



Promising Practices in Recreation and Parks

“If you want one year of prosperity, grow grain. If you want ten years of prosperity, grow trees. If you want 100 years of prosperity, grow people.”

Chinese Proverb

Shifting to Action

Using the Quality of Life roadmap to chart a new way

From Airdrie to Wood Buffalo, communities across Alberta are discovering anew that the field of recreation and parks has the ability to address the biggest challenges of our time, including epidemic obesity and environmental and social decay.

In recent decades, the field drifted away from its historic purpose as an agent of individual, community and environmental wellness. All too often, managing facilities and attracting paying customers became the central focus rather than meeting essential leisure needs. But with lifestyle-related healthcare costs skyrocketing and global warming a stark reality, recreation and parks

must use its expertise not only to serve the already-active and the well-off, but to inspire a massive cultural shift to a more active, stewardly way of life.

Foundations for Action: Enhancing the Quality of Life in Alberta offers a roadmap for the radical reorientation required for recreation and parks to take up the role it must play at this time in history – a time dramatically unlike anything humans have coped with yet. Developed by leaders in recreation and parks and numerous others from Quality of Life fields, *Foundations for Action* now guides every decision made by the Alberta Recreation and Parks Association (ARPA) and a growing array of partners. As a result, Albertans are developing essential skills for an era when global stewardship and healthy living demands that we all pull together toward common goals.

ACE (Active, Creative Engaged) Communities offers an excellent case in point. Thanks to a mix of public and private sector funding, ARPA is working intensely with a growing number of partner communities on the ACE Communities initiative. Supported by coaching,

workshops, seed funding and networking, grassroots leaders are gaining the confidence and skill to inspire their neighbours to get involved in making their communities better.

In Drayton Valley, for example, volunteers of all ages are turning space next to a childcare centre that formerly attracted drug traffic into an imaginative nature park whose success has inspired imitation in new subdivisions. In Calling Lake, work on historical trail markers has spurred an oral history project that is enhancing community pride and understanding.

Community leaders report that being linked to insightful coaches, peers and resources is the very best part of the ACE Communities experience. That evidence in hand, ARPA is calling for provincial commitment to a network of coaches for all communities and regions. And success sets the stage for even bigger opportunities. That’s the beauty of working better together in the spirit of *Foundations for Action*.

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Recreation and parks action toward key results

Key result areas and hoped-for outcomes

1. Collaborative decision making

All fields work together to build and sustain vibrant communities.



2. Infrastructure renewal and development

Alberta communities benefit from new and sustainable facilities that meet a broad range of community and regional needs, plus an expanded network of linked parks, open spaces and corridors.



Inglewood Community Garden, Calgary

3. Promotion and communications

Consistent, effective messaging inspires more people to be more active more often.

4. Leadership development

Professionals equipped with appropriate skills, abilities and competencies carry the field forward as a large cadre of senior leaders retires.



Strategies and examples of action to date

1) Advancing the Quality of Life Sector

ARPA hosts interdisciplinary forums on such crucial issues as children and nature, community gardens and critical afterschool hours needs, finding appetite for united action. ARPA leaders help revitalize the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association (CPRPA) into an effective national voice with a collaborative alliance style.

2) Collaborative regional services

The provincial government begins work on seven regional land use frameworks that will shape development across Alberta, and invites ARPA to contribute by developing “recreation, parks, and open space” guidelines.

3) Alberta recreation facilities inventory

Data collected through ARPA’s Facility Inventory Tracking System (FITS) helps spur some reinvestment in Alberta’s aging community recreation facilities. Other provinces may adopt FITS, setting the stage for comparative analysis.

4) Bilateral sport and recreation infrastructure investment

Advocacy by the CPRPA/ARPA and others helps spur \$500 million in federal infrastructure dollars that attract other investments, resulting in such projects as an Airdrie arena, a sportplex in Olds, a trail system in Three Hills and a YMCA in Calgary. ARPA’s research and advocacy also results in the provincial “Major Community Facilities” program.

5) Energy and utilities conservation, waste management and green procurement

Facility managers throughout Alberta take advantage of training in integrated management and lifecycle maintenance, a step toward sustainability.

6) Alberta trails and corridors strategy

Alberta TrailNet actively champions an expanded and linked trail network, and some targeted federal funding occurs. ARPA begins work on a discussion paper that will propose guidelines for recreation, parks and open spaces, including trails, corridors and other linkages within Alberta’s regional plans.

7) Recreation for Life Campaign

Alberta Health Services’ *Stand Up for Life* campaign signals a welcome shift from a “fix it” message. An updated recreation benefits catalogue, available in print and online, offers rich fodder for social marketing. ARPA collaborates with CanWest Global on articles encouraging healthy living.

8) Career awareness strategy

A refined recreation and parks career pamphlet equips ambassadors in schools and job fairs to make a persuasive case for entering this career path.

9) Career preparation strategy

Senior Liaison, Leadership and Professional Development position established under a tripartite agreement involving the University of Alberta (Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation), Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation and ARPA to build bridges and bring frontline relevance to leadership and professional development within the recreation and parks field.

10) Career development strategy

ARPA leaders define core professional competencies and incorporate those into a professional development toolkit for use in communities. Work proceeds on an emerging leader institute to fill gaps in mentoring next generation leaders.

Key result areas and hoped-for outcomes

5. Stewardship of the environment

Alberta's superb environmental assets are conserved, protected and effectively managed so that they survive to serve future generations.



6. Personal wellness

With enhanced support from a broader range of Quality of Life professions, nearly all Albertans are active enough to achieve health benefits, up from little more than half.



Oilsands Marathon, Fort McMurray Alberta

7. Community wellness

Human-scale built environments and balanced transportation systems that suit bicycles, transit and walking as well as cars encourage active transportation and other healthy behaviours.



Youth learn lifeskills at an ACE Communities Trade Fair

Strategies and examples of action to date

11) Protecting and conserving our natural capital

The ARPA paper *Healthy By Nature: Up Close and Personal* demonstrates the value of investing in community parks, open space and nature education. Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation's *Plan for Parks* lays a foundation for investment in provincial parks by recognizing the need to protect and conserve natural capital.

12) Revitalizing urban and rural parks

Public Funding of Recreation, an ARPA report examining historical funding trends, provides a persuasive tool for advocating reinvestment in the recreation and parks field. The Alberta Urban Municipalities Association (AUMA) is also calling for reinvestment in urban parks and community social infrastructure.

13) Unlocking the "rural urban fringe"

Growing grassroots action around "buying local" and "food security" confirms the need to conserve prime farmland and provide opportunities for people to connect with nature as cities sprawl. The evolving provincial Land-use Framework offers a prime opportunity to set wise ground rules for the rural-urban fringe.

14) Taking the Natural Step... for communities

Alberta communities such as Canmore and Okotoks endorse The Natural Step and other promising approaches to environmental sustainability.

15) Smart growth in Alberta communities

Some cities are attempting to arrest sprawl and create more livable spaces through adapting smart growth principles.

16) Food nutrition standards for public recreation facilities

Alberta Health and Wellness, with others, develops nutrition guidelines for public recreation facilities; if followed, they will improve the nutrition value of available foods.

17) Healthy living tax incentive for children and youth

Alberta institutes a modest fitness tax credit for children and youth.

18) Lifestyle intervention by general practitioners

Recreation professionals in some communities are working with general practitioners to ensure patients receive specific healthy living advice.

19) Professional status for therapeutic recreation

The Alberta Therapeutic Recreation Association pursues professional sector status within the Health Professions Act, with support from ARPA and others. Therapeutic recreation services help people with mobility challenges live independently, avoid isolation, cope with pain, regain function and become leisure literate.

20) Alberta Active Communities initiative (now ACE Communities)

A mix of public and corporate sector funding has enabled ARPA to work closely with a growing number of communities, building local leadership and capacity through recreation, parks, arts, culture and heritage.

21) Healthy school communities and the after-school agenda

Having called for concerted attention to afterschool programming that incorporates recreation and parks, ARPA is crafting a provincial program prospectus and hosting provincial intersectoral/agency dialogue.

22) Social change model for creating activity-friendly communities

ACE communities are helping to hone a social change model that will prove useful elsewhere.

23) Creating walkable communities

The ARPA document *Healthy By Nature: Up Close and Personal* adds to the voices advocating for corridors and destinations that invite people to walk for business as well as pleasure.

Key result areas and hoped-for outcomes	Strategies and examples of action to date
<p>8. Refinancing recreation and parks services at the community level A broader mix of consistent revenue enables municipalities to meet recreation and parks needs.</p>	<p>24) New deal for Alberta communities Advocacy continues for an expanded menu of municipal revenue sources, aided by a new AUMA report. ARPA's updated <i>Public Funding of Recreation</i> adds to case for expanded investment in recreation and parks services.</p>
<p>9. Inclusive participation Recognized as a basic service, recreation and parks is inclusive of everyone in every community, thus countering the widening gap between haves and have-nots.</p>	<p>25) An equality framework Many communities lack policies and programs to ensure that people of all income levels can access leisure opportunities. Working with the Active Living Alliance of Citizens with a Disability, ARPA will be addressing this issue.</p> <p>26) Implementing Everybody gets to play™ in Alberta ARPA is the Alberta agent for Everybody gets to play™, a CPRA initiative that seeks to ensure that children and youth living in poverty are engaged in recreation and play.</p> <p>27) Recreation diversity and inclusion strategies Work by ALACD, InMotion Alberta, the Alberta Centre for Active Living, the Indigenous Sport Recreation Council and others contributes to innovations and advancements.</p>
<p>10. Quality assurance Demonstrated commitment to continuous improvement earns the field a greater role in public policy and a greater share of public resources.</p>	<p>28) An excellence framework for recreation and parks services in local government A conceptual service excellence framework is being fine-tuned through work with ARPA's ACE Communities initiative.</p> <p>29) Quality assurance in children's recreation programming Having identified a gap in quality assurance in sport and recreation, ARPA becomes the Alberta provider of HIGH FIVE, Canada's only (and highly regarded) standard for recreation and sport programs serving children ages 6 to 12.</p>
<p>11. Policy and governance Clearly articulated policy directs decision makers to focus resources on recreation and parks, a discipline that is crucial to an affordable, livable future.</p>	<p>30) Recreation policy and strategy for Alberta An inter-ministry task group has begun work on a provincial recreation policy and strategy, addressing a significant policy gap that has been the focus of much ARPA advocacy over the years.</p> <p>31) Leisure and cultural policy studies centre Momentum is gathering for a Centre of Excellence for "Recreation, Community and Quality of Life" involving ARPA, ATPR and the University of Alberta. This could become home for aspects of ACE Communities that need to continue on, including community coaching and other approaches to knowledge transfer, policy analysis, trend-scanning and fostering community leadership.</p>

"The arts and creative activities can profoundly affect the ability of a town not only to survive over time, but to thrive."

Developing and Revitalizing Communities through Arts and Culture, 2009
Creative City Network of Canada



"What *Foundations for Action* did for me was to validate the importance of recreation and parks as community builders. This is our soul work, our heart work—and we lost touch. But we can make a difference. There is no better field, no better time. And we have all the tools because we know how communities work."

Brenda Herchmer
ACE Communities Director

Key result areas and hoped-for outcomes	Strategies and examples of action to date
<p>12. Strategic planning and evidence</p> <p>Community planning grounded in a convincing body of evidence demonstrates the benefit of recreation and parks to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • personal health and wellness • community cohesion and vitality • safety and crime reduction • economic development • environmental sustainability 	<p>32) Performance measures</p> <p>Recognizing the need to measure outcomes, CPRA is working toward a comprehensive performance framework, informed by ARPA’s experience with ACE Communities initiative and the service excellence framework for community recreation and parks.</p> <p>33) Fostering research and inquiry</p> <p>Progress toward the focused provincial research agenda needed to inform recreation and parks decision making will occur in concert with the proposed (and still evolving) Centre of Excellence.</p> <p>34) Social and economic modeling</p> <p>Experiences in ACE Communities, coupled with the newly updated <i>Benefits Catalogue</i>, take us a step closer to credible models for assessing how recreation and parks contribute to key aspects of life. The model is supported by ARPA research demonstrating the proximate value of community parks and open space to nearby residential properties.</p> <p>35) Provincial/regional market segmentation</p> <p>Frontline workers need easy access to market segmentation research telling them what prompts individuals to be active, or to shun certain activities. Alberta Centre for Active Living provides an increasingly rich online resource, but more research is needed.</p> <p>36) Benefits of recreation and parks e-monitor</p> <p>The newly updated benefits catalogue will be online, making it significantly easier to access and search. An accompanying communications plan will invite its use by other fields.</p> <p>37) Data collection and dissemination</p> <p>The funding and expertise brought on board through ACE Communities has resulted in much upgraded technology infrastructure, a huge asset for working with scattered communities. To meet the need for one-window access to the latest research, ARPA has recently assumed oversight and management responsibility for the Lifestyle Information Network (LIN), which houses the National Recreation Database.</p>
<p>13. Emerging recreation development priorities</p> <p>Alberta exceeds national physical activity targets by paying special heed to particularly inactive segments of the population while promoting a culture of leisure literacy in collaboration with other quality of life disciplines.</p>	<p>38) Getting serious about play</p> <p>Canada’s first Kids at Hope initiative comes to Alberta via ACE Communities and begins building a network of ambassadors who refuse to consider any kid “at risk,” grounded in research showing that kids who can articulate their future are more apt to achieve their dreams. Children’s disconnect from nature becomes a strong focus as ARPA hosts a provincial inter-sectoral dialogue that results in a call to action, hosts Richard Louv to an overflow intersectoral audience, and joins Louv’s Children and Nature Network. ARPA also advocates for including the importance of children’s play in the provincial recreation policy.</p> <p>39) Leisure education/active lifestyles coaching</p> <p>ARPA is dedicating staff time to teaching leisure education and assisting the health sector with active lifestyles coaching. The Association is involved through the Tripartite Agreement with the University of Alberta and ATPR in teaching leisure education from a community recreation perspective at the University of Alberta.</p> <p>40) Community arts and culture</p> <p>The creative aspect of ACE Communities strengthens links between recreation/parks and arts/culture. ARPA joins the provincial task group for building out Alberta Arts Day, and ACE Communities has partnered with the Arts Touring Alliance of Alberta to offer songwriting and dance workshops and showcases in isolated rural communities.</p>

Key result areas and hoped-for outcomes	Strategies and examples of action to date
<p>13. Emerging recreation development priorities Alberta exceeds national physical activity targets by paying special heed to particularly inactive segments of the population while promoting a culture of leisure literacy in collaboration with other quality of life disciplines.</p>	<p>41) Sport in the community ARPA launches a Canadian Sport for Life round table to draft a provincial model that will help community recreation and parks departments better integrate the foundational components of the Canadian Sport for Life Strategy (e.g., improved physical literacy).</p> <p>42) Youth leadership, development and outreach ARPA was the first agency in Canada to host a “Youth Development through Recreation Services” Symposium, which it continues to host each year. ARPA has also partnered with ParticipACTION on a Sogo Active initiative targeted at getting inactive youth more active. The first phase was tied to the 2010 Olympic Torch Relay.</p> <p>43) Promoting “active aging” Largely through the Alberta Centre for Active Living, research regarding active seniors is being shared throughout the province. Some communities are designing senior friendly parks and trails.</p>
<p>14. Robust, sustainable recreation industry Public, private and not-for-profit recreation work in concert to enhance wellness and quality of life.</p>	<p>44) Growing the business of recreation <i>Alberta’s Growing Business of Recreation</i> (ARPA, 2007) lays a foundation for coordinated action by demonstrating the economic significance of both private and public sector recreation. Nurturing this important part of the Alberta economy requires dialogue among everyone involved in recreation delivery—public, private and not-for-profit.</p>

Capitalizing on momentum to make the ideal real

In its most powerful community development mode, recreation and parks is about connecting and empowering people. Its ability to draw people together



and seek wisdom from the group rather than offering all the answers is exactly what’s needed to nurture personal and

community growth at a time when all hands are needed on deck.

Early successes in applying *Foundations for Action* reconfirm recreation and parks’ powerful potential. In communities, within regions, around provincial tables and beyond, citizens are relearning how to identify and solve

issues together rather than in isolated silos.

There has never been a better time for the “let’s tackle it together” approach that recreation and park has historically taken. People are hungry for a sense of community and for more engaging, healthful ways to live, work and play. Every community needs grassroots leaders who intimately know their setting’s unique mix of people, places and heritage.

Initiatives such as ACE Communities are confirming what many have long suspected: coaching and connections to external resources remain hugely important to building communities. Just another reminder that, in moving forward, we need to learn from what has worked in the past.

Alberta has a proud history recreation and parks leadership. Work propelled by *Foundations for Action* gives us early glimpses of the benefits everyone will share as momentum builds and the quality of life we envision becomes ever more real.

Find out more

This bulletin is part of a series based on *Foundations for Action*, a collaborative action plan for Alberta wellness and quality of life. The plan draws from the insights of individuals and agencies from many disciplines that share the vision of a future Alberta with healthy people, sustainable environments and strong vital communities. *Foundations for Action* is a key outcome of Vision 2015, an ARPA-led project that is linking the good work of organizations, government and agencies and creating new ways to make a difference together. For a full copy of *Foundations for Action*, go to the Vision 2015 website at <http://www.vision2015.arpaonline.ca>