played in their lives. The profession needs instruction on making use of existing data, gathering/telling stories of local successes, and effective means of communicating key messages to decision makers.

**Disparity Reduction**
Appropriately addressing recreation's role in disparity reduction, and equitable provision of programs and services for all citizens, will be a key success factor in our collective future. Recreation has come through a stage of development where our focus was on demand (business model) rather than need (community model), and we have to figure out how to better apply the substantial resources at our disposal (e.g. expertise, money, facilities, networks) in providing equitable and inclusive services that are based on need rather than demand. This a complex and multifaceted issue that requires a greater understanding of the following: the needs of those who have traditionally been underserved and/or those in society who can most benefit from recreation participation; the personal factors that have prevented participation in pro social recreation activities; the practises that have caused certain groups to systemically been excluded from accessing recreation opportunities; as well as the promising practises that have helped facilitate recreation participation for specific underserved groups. The field will need to be very intentional in its actions if disparity reduction is to occur, and those who have been excluded will need to be central in the process. Our past failure to think and act in ways that are inclusive has resulted in thousands of individuals, many of whom could benefit most from our services, being excluded from participation in meaningful forms of recreation.

Identifiable groups of Canadians have long experienced disparity in regards to access to recreation, and policies and procedures are required to provide recreation for all, however two groups in particular stand out as being in need of our immediate attention: 1) girls and women for they are the largest group in Canada that has faced systemic barriers to participation in public recreation, both as participants and leaders/administrators, in large part due to socialization; and 2) those on low income for there have always been recreation opportunities available to those who have the economic means to purchase experiences (e.g. going to movie, joining a club, taking lessons, travel). However, people living in poverty, often by no fault of their own, experience a diminished quality of life. Recreation could play a large role in enhancing their health and wellness yet there exists many barriers to their participation, only some of which are financial. Extraordinary measures must be taken to alleviate lack of funding as a barrier to accessing the benefits of participation in quality recreation experiences.

**Recreation literacy**
Perhaps the least understood yet very important aspect of the public recreation agenda is the need for recreation literacy and the function of education/instructional opportunities. Leisure education is the means through which individuals acquire the knowledge and skills to engage in recreation. Recreation literacy is the level of proficiency an individual possesses in a range of skills but also the possession of information that empowers a person to make informed decisions about the use of free time. The public school system exists largely to prepare children for their eventual place in the workforce, yet no public agency accepts responsibility to prepare children, or adults, to make wise use of their free discretionary time. Certain groups have more discretionary time then others (e.g. youth, seniors, unemployed). Certain life events greatly impact recreation patterns which require adjustment (e.g. becoming a parent, sustaining serious injury or illness, addiction, retirement). Literacy is required to make such adjustments. Clear articulation is needed in terms of the following types of issues: what constitutes varying levels of literacy, who shall have primary responsibility to provide leisure education, who shall play what supporting roles, who are the primary target groups, and what specific strategies will be employed (e.g. public school curriculum development, parent education initiatives, youth leader/coach training).
Education and recreation literacy development can take many forms and can be applied in a multitude of settings. Consideration must be given to how the process can take place throughout the entire lifespan. The need for children is apparent but so should it be for those retiring when recreation rather than work will become the focus of their lives. Two specific aspects of education/literacy in need of immediate attention are unstructured play and connecting with nature. Parents, teachers, youth leaders, and recreation providers must all become educated about the value of play and of nature, and their respective roles in ensuring that children have the means required (literacy) to reap the benefits of play in both built and natural environments (e.g. confidence to be creative, respect for others, ability to play cooperatively, knowledge of plants and animals, basic survival skills, respect for nature). High degrees of literacy are of particular importance to those lacking in access to structured recreation opportunities (e.g. living in rural areas, lack of transportation, mobile challenges, low income).

Access to Nature
The outdoors is our greatest asset as a country. It affords many opportunities for people to play and recreate, therein achieving mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical benefits. As a field we have a vested interest in ensuring that outdoor areas and green space exists that are accessible for a broad range of recreation purposes. This includes acquisition and development of outdoor spaces as well as negotiating access agreements with land owners. Spin off benefits could include economic outcomes through tourism as well as environmental sustainability but first and foremost, the recreation sector needs to ensure that the outdoors continues to be a place where citizens can play and recreate. A set of protocols needs to be established involving all levels of government that will ensure the identification, acquisition, and management of natural areas in support of as broad a range of year around outdoor recreation opportunities as possible.

Breadth of Opportunity
The physical health crisis of the past decade has channeled public resources into a physical activity agenda. However the mental and emotional wellness of many Canadians are being seriously compromised by a number of societal factors, and social wellness is in jeopardy as a result of decreased face to face interaction brought about by the explosion in social media. Although once a cornerstone of the recreation agenda, many in the field have chosen to disregard the role of public recreation in spiritual development and renewal. Adoption of a broad concept of public recreation is required that calls for the provision of as broad a range of activities as possible in order to foster mental, physical, social, emotional, and spiritual development and wellness across the entire lifespan. Opportunities are required for participants to engage in activities at a continuum of levels from beginner to expert in domains including arts and culture, outdoor pursuits, sport and physical activity, and hobbies. The primary, although not exclusive, focus of public recreation is on ensuring opportunities for participation at the introductory end of the continuum. Our attention is required to ensure that mechanisms exist to enable access to as broad a range of opportunities to satisfy a myriad of needs by all Canadians, either as direct providers, or enablers by working closely with other service providers within the sector.

Rural Recreation
Nova Scotia is primarily a rural province, which is true of many other parts of Canada. Rural recreation was once a key focus in Canada but it has long ago taken a back seat to the provision of services in urban areas. Recreation continues to abound in urban areas, much of which is offered by private or commercial vendors, but not so in rural areas. This is an important issue, not just for the residents of rural areas but also for the population as a whole. The economy of the country is very much dependent upon natural resources industries such as farming, fishing, mining, and forestry making the sustainability of the rural communities critical. Within the agenda, a mechanism must be put into place to ensure that the unique recreation needs of rural Canada are acknowledged, identified, and addressed in order to help ensure the sustainability of rural communities.
Response to the National Recreation Agenda items identified in the Summit proceedings

A. Make the healthy choices the easiest and cheapest ones (with respect to recreation)
   Nova Scotians strongly support actions that increase access of low income Canadians to healthy forms of recreation. This item was discussed at the National Summit in terms of access to healthy foods, but the context in terms of the National agenda needs to be clarified.

B. Lead and partner in an after school child/youth serving agenda
   Nova Scotians consider that public recreation is an important facilitator of recreation literacy and a contributor to ensuring opportunities for recreation during free time (including the after school hours) through service delivery, policy and collaboration. The intention of this item in regards to the National Recreation Agenda needs to be clarified.

C. Reprioritize unstructured play
   Nova Scotians consider this to be a critically important priority for the field, with a focus on children but also for Canadians throughout the lifecycle. This issue is primarily one of recreation literacy and education around the benefits of play, for all ages.

D. Retain and incorporate nature in our urban neighbourhoods, our communities and our regions
   The need for a mechanism to ensure access to natural areas for multiple forms of recreation, in both urban and rural areas, is a high priority for Nova Scotians.

E. Foster volunteerism as the highest form of recreation
   Most Nova Scotians do not necessarily support the premise of volunteerism as the “highest form” of recreation, or even understand what that means, but are very concerned about the impacts of declining volunteerism and capacity of the volunteer sector on our ability to adequately deliver public recreation services.

F. Prepare the working practitioners with relevant skills and abilities and timely information
   This is an issue of significant concern to Nova Scotians in the following ways: a) changes in academic programs away from preparing public recreation professionals; b) relevance of curriculum to meet current knowledge/skill needs of the profession; and c) availability of accessible high quality professional development opportunities for those working in the field as professionals or volunteers.

G. Invest and reinvest in our aging and inadequate infrastructure, to better meet emerging needs
   This item is important to Nova Scotians, with the proviso that the following factors are duly considered: a) that facilities will address current and emerging needs; b) that planning is undertaken and policies developed to ensure equity in access by traditionally underserved groups; and c) that investment is tied to specific measureable outcomes.

H. Be proactive about climate change
   Although Nova Scotians support initiatives against actions that are detrimental to the environment, this is not considered to be central to the agenda of the public recreation sector.

I. Expand and invest in our national information sharing systems (LIN and the Benefits Hub)
   Although a small percentage of Nova Scotians actually flagged this item as a priority within the National agenda, the vast majority consider it very important that the public recreation sector do a more effective
job at creating awareness and building understanding of the benefits associated with recreation. This indicates a lack of understanding, and use, of LIN and the Benefits Hub to support such awareness building.

J. *Enhance physical and leisure literacy in our communities*
Leisure education, aimed at creating widespread recreation (leisure) literacy (including physical literacy, nature literacy, etc.) is considered to be a primary responsibility of public recreation in partnership with sport and others, and is an area that has been greatly under-developed, and in need of considerable attention by the sector.

K. *Develop appropriate outcomes focused performance measures*
Although not universally identified as a priority, a large segment of the sector in Nova Scotia recognize the value in, and need for, outcome based measures to ensure that scarce resources are being utilized effectively. It was noted that outcomes are not necessarily quantitative in nature.

L. *Commission and use evidence-based research*
A certain segment of the sector, certainly value the use of quality data in planning, decision making, and resource allocation. Two aspects are important to consider: a) the need for closer ties between practitioners in need of the data and researchers who gather it; and b) how can the data best be disseminated to end users in a way that is most likely to be useful (e.g. language, format, amount of detail).