Best Practices for Inclusion in Parks and Recreation

A REVIEW OF EXISTING LITERATURE

GUELPH WELLINGTON LOCAL IMMIGRATION PARTNERSHIP (GWLIP)

<u>**Preamble**</u>

This research study has been shared with the City of Guelph to help inform the ongoing work of the Culture and Recreation Department and the Parks Department. The findings of the study will be used to help inform the City's Parks and Recreation Master Plan.

<u>Best Practices for Inclusion in Parks and Recreation</u>

This report examines the practices of various North American municipal parks and recreation departments in addressing issues of equity and inclusion in their services and operations. Municipalities examined include New York City, Vancouver, Toronto, Mississauga, Minneapolis, San Diego, Ajax, and Richmond Hill, which represent a wide range of populations and geographies. There are indications that Canada is the most ethnically and linguistically diverse G7 country by a notable margin, followed by the USA (Fearon and Alesina). As a result, we should expect both Canada and the USA to be at the forefront of policies and best practices in this area. For that reason, this literature review focuses on Canadian and American cities.

There is a wide variety of definitions of equity among municipalities. For this purposes of this report, we will use the San Diego Parks and Recreation Department's definition of equity, being *"[...] the principle that public parks and recreation services should be available and accessible to all people regardless of income, ethnicity, gender, ability, or age."* (Parks and Recreation Department, The City of San Diego).

<u>Data Collection at the Neighbourhood Level</u>

The National Framework for Recreation in Canada states the following with regard to data collection in recreation programming:

> *"Recreation integrates the best available research evidence with practitioner expertise and the characteristics, needs, capacities, values and preferences of those who are affected. This requires support for the systematic collection and analysis of data, the sharing of information and the use of both quantitative and qualitative research methods, evaluation and social and economic modeling."* (Interprovincial Sport and Recreation Council, Canadian Parks and Recreation Association).

Almost all parks departments examined for this study explicitly stated that they collect and analyse data at the neighbourhood level to identify areas of need, and that data collection is key to proper parks planning, acting as a framework in which decisions are made and resources allocated (Community Services Department, City of Mississauga). Vancouver added that while data is very important, it is also important for parks departments to identify where there are gaps in the data available (Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation).

Some parks departments collected demographic and inclusion related data in surveys (Community Services Department, City of Mississauga), and found that analysing data at the neighbourhood level specifically helped in identifying equity issues (Parks and Recreation Department, The City of San Diego), while others focused more on user park rates, attitudes, and activities (NYC Parks).

A Vancouver survey of residents indicated that 92% of respondents indicated that they support "prioritizing the delivery of resources where they are needed most" (Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation), suggesting that targeted parks initiatives may have broad popular support.

Parks departments offered up key advice in the collection of such neighbourhood level data, including: developing a set of quantitative and qualitative metrics and examining them before and after interventions (NYC Parks); conducting in person surveys of parks representing all catchment areas (NYC Parks); conducting visual audits of recreation facilities and programs to ensure that all populations are included and represented (Community Services Department, City of Mississauga) and; using a historical review of park development in a given city to identify areas of historical underinvestment. This particular type of analysis may offer an opportunity to explain why certain disparities in park investment may have occurred (e.g. changes in legislation, rates of development, revenues, etc.) (Parks and Recreation Department, The City of San Diego).

> ### Toronto Parks, Forestry and Recreation
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> *"When planning facilities, the City should consider facility gaps, demographics, population growth and level of need, making sure that facilities are available to marginalized communities. Many residents identified the importance of responding to demographic changes through facility planning, including the needs of older adults, newcomers and low-income communities."*

TABLE 1

Population and Allocation of Resources by Council Districts

Council District	Median Income*	Population*	% of Population	Facility Sq Ft**	Sq Ft Per Resident	% of Space	Est. Usable Acres**	Acres Per 1,000 Residents	% of Acres
1	$105,365	162,505	11.7%	117,796	0.66	17.3%	967.77	6.0	24.0%
2	$75,751	159,379	11.5%	60,156	0.31	8.8%	719.57	4.5	17.9%
3	$61,001	172,900	12.4%	35,009	0.53	5.1%	537.80	3.1	13.4%
4	$55,540	137,994	9.9%	55,134	0.38	8.1%	467.83	3.4	11.6%
5	$111,922	157,513	11.3%	52,413	0.36	7.7%	308.39	2.0	7.7%
6	$85,999	147,891	10.6%	80,186	0.43	11.8%	322.22	2.2	8.0%
7	$74,952	160,317	11.5%	90,284	0.46	13.2%	312.61	1.9	7.8%
8	$45,634	145,208	10.4%	80,695	0.59	11.8%	225.71	1.6	5.6%
9	$38,641	147,969	10.6%	110,239	0.66	16.2%	164.64	1.1	4.1%
Totals	$654,805	1,391,676	100.0%	681,912	0.49	100.0%	4,026.54	2.9	100.0%

* SANDAG Current Estimates based on adjusted 2010 Census data.

