



# Recreation Service Plan 2013 – 2017



## **Acknowledgements**

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# Table of Contents

<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	vi
<b>1. Introduction</b> .....	1
1.1 Service planning .....	1
1.2 Service planning process .....	2
1.3 The benefits of recreation.....	3
<b>2. The Toronto recreation service sector</b> .....	5
2.1 City-provided recreation services.....	6
2.2 Recreation services delivered by others .....	14
<b>3. Context and trends</b> .....	21
3.1 Social and demographic trends in Toronto .....	21
3.2 National trends in leisure and health .....	23
3.3 Toronto leisure and health trends .....	24
3.4 Trends in municipal recreation service provision.....	25
3.5 Multi-sport games in Toronto .....	26
<b>4. Quality</b> .....	27
1. Improve consistency and quality of all recreation programs and services ...	29
2. Strengthen the customer service experience.....	31
<b>5. Capacity building</b> .....	34
3. Maximize the potential of recreation facilities as core community assets ....	35
4. Enhance engagement to support local planning.....	38
5. Increase and simplify opportunities to volunteer .....	41
<b>6. Inclusion</b> .....	43
6. Develop a comprehensive outreach and communications strategy .....	44
7. Enhance and improve access for underserved residents .....	46
<b>7. Equitable access</b> .....	51
8. Develop a service planning system.....	52
9. Enhance the consistency and equity of service delivery across the City....	54
10. Reduce financial barriers to participation .....	57
11. Increase participation in recreation by developing two city-wide programs for children and youth .....	65
<b>8. Conclusion</b> .....	69
<b>Appendix</b> .....	70
<b>Endnotes</b> .....	80

## List of figures

Figure 1: Toronto’s recreation sector .....	5
Figure 2: District populations with recreation program facility locations.....	6
Figure 3: Proportion of registrations by program type (2011).....	7
Figure 4: Registered program participants by age category (2011) .....	8
Figure 5: Drop-in program participation by category (2011) .....	9
Figure 6: Drop-in visits by age category (2010-2011) .....	9
Figure 7: Recently used facility by Recreation Service Plan survey respondents (2011) .....	11
Figure 8: Registered program (2003-2011).....	13
Figure 9: Program registration (2003-2011).....	13
Figure 10: Map of population growth in Toronto (2006-2011) .....	22
Figure 11: Geographic concentrations of children and youth in Toronto (2011) .....	22
Figure 12: Survey question: “How satisfied were you with the permit application process?” .....	37
Figure 13: Individual and registration trends in Adapted and Integrated programs 2003-2011 .....	48
Figure 14: Community Recreation primary and secondary program categories.....	55
Figure 15: Community Recreation’s program model.....	56
Figure 16: Welcome Policy participation and expenditure .....	58
Figure 17: Comparing adult registrations at Priority Centres in the four seasons before and after the introduction of fees .....	59
Figure 18: Comparing where Priority Centre and Welcome Policy registrants live (2011).....	63
Figure 19: Survey responses on quality.....	73
Figure 20: Survey responses on capacity building.....	75
Figure 21: Survey responses on inclusion.....	77
Figure 22: Survey responses on equitable access.....	79

## List of tables

Table 1: Recreation Service Plan consultation participants .....	3
Table 2: Registered program delivery trends change in hours (2003-2011).....	12
Table 3: Drop-in program delivery trends: change in hours (2003-2011).....	12
Table 4: Survey question .....	14
Table 5: Proportion of Parks, Forestry and Recreation's 10 most common permits issued, by activity type (2011) .....	15
Table 6: Number of approved grants by community type in 2012 .....	17
Table 7: Toronto community organizations that deliver recreation services.....	18
Table 8: Toronto low-income cut off (2012) .....	23
Table 9: HIGH FIVE Principles for successful children's programming .....	29
Table 10: Hours of indoor and outdoor permits issued by facility type (2011).....	36
Table 11: Top five permits issued by activity type (2011).....	36
Table 12: Registration method for Parks, Forestry and Recreation registered programs (2011-2012) .....	45
Table 13: Comparing the age of registrants to Toronto's population (2011) .....	52
Table 14: Comparing the age of drop-in participants to Toronto's population (2011)....	53
Table 15: Examples of primary and secondary programs by program area .....	56
Table 16: Comparing Priority and non-Priority Centres (2011).....	60
Table 17: Comparison of the currently funded and new method of selecting Priority Centres .....	62
Table 18: Improvement to district equity using the new method of selecting Priority Centres .....	62
Table 19: The ten most common themes of the Recreation Service Plan engagement .....	71

# Executive summary

## Building on Success

The 2013-2017 Recreation Service Plan is the first service plan for recreation in the City of Toronto. This document will guide Parks, Forestry and Recreation's delivery of recreation programs and services over the next five years. The Recreation Service Plan aims to increase overall participation in recreation, decrease financial barriers to recreation and improve local and geographic access. It outlines the role that the City plays in meeting the recreation needs of Torontonians, within the context of the larger recreation service sector that has many and diverse providers.

