



# Alberta Recreation and Parks Association Diversity Position Paper “Focus on Inclusion”

## **Policy Rationale:**

The Alberta Recreation and Parks Association has made a commitment to serving all Albertans. The vision of the Association is:

“A province, and communities within, that embrace and proactively use recreation and parks as essential means for enhancing individual wellbeing and community vitality, economic sustainability and natural resource protection and conservation.”

## **Statement of Need**

The population of Alberta is made up of many groups and individuals with a wide variety of backgrounds, interests, abilities and cultures. It is a diverse society, comprised of many different ethnic, religious, linguistic, social and economic groups. However, while some segments of the population tend to have many characteristics in common, there are others, which may have special needs or challenges, which can limit or prevent their full participation in recreation and parks services. Given the diverse nature of the province’s population, it is important to encourage and ensure that all Albertans are considered and included in the planning and delivery of parks and recreation services, and in the ongoing business and practices of the Association.

As stated in the ARPA Strategic Business Plan,“ socio-economic inequalities continue to persist, requiring priority attention, namely:

- low socio-economic groups
- at risk children and youth
- older people
- people with disabilities
- indigenous populations
- people living in rural and remote locations and
- new citizens with diverse cultural backgrounds and
- people with addictions”.

While there are certainly advantages to providing integrated programs, services, and facilities, there are also situations where separate or specialized services will serve a certain segment of the population more effectively. For example, a specialized day camp for teens with learning disabilities could provide the

participants with skill development and social interaction in a setting that is more supportive and less threatening than an integrated setting. For some, this could act as a “stepping stone” to a mainstream program, while for others this could be the most appropriate placement for several seasons. As well, some cultural traditions involve special pre-requisites for participation. This need for specialized service should be respected and should be part of a range of opportunities.

The many differences among Albertans can be seen to contribute to a rich diversity in the way citizens take part in recreation and leisure activities. However, these differences can also be accompanied by problems such as racism, discrimination and intolerance, with the result that some of these areas are being served well, while others face barriers to participation.

It is important to be aware that barriers to participation can be

- *physical* (such as inaccessible facilities),
- *systemic* (such as expensive registration fees) or
- *attitudinal* (such as lack of cultural sensitivity).

Any of these may prevent certain elements of the population from taking part in a full range of recreational opportunities. Groups or individuals who have had a negative experience, or who have not been included in the past, may remain on the periphery of community life unless a commitment is made to removing all of the possible barriers.

These barriers can be addressed through a variety of measures, including but not limited to: education of staff and customers, flexibility in planning, specialized support, adaptability in programming, coordination of service delivery and most importantly, a clearly stated commitment to inclusion. Removing the barriers to participation will ensure that all Albertans, regardless of the community in which they reside, will be able to enjoy the benefits of recreation and parks.

It is also important to be aware of how the Association itself demonstrates inclusion in planning, promotion and service delivery. It is not sufficient to simply state an intent to be inclusive - the Association should practice what it promotes. Some examples of “best practices” would be: diverse representation on committees, the use of proper current terminology, appropriately varied graphics in promotional material, recognition of and respect for a wide range of cultural traditions, and hosting events only in accessible facilities.

As an Association devoted to improving the quality of life for Albertans, ARPA has an obligation to ensure the availability of meaningful opportunities for a full range of leisure and recreation participation for all citizens.

## **Benefits**

There are many well-documented benefits to participating in recreational activities for all Albertans. In terms of diversity issues, there are some additional benefits. For example, recreation can provide opportunities for building stronger communities when people of different backgrounds and abilities have a chance to participate in informal, non-threatening activities together, such as picnicking in the park, attending a festival or planting a garden. Recreating together can promote an appreciation for and better understanding of different cultural values and ways of doing things. Recreation can also provide a venue for individuals of differing ability levels to succeed in the areas where they have skills, thereby enabling them to participate more equitably. An example of this could be an individual who is deaf taking part in a pottery class, or an individual who is visually impaired singing in a choir.

From “The Benefits Catalogue” of the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association:

- Community recreation promotes ethnic and cultural harmony
- Recreation, sports, and arts/culture can reduce racism - build understanding between diverse cultures
- Recreation, sports, and arts/culture nurtures growth, acquisition of life skills and independent living for those with a disability
- Integrated and accessible leisure services are critical to the quality of life of people with a disability and disadvantaged individuals

As stated in the ARPA Strategic Business Plan 2001-2003, “Respecting people’s differences and celebrating our diversity brings communities closer together, and better connects diverse populations to their communities.” (3.8, p.19)

## **Historical Background**

Within ARPA, the diverse populations area has traditionally included services for individuals with a disability, and some service to the aboriginal population. A “Diverse Populations” Network has been in place, however in recent years, this group has been active only in a limited manner.

In the spring of 2002, a review of the Network and its function resulted in the recommendation that the Network be retired, and that services to diverse populations be addressed at a different, broader level. The development of this position paper, and the direction that the Association as a whole, should focus on inclusion evolved as the suggested model for the future.

Currently, the area of individuals with a disability is being served through a partnership with the Active Living Alliance for Canadians with a Disability. ARPA is a key partner in the Alberta Initiative of this organization, providing the support for a staff person and a “home” for the Alliance in Alberta.

## **New Direction on Inclusion for ARPA**

### **Definitions:**

For the purposes of this position paper, diverse populations will refer to:

- Individuals with physical, mental and sensory disabilities,
- Aboriginal Albertans
- New immigrants
- Visible minorities
- Economically-disadvantaged Albertans.

### **Overall Vision:**

ARPA has an important role to play in demonstrating how an inclusive organization should operate, and offering encouragement and leadership to communities throughout the province to be inclusive and accessible as well.

### **Statements of Principle:**

1. All Albertans have a right to take part in meaningful, accessible, affordable recreational activities, regardless of race, age, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation, ability or economic level,
2. ARPA has a key role to play in assisting individuals and communities throughout the province to be inclusive in serving diverse populations.
3. Barriers to participation, whether economic, race, gender, physical or mental ability, distance or other, must be overcome to facilitate more Albertans to become involved in meaningful recreation activities.
4. A continuum of services must be available, providing opportunities for choice ranging from separate to inclusive, as needed.
5. Effective and appropriate methods of recruitment must be used to ensure representation from diverse groups at all levels of the organization: planning, policy development and implementation.

### **Policy Statements:**

Within the resources available to the organization, ARPA will strive to:

1. Take a leadership role in promoting greater understanding, appreciation, and respect for diverse populations.
2. Support initiatives which aim to reduce barriers to participation and effectively encourage participation of targeted populations, such as Aboriginal groups, multi-cultural groups, individuals with a disability and the economically-disadvantaged.

3. Take a leadership role in including individuals of diverse cultural backgrounds and ability levels in planning and delivering services at all levels.
4. Provide training to ensure that practitioners have the information they need to adapt programs, services and facilities and to include all members of their communities.
5. Collect and disseminate current resource information on best practice information in meeting the recreational needs of diverse groups.
6. Provide resource materials for practitioners and organizations to aid in adapting programs, services and facilities.
7. Encourage communities and service providers to develop flexible fee structures and a variety of affordable recreation opportunities to accommodate variable income levels.
8. Work in partnership and collaborate with groups and organizations whose mandates focus on inclusion of diverse populations.
9. Strive to provide promotional materials in alternate formats, such as Braille, large print, audio-cassette, languages other than English, etc.
10. Recognize excellence in service delivery pertaining to diverse populations.