**Includes new recreation centers in CD 1 and 9, pool buildings, and usable park space in Mission Bay, Balboa Park and beaches.

Figure 1 - San Diego Parks Analysis of Resource Allocation by District (Parks and Recreation Department, The City of San Diego)

Vancouver recognizes that a number of external factors may result in inequitable access to parks and recreation. The department applies several "Equity Analysis Factors" (Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation) in identifying and addressing equity issues at the neighbourhood level, listed below:

• Access indicators (e.g. car ownership, languages spoken at home, wealth, people with disabilities)
• Equity-seeking groups (those facing barriers to equal access due to being treated differently)
• Number of hours of free programming (at community centres and in parks)
• Indicators to help us reduce disaster risk and foster disaster resilience
• Survey data (e.g. annual satisfaction surveys, the "My Health, My Community" survey, or findings from the Vancouver Foundation's Connect & Engage surveys)
• Location of capital investments made by the Park Board in the past
• Sociodemographic patterns (e.g. children, youth, older adults, and seniors)

Vancouver's Use of Geographic Information Systems (GIS)

Vancouver has employed geographic analysis of their neighbourhood level data to, in their words (Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation):

• Identify patterns of uneven service and resource distribution;
• Inventory existing amenities;
• Prioritise investment;
• Ask better questions; and,
• Catalyze transformative change

In addition to this geographic analysis, Vancouver also collects information on 3 indicators of need. The first indicator is Park Access Gaps, which considers distance to parks and the density of population within a 10-minute walk of each park. The second is Demand for Low Barrier Recreation, which are areas where the number of "Leisure Access Program" participants is 3 times the average. The third indicator is Urban Forest Canopy Gaps, areas where there is less than 10% tree coverage. Vancouver collects information on these 3 primary indicators, then overlays this information in a composite map to identify areas

Figure 2 - Vancouver Equity Analysis Map - (Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation)

where these 3 indicators overlap. Those overlapping areas become candidate "Initiative Zones" for increased, targeted investment (Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation).
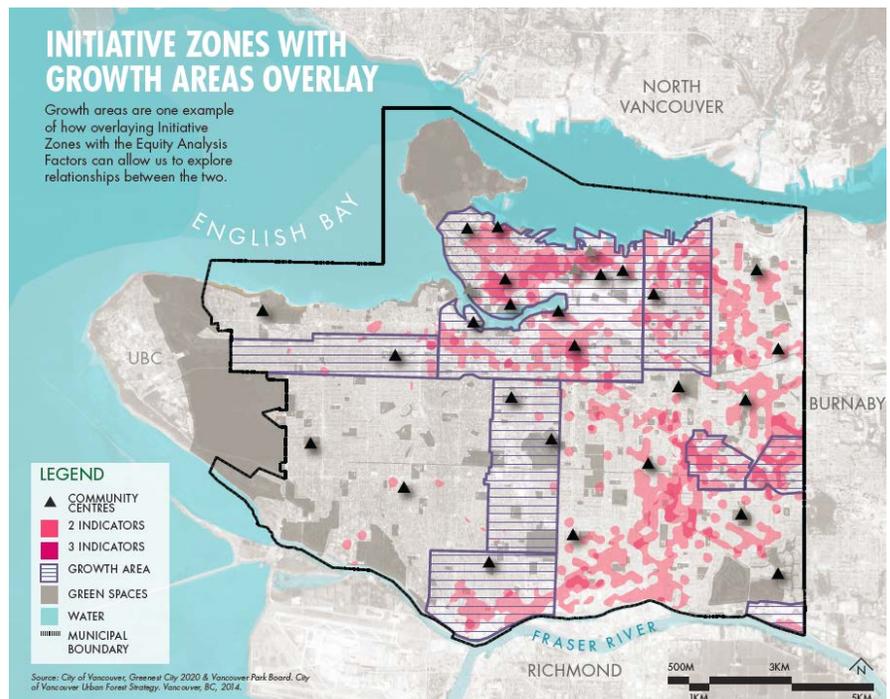
Targeted Recreation Programming For Diverse Groups

A clear demographic trend in Canadian cities is the increase in immigration and the wide of variety of cultures making Canadian cities their homes. Seeing a shift in diversity, many parks departments understand the importance in offering a wide variety of programming to accommodate changes in user preferences (Community Services Department, City of Mississauga) (Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board) (Toronto Parks, Forestry and Recreation). The City of Richmond Hill emphasizes the importance of actually reaching out to diverse populations to better understand their recreation needs (City of Richmond Hill). One of the frequently mentioned ways that parks departments can offer diversity in programming is the use of multifunctional and multiseasonal facilities and services. This approach can benefit all users, while allowing for facilities to remain relevant as user preferences change (Toronto Parks, Forestry and Recreation).

Of course, parks departments are usually working with a finite amount of land allocated for recreation, so it can be difficult to change park or facility use in step with changes in user trends and preferences. For one instance of a multifunctional solution, we can look to Toronto Parks, Forestry, and Recreation. While cricket is one of the only growing sports in Toronto, it requires a large area to accommodate the round field (a circle with a 137-150m diameter). The Toronto parks department determined that a cricket field's markings could be superimposed over two side-by-side soccer fields (Toronto Parks, Forestry and Recreation). This is a simple solution to a multifunctional space for two of the world's most popular sports that requires little more than changing the pattern of field markings!

Targeted Investment for Underserved Neighbourhoods

Once neighbourhood level data has been collected and analysed, municipalities are making targeted investments in neighbourhoods that are identified as having been historically underserved, or in greater need. Almost all park departments reviewed for this study discussed the importance of focusing increased resources in areas of identified need.

As a way to initiate these targeted initiatives, Mississauga started with a pilot program targeting a single underserved neighbourhood (Community Services Department, City of Mississauga), rather than attempting to implement an untested program city-wide.

Building on neighbourhood data collected, how a parks department can choose to define or target an underserved neighbourhood can vary. Vancouver has focused on neighbourhoods with identified service gaps. How Vancouver identifies these neighbourhoods can vary however, with the

> ### Toronto Parks, Forestry and Recreation
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> *"As private living spaces shrink, demand for public amenities will grow. Intensification and rising land values require different thinking about infrastructure provision, such as maximizing current assets and doing more with less, new forms of development and partnerships."*

department considering not only park frequency for a given acreage, but also population density. The department also proposed additional geographic flexibility in the delivery of developer contributions given that some areas may have better access to parks and recreation than others

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(Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation). In a more focused approach, Minneapolis increased park development specifically in areas of concentrated poverty, with an emphasis on creating more community gardens (Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board).

Like Minneapolis, New York City has focused its targeted developments in its poorest, most densely populated, and fastest-growing communities, with a focus on areas outside a 10-minute walk of a park. In analysing park investment over the previous 20 years, the department found that of those parks which had received $250,000 USD or less in capital investment, 54% were parks in neighbourhoods with above average levels of poverty. This "Community Parks Initiative" dedicated capital resources towards these in-need neighbourhoods, while increasing connection to local neighbourhood stakeholders in an effort to increase engagement and stewardship. The department suggests that targeted, modest physical improvements can represent quick wins for recreation in these underserved communities (NYC Parks).

Partnerships and Collaborations

Nearly all parks departments reviewed stressed the importance of partnerships in addressing the equity and inclusion needs of a community. Mississauga suggested that formal relationships be established with groups representing diverse populations, such as through committees (Community Services Department, City of Mississauga).

There were a variety of benefits mentioned by parks departments, including identifying community goals and priorities for local public spaces. The Mississauga parks department also suggested that formal partnerships were an opportunity to both understand recreation preferences and to introduce residents to the merits of participation in recreational activities. Naturally, these partnerships would have the added benefit of increasing community engagement in general, in alignment with the goals of many municipalities. Some parks departments even suggested that these kinds of partnerships generated creative strategies to repurpose city properties that were considered unconventional for park use (NYC Parks) (Community Services Department, City of Mississauga).

Toronto Parks, Forestry and Recreation
"To remain relevant and effective, facility design and operation must evolve in response to broad social and economic trends, changing user expectations and emerging facility demands that are often driven by demographic and recreation trends."