"Our Common Grounds," the Parks, Forestry and Recreation's Strategic Plan adopted by council in 2005, made the following statement: "To reach its goals, the City of Toronto needs to ensure that Parks and Recreation is a strong front-line function that delivers high quality services that enhance life of Toronto residents." That statement is as true in 2012 as it was in 2005. "Our Common Grounds" provides the framework for the City of Toronto's Recreation Service Plan.

The Recreation Service Plan builds on a strong foundation of public support. Parks, Forestry and Recreation services are well used and deeply valued by Toronto residents. In the 2011 Core Service Review survey, 95 per cent of respondents said that parks, recreation and community centres are an integral part of the City.

Publicly funded recreation is integral to the success of Toronto, its communities and residents, an important aspect of what makes Toronto an attractive place to live and work. Toronto's recreation programs promote physical activity for people of all ages and abilities, build social connections within neighbourhoods and train future leaders. There is a strong relationship between the provision of public recreation and benefits to personal, community and economic wellbeing.

## Highlights of broad issues facing Parks, Forestry and Recreation:

The Recreation Service Plan was developed within the context of notable demographic and recreation service sector factors:

- A growing population that is becoming increasingly inactive
- High and increasing demand for Parks, Forestry and Recreation programs and services
- Barriers to recreation faced by underserved communities and residents
- Facilities and equipment that are aging and in need of repair and replacement
- High demand for resources to adapt facilities and services to comply with the Accessibility for Ontarians with a Disability Act (AODA 2005)
- High demand to support partnerships
- Need for ongoing improvements to data collection to provide consistent information about the variety of Parks, Forestry and Recreation programs and facilities

This Service Plan offers a vision of how Parks, Forestry and Recreation can continue to improve in areas that require greater focus, and build on its strengths. A key priority throughout this plan is to find ways to increase participation in recreation in order to help Toronto residents live long, healthy, active and fulfilling lives.

## The Recreation Service Plan outlines the following key components for Parks, Forestry and Recreation:

- Continued focus on children, youth and seniors in City recreation programs because these age groups have fewer options in the larger recreation sector; their access is limited by income and transportation barriers; and the benefits of recreation are most significant when experienced early and are lifelong.
- Enhanced engagement and partnership with schools, community agencies, and delivery partners to improve sector coordination (reduce gaps and overlaps) and local planning (respond to local needs).
- Development of quality standards and measures in all programs, facilities, and other services will improve Parks, Forestry and Recreation's capacity to manage, measure progress and report on the overall system.
- Continued use of the Welcome Policy to provide access to City recreation programs for low-income residents. The program has been effective in improving access.
- An equitable and consistent method of identifying Priority Centres across the city. The new method services the greatest number of low-income census tracts.
- Increase access to recreation through expansion of the Swim to Survive program. Swim to Survive, delivered in partnership with the school boards, helps to ensure that every child in grade four has an opportunity to participate.
- The need to develop a Youth Leadership program model, with other City divisions and partners that will build leadership, civic engagement and employability skills.
- A new focus for Parks, Forestry and Recreation's directly delivered programs through a "primary programs" model. This will ensure that every centre across the city delivers a "menu" of basic recreation programs that also respond to local need. The model prioritizes City delivery of programs at an introductory level, in group settings, as well as those that teach basic skills.
- Future work: communication strategy, customer service improvement strategy, facilities plan, and program plans (e.g. for children, youth, seniors, etc.) will follow the 2013-2017 Recreation Service Plan and will be developed with Parks and Forestry, where appropriate.



## Community Recreation by the numbers

- 1 million hours of programming in over 75,000 programs in 2011.
- 154,000+ individuals registered for programs in 2011, adding up to 4.2 million visits.
- 4.3 million visits to Parks, Forestry and Recreation drop-in programs in 2011.
- 93 per cent of drop-ins programs are free.
- Community groups received 300,000 permits in Parks, Forestry and Recreation facilities in 2011.
- 56 per cent of registrations are completed within the first hour of availability.
- FUN Guide online received 338,000 visits in 2011.
- 262,000 (or 80 per cent) of 2011 registrations are for children or youth.
- 14,000 programs are just for adults 60+. Parks, Forestry and Recreation has six seniors' centres focusing on that population segment.
- 8,400 seniors received \$350,000 in discounts on programs.
- 24,000 residents participate through the Welcome Policy, a family-based recreation subsidy for low-income residents.
- 400,000+ drop-in hours are spread across Toronto's recreation facilities.
- Over 5,500 Toronto residents volunteer with Community Recreation.