Some parks departments chose to establish formalized committees or community groups. In Toronto, Stakeholder Advisory Groups were established to gather newcomer and culturally specific perspectives on parks and recreational facilities (Toronto Parks, Forestry and Recreation), while both Mississauga and Toronto saw value in City-wide, interdepartmental collaborations to gather newcomer and culturally specific perspectives on all City services and programs (Toronto Parks, Forestry and Recreation) (Community Services Department, City of Mississauga). In fact, the Minneapolis parks department identified being an "inclusive government that engages all communities" as one of the five key pillars of their Racial Equity Plan (Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board).

The City of Mississauga suggested that even simply having an intentional plan to reach out to diverse and marginalized groups is a key best practice. As identified in the City of Mississauga's own review of best practices, the Town of Ajax saw unanticipated benefits of

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developing their Diversity and Community Engagement Action Plan through a steering committee comprised of diverse cultures and representatives from marginalized populations. In addition to the creation of a plan reflective of community voices, they found that the steering committee quickly became advocates for ensuring that municipal staff and volunteers were well-trained in the needs of diverse and marginalized populations (Community Services Department, City of Mississauga).

The Vancouver parks department saw value in consulting with newcomer and cultural groups to guide their collection and interpretation of data (e.g. surveys, demographics). They also saw the creation of a transparent and equitable process for community groups interested in organizing community programming activities in Vancouver parks as a valuable exercise in equity and inclusion (Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation).

No matter what the format, the engagement of community groups and marginalized populations is seen to have the added benefit of increasing a sense of community belonging for those groups (Community Services Department, City of Mississauga).

Fostering an Internal Culture of Equity and Diversity

As mentioned in the previous section on community partnerships, many parks departments stressed the importance of internal municipal committees, processes, and approaches to programming and services that take the issues of equity and inclusion into account.

One of the most common methods mentioned to bring equity and inclusion issues to internal procedures is the development of internal committees focused on equity, inclusion, and diversity. For instance, the City of Richmond Hill created and internal Staff Diversity Committee intended to foster a welcoming organizational culture of inclusion. Activities of this committee included the development of training programs, outreach efforts to diverse community groups, and measuring and tracking the effectiveness of their efforts (Community Services Department, City of Mississauga). In 2014 Mississauga created a Council-appointed Diversity and Inclusion Advisory Committee intended to ensure that municipal policies, programs and services reflect the needs of the ethno-cultural community. The committee meets quarterly to directly advise the Council of the inclusiveness of proposed policies and whether they might pose any barriers to certain groups of community members (Community Services Department, City of Mississauga).

Another commonly cited tool for applying equity and inclusion principals internally was the provision of staff training. Both Mississauga and Minneapolis explicitly mentioned such training in the documents that were reviewed, but it is likely that other municipalities also offer this kind of training to their staff.

Having a workforce that is reflective of the diversity of the community it serves was also mentioned by several municipalities as being a key element of diversity and inclusion at the internal level. Both Minneapolis and Mississauga specifically sought to target diverse youth for leadership and employment development programs (Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board) (Community Services Department, City of Mississauga). Minneapolis also states the importance of a representative workforce as one the five key elements of their Racial Equity Plan, and even

suggests that racial equity should extend to the contracting and procurement process (Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board).

Another method commonly used to bring equity and inclusion issues to planning is to develop tools to regularly and systematically apply consideration of equity and diversity issues in policy and program development. The City of Toronto has developed and employed an "Equity Lens" tool as a part of their efforts to provide more equitable and diverse programming. City staff are asked to ask themselves the following questions when developing programs or policies, or making updates to them (Community Services Department, City of Mississauga):

1) *How did you identify the barriers faced by diverse groups and assess the impact of the policy/program on them? What groups did you consult? What diverse groups are impacted by the identified barriers?*
2) *How did you reduce or remove the barriers? What changes have you made to the policy/program so that the diverse groups will benefit from the policy/program?*
3) *How do you measure the results of the policy/program to see if it works to benefit diverse groups?*

The Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul developed a similar set of questions as a part of their Equity Toolkit for parks (Metropolitan Council):

1) *What is the population breakdown for your jurisdiction by race, ethnicity, age, national origin, ability status, and income?*
2) *Which population segments above are currently underserved by the regional parks system?*
3) *Which of the underserved populations identified will this project better serve?*
4) *What specific aspects of this project will help to better serve the targeted populations identified?*
5) *Exactly how will you verify the target populations are better served?*

More generally, Vancouver agrees that an equity analysis should be a part of the determination of where resources should be allocated for parks and recreation programming and services (Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation).

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