## Setting the directions of City of Toronto recreation services

The Recreation Service Plan provides an overview of recreation services, and provides the local and national context in which the City of Toronto provides recreation services. The report is divided into four main sections, each one corresponding to Council-approved principles for Parks, Forestry and Recreation – quality, capacity building, inclusion and equitable access.

For each of the four guiding principles, this report identifies a set of recommended actions based on input from stakeholders, the public, and community organizations. They are:

**Quality** – Providing the highest quality programs and services to enhance the health, quality of life, and wellbeing of residents.

Directions	Recommended actions
1. Improve consistency and quality of all recreation programs and services by advancing quality standards, monitoring, and evaluation.	1.1 Expand quality standards to all age groups and recreation program areas, focusing on safety, health and skill-development. 1.2 Develop a system to measure and report on the achievement of recreation program standards.
2. Strengthen the customer service experience as part of the development and implementation of a division-wide Customer Service Improvement Strategy and by improving facility conditions.	2.1 Develop and implement a Customer Service Improvement Strategy. 2.2 Implement and monitor consistent facility cleaning and maintenance standards at all community recreation facilities. 2.3 Advance identified State of Good Repair facilities projects.

**Capacity building** – Providing recreation programs and services of social, economic and physical benefit to all participants and that create a sense of community, belonging, and vitality.

Directions	Recommended actions
3. Maximize the use of recreation facilities as core community assets.	3.1 Improve the permitting system to enhance facility use and customer service by providing information and access to permits online. 3.2 Enhance reporting standards for permits to better understand the use of facilities, and to achieve equity goals through permitting.

<p>4. Enhance engagement and partnerships with local residents, other recreation providers, and schools to enable coordinated recreation service planning in Toronto and address service gaps and overlaps.</p>	<p>4.1 Support the expanded use of community engagement.</p> <p>4.2 Develop local recreation plans with residents and local stakeholders that respond to community needs.</p>
<p>5. Increase and simplify opportunities to volunteer.</p>	<p>5.1 Develop a centralized volunteer management system.</p> <p>5.2 Leverage the volunteer engagement efforts of the 2012 Ontario Summer Games and the 2015 PanParapan American Games.</p>

**Inclusion** – Ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to access and participate in programs and services that are planned, delivered, and managed in a way that recognizes diversity and encourages participation of marginalized and racialized people and groups.

Directions	Recommended actions
<p>6. Increase awareness among residents of the City’s recreation services by developing a comprehensive outreach and communications strategy.</p>	<p>6.1 Improve citywide and local promotion of programs and services by implementing a comprehensive communications strategy.</p> <p>6.2 Continue to offer registration and customer service in a variety of ways.</p> <p>6.3 Improve registration and Welcome Policy application processes to make it easier for everyone to register for programs.</p>
<p>7. Improve access for underserved residents, including people with a disability.</p>	<p>7.1 Improve outreach to underserved residents.</p> <p>7.2 Create tools and strategies as part of local planning to support work with diverse and newcomer populations.</p> <p>7.3 Strengthen partnerships with service agencies and organizations that work with underserved populations.</p> <p>7.4 Ensure continued compliance with disability legislation.</p>

**Equitable access** – Providing equitable recreation access on a geographic and demographic basis for all residents of Toronto.

Directions	Recommended actions
8. Develop a service planning system that plans for age groups and recreation program types at both the city-wide and local scales.	8.1 Develop recreation plans for recreation program types and age categories. 8.2 Provide supports to recreation staff in planning, creating, and delivering innovative and well-used programs.
9. Enhance the consistency and equity of service delivery across the city.	9.1 Implement the primary program categorization as a tool for planning. 9.2 Develop a measure for service equity, focusing on participation rates and residents’ ability to access recreation in their community. 9.3 Develop a 20-year Parks, Forestry and Recreation facilities plan to guide facility planning and required investments.
10. Refocus subsidy investments to reduce barriers and increase participation in recreation.	10.1 Continue Welcome Policy provision. 10.2 Implement the equitable distribution of free programs at designated recreation centres (currently called “Priority Centres”) based on the revised method for identifying Priority Centre locations.
11. Increase participation in recreation by developing two citywide programs for children and youth.	11.1 Expand the current Swim to Survive program. 11.2 Develop a Youth Leadership Program model.

Service planning is an ongoing process. The focus of this Recreation Service Plan is on the delivery of recreation services, setting priorities for further planning and guiding new investment. An implementation strategy will be developed for the major directions, detailing how they will be put into action over the next five years.

The Recreation Service Plan also sets the foundation for important work regarding facility investments that can best support our services through the development of a 20 year Parks Forestry and Recreation facilities plan. User fees are the subject of their own dedicated review that will build on the principles of this plan.

The Recreation Service Plan aligns with other City service planning initiatives, including the Middle Childhood Strategy, the Seniors Strategy, integrated planning for youth, and the Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy 2020.

# 1. Introduction

The Recreation Service Plan will guide the City of Toronto's delivery of recreation programs and services over the next five years. It is the result of three years of public engagement, consultation, research and development.

The Recreation Service Plan will define the City's role in the Recreation service sector. It will support integrated planning efforts with other service providers including school boards, non-profit organizations, community groups, as well as commercial providers.

The focus of this plan is on the delivery of recreation services, setting priorities for further planning, and guiding new investment. The service priorities described in this plan are an important precursor to making decisions about which facility investments can best support our services. Likewise, user fees are the subject of their own dedicated review that will build on the principles of this document.

This plan begins by laying out the context for recreation, describing the recreation service sector and its component parts, including the City's programs and services as well as those offered by the non-profit and for-profit organizations. The report then outlines the major demographic, leisure service, and health trends that affect the delivery of recreation services in Toronto. This context is followed by four chapters that correspond to the service planning principles adopted by Council: quality, capacity building, inclusion, and equitable access. These chapters describe the recommended future directions in recreation planning and service delivery in Toronto, based on the feedback from the public consultation, and the other analysis conducted in the development of this plan.

## 1.1 Service planning

The purpose of the 2013-2017 Recreation Service Plan is to outline strategic directions that will balance current demands with future needs. It creates a framework for decision-making, management, and administration of the City's recreation programs and services. The Recreation Service Plan will guide Parks, Forestry and Recreation in planning, facilitating, and delivering the recreation services that meet the needs of Toronto residents.

A key aim of this plan is to increase participation in recreation. This will help Toronto residents live long, healthy, active and fulfilling lives. The plan targets barriers to participation, and explores how Parks, Forestry and Recreation can better engage with groups who have not participated in the past. It lays out the ways in which the City of Toronto will coordinate its recreation activities in relation to the recreation options delivered by non-profit organizations, commercial operators and clubs, and other providers in City-owned facilities.

### What is Recreation?

Recreation is active leisure. For the City of Toronto, recreation includes a wide variety of activities; most involve physical activity, but some are also creative and cultural.

### **Community Recreation's mission:**

Community Recreation improves the quality of life for all Torontonians, and strengthens communities by providing high quality and accessible services, programs and facilities.

### **The vision for Community Recreation in Toronto in 2017:**

Every Torontonian has better access to quality recreation programs in their community.

In 2009, Toronto City Council approved four principles to guide the development of the service plan:

- **Quality:** providing the highest quality programs and services to enhance the health, quality of life, and wellbeing of residents.
- **Capacity building:** providing recreation programs and services of social, economic and physical benefits to all participants and that create a sense of community, belonging, and vitality.
- **Inclusion:** ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to access and participate in programs and services that are planned, delivered, and managed in a way that recognizes diversity and encourages participation of marginalized and racialized people and groups.
- **Equitable access:** providing equitable recreation access on a geographic and demographic basis for all residents of Toronto.

## **1.2 Service planning process**

The Recreation Service Plan has been developed in concert with the Parks Plan and the Forestry Management Plan. As such, areas overseen by the Parks and Forestry branches will be covered in those plans. The Recreation Service Plan also aligns with other City service planning initiatives, such as integrated planning for youth, the Middle Childhood Strategy, the Seniors Strategy, and the Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy 2020.

### **Public, stakeholder and staff engagement**

The framework for the public consultation was approved by Council in April 2011. During the spring and summer of 2011, Parks, Forestry and Recreation conducted a broad and inclusive consultation process that included a survey and 28 consultation sessions. The public was invited to attend one of four public meetings (one per district). Outreach and focus groups gathered input from newcomers, homeless individuals, youth and women's groups. In addition, fifteen stakeholder sessions were held to gather feedback from permit holders, people with disabilities, seniors and other groups. The comments gathered from all of these engagement efforts inform the plan's directions.

Comments and ideas from staff at all levels of Community Recreation were included in the plan's development. Staff working directly with recreation participants have an important role to play in service planning and implementation. As well, a Staff Reference Group representing City divisions and agencies helped to guide the process and directions.

**Table 1: Recreation Service Plan consultation**

Representatives from stakeholder groups	230
Participants in focus groups	170
Members of the public	176
Total	676
Individuals who responded to the survey	2,500
Total comments received through the consultation	4,400

### Environmental scan

Parks, Forestry and Recreation examined relevant legislation and academic literature, as well as reports from organizations with a focus on recreation and leisure. These included Toronto Public Health, Get Active Toronto, Toronto Vital Signs, Parks and Recreation Ontario, and ParticipACTION. These studies helped identify the trends, best practices and informed the directions. Parks, Forestry and Recreation also assessed the recreation plans of 17 comparable municipalities, in Canada, the United States and abroad. Comparable municipalities were selected by population size, the existence of recently published recreation plans, or similarity to Toronto in their governance structure, and cultural diversity. Parks, Forestry and Recreation contacted several of these and other municipalities to better understand the outcomes of certain initiatives, where applicable.

### Data gathering and analysis

Parks, Forestry and Recreation gathered and analyzed census data, other Statistics Canada studies, academic research, and local or regional reports from Toronto Public Health, the United Way and the Metcalf Foundation. Most of the data, however, comes from Parks, Forestry and Recreation's own facility, registrations, drop-in, and permit databases. In many cases, Parks, Forestry and Recreation data is combined with external research to provide context.

## 1.3 The benefits of recreation

Recreation is integral to the success of individuals and the City of Toronto as a whole. City of Toronto recreation programs promote the social and physical development of people of all ages and abilities. Recreation programs develop skills and talents in individuals, build social connections within neighborhoods, and train future leaders. Public recreation programs and services play a key role in maintaining healthy, strong and vibrant communities in Toronto. Strong communities, in turn, inspire Torontonians to invest their time and energy in their city.

### Personal growth

Recreation programs are of particular benefit to children and youth. Through City programs, children and youth learn social and leadership skills. Active participation early in life also sets the stage for lifelong health benefits through physical activity.<sup>1, 2</sup>

Lifelong recreation reduces the burden of disease and disability, including heart disease, stroke, hypertension, colon and breast cancer, osteoporosis and diabetes. Physically active seniors are said to have bodies that are 10-20 years younger than seniors who are not active.<sup>3,4</sup>

Physical activity enhances mental health among all ages. Reduced stress, depression, and anxiety as well as improvements in self-esteem are noted in recreation participants.<sup>5</sup> Recreation can have a significant therapeutic effect, for residents living with mental illness such as clinical depression.<sup>6</sup> Children, youth and seniors, in particular, have been found to have higher cognitive and academic performance when physical activity is part of their lives.<sup>7,8</sup>

### **Healthy communities**

Public recreation services play a key role in improving the health of individuals through increased physical activity. In addition, participation can contribute to healthy lifestyle choices. Studies show recreation helps people quit smoking and rehabilitate from drug and alcohol abuse. Recreation has powerful mental health benefits and is associated with suicide prevention.<sup>9,10</sup> Recreation programs for at-risk youth have a proven record of addressing negative behaviours and fostering continued self-development among participants.<sup>11</sup>

Recreation programs are an investment in prevention. Participation in recreation has been shown to reduce health care, intervention and social assistance costs.<sup>12</sup> Health Canada estimates that for each dollar invested in physical activity, \$11 is saved in health care costs.<sup>13</sup> This return is strongest when people get involved in physical activity at a young age.

### **Community development**

Participation in recreation builds strong communities by supporting positive engagement and citizen involvement. Recreational activity reduces social isolation and promotes understanding and tolerance between individuals, and between communities.<sup>14</sup> Public recreation programs are delivered to groups of citizens, expanding social networks among Torontonians.<sup>15</sup> At the same time, these programs foster independence.<sup>16</sup>

### **Economic benefits to the city**

Recreation is an important part of what makes Toronto an attractive city. Toronto ranked 15th in the 2011 Mercer Quality of Living Survey for world cities.<sup>17</sup> Mercer includes recreation as one of the seven factors used to evaluate cities. Citizens as well as businesses move to places not only because of economic factors, but because leisure and recreational opportunities are plentiful and of high quality. Toronto's recreation services play an important role in keeping Toronto's workers and their families mentally and physically healthy. Visitors and tourists also come to play and recreate, contributing to Toronto's social environment and economy. Finally, recreation also provides many residents with opportunities to explore the city. When Torontonians visit neighbourhoods beyond where they live and work, they gain a broader understanding of the makeup of our city, its geography and its residents. This helps to weave Toronto together.<sup>18,19</sup>

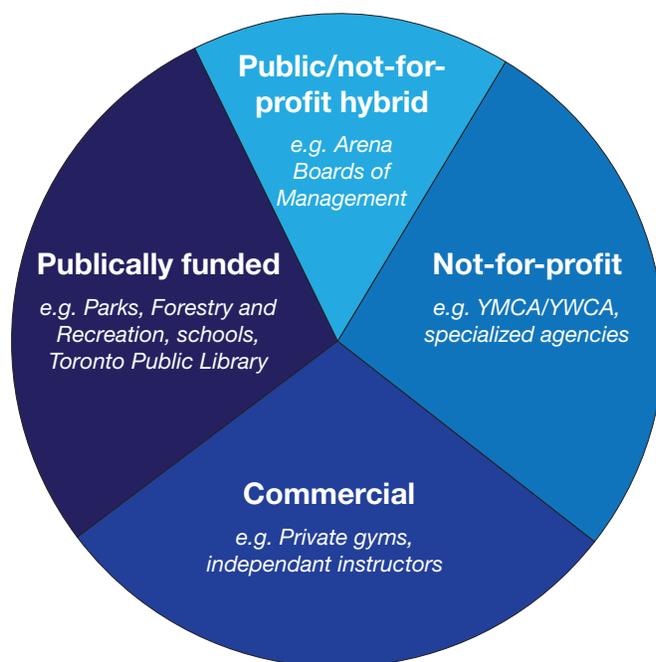
## 2. The Toronto recreation service sector

### Introduction

This section provides an overview of Parks, Forestry and Recreation's services, within the context of the other service providers in Toronto. It provides service information on Parks, Forestry and Recreation's offerings, and describes the type of variety of other players in the sector.

Recreation services in Toronto are provided by a wide variety of providers. Together, they make up Toronto's recreation service sector. Almost all Torontonians engage in active leisure, and most access services from more than one provider.

**Figure 1: Toronto's recreation sector**



Parks, Forestry and Recreation is the single largest recreation service provider, but is just one portion of the sector. The diagram above is not to scale, but is intended to give a sense of the breakdown.

- **Publicly funded.** Parks, Forestry and Recreation directly provides 75,000 registered and drop-in courses per year. Other City divisions and agencies like Economic Development and Culture as well the Toronto Public Library, provide some recreation opportunities. The City has a variety of agreements with Toronto's school boards that allow for the City delivery of programs in schools and the shared use of facilities.
- **Public/not-for-profit hybrids.** City Council appoints Boards of Management to operate City owned and funded community centres and arenas through Council approved Relationship Frameworks. The Association of Community Centres (AOCCs) and the Arena Boards of Management (ABOM) provide community recreation and social service programs and indoor ice-based activities.

- **Not-for-profit.** While some not-for-profit providers have their own facilities and operate entirely independently of the City, many organizations provide their services using City recreation facilities. These range from small community groups to major leagues and clubs. The City has a variety of leases, agreements and permits with these groups, and, in many cases, partners with them to provide affordable recreation.
- **Commercial.** Most commercial providers use their own facilities, such as private clubs and fitness centres. Some leagues, however, use City or school board fields, gyms, beaches and other facilities.

The Recreation Service Plan provides an initial description of the recreation service sector, setting the stage for improved coordination and planning with other service providers.

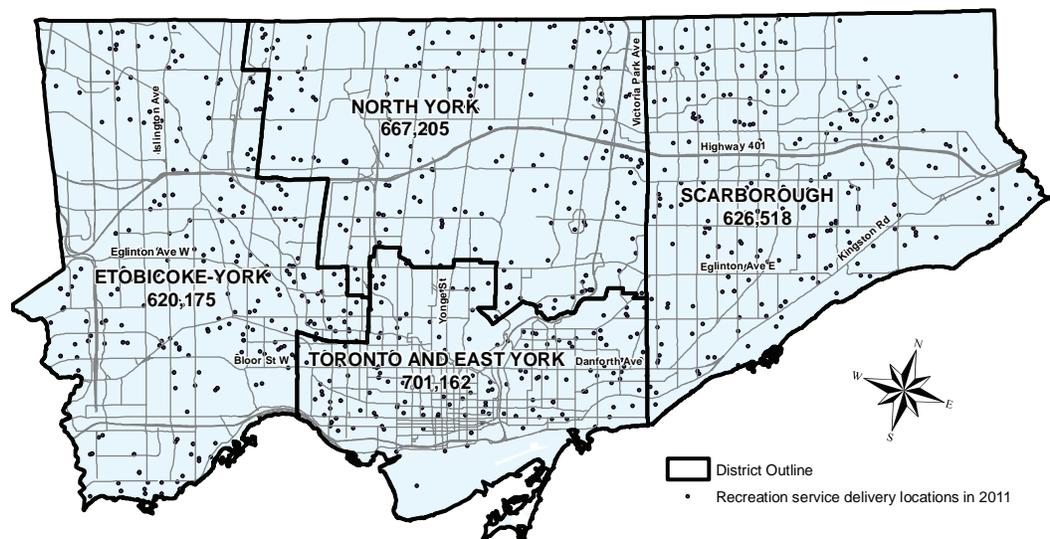
## 2.1 City-provided recreation services

Community recreation delivers programs and services across the city in four operational districts that correspond to the four Community Council areas. A variety of facilities provide spaces for programs delivered by over 10,000 full-time and part-time staff.

The total annual investment in Community Recreation operations in 2011 was \$185 million (gross), with a net city investment of \$121 million.

Parks, Forestry and Recreation delivers recreation services to Torontonians in two main ways: registered and drop-in programs.

**Figure 2: District populations with recreation program facility locations**



## Registered programs

A registered program is a supervised course with several classes that run over a period of time, and usually requires a fee. Registered programs offer progressive skill development. Many are also standardized, so the same program can be offered in multiple locations. Most registered programs are delivered in half-hour or one-hour sessions for nine weeks, such as swim programs, general interest, arts, and others. Another major registered program is camps, which run for one or two weeks during the summer months and at March Break in some locations.

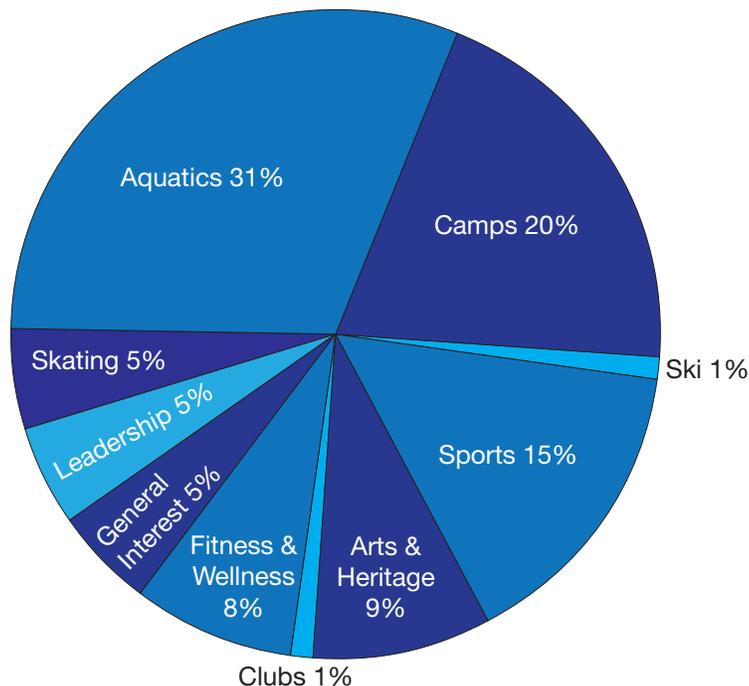


### Registered programs by the numbers (2011)

- Attracted 4.2 million visits
- 154,000 individual participants
- 63,000 registered programs

The three most common registered programs are aquatics, camps and sports. Together, these three program areas represent approximately 61 per cent of all program registration.

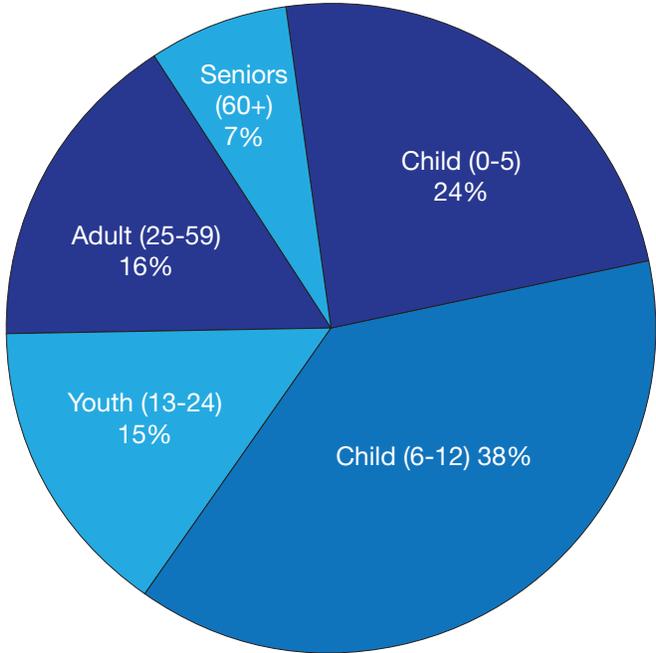
**Figure 3: Proportion of registrations by program type (2011)**



Another example of a registered program is After-school Recreation and Care, a registered program that provides high-quality, unlicensed after-school care for children ages 6-12 throughout the school year.

Participants in registered programs are mostly children and youth. Adult and seniors also use registered programs, but account for less than one-quarter of registrations.

**Figure 4: Registered program participants by age category (2011)**



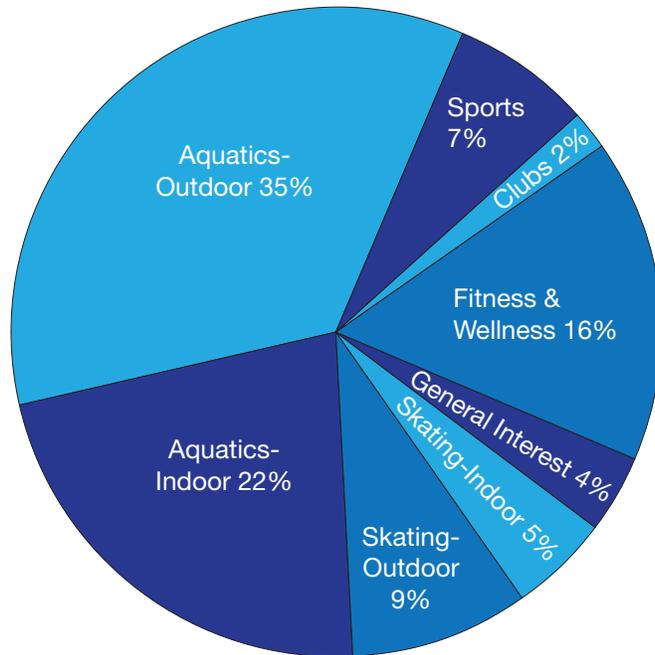
**Drop-in programs**

Drop-in programs offer the ability to participate in a range of recreation activities without having to register beforehand. This provides an element of flexibility for residents’ busy schedules. Drop-in programs are popular among all age groups, attracting 4.3 million visits per year, and many are free.

Aquatics, fitness and wellness, and skating were the three most-used drop-in programs in 2011, making up nearly 90 per cent of all recorded drop-in visits. Some participants incorporate drop-in programs to their daily or weekly routines, such as seniors who come to exercise and socialize. Others, such as families, may attend the occasional weekend swim, fitness program or leisure skate. Drop-in programs are an excellent way to deliver intergenerational and family programming. It is difficult to determine the exact number of individuals who attend drop-in programs each year because registration is not required.

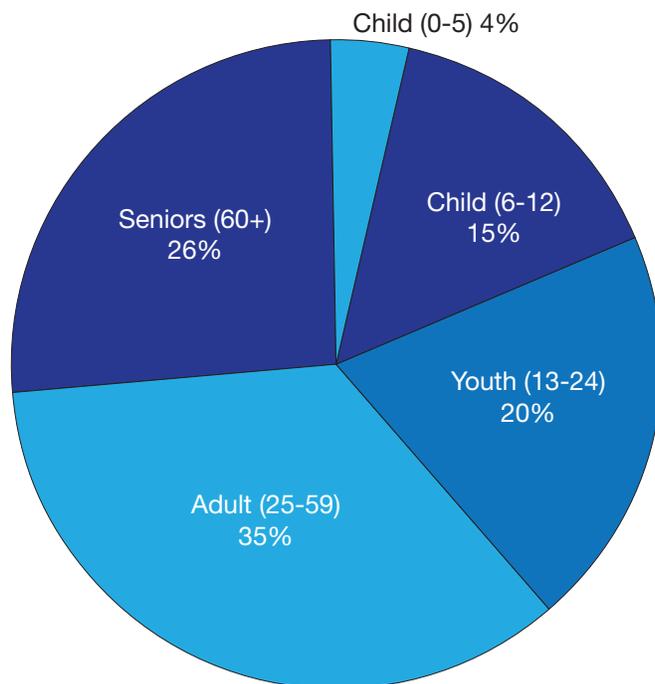
Participation in drop-in programs by program area for 2011 is shown in the following pie chart. Note that the most popular categories, such as aquatics and fitness, cover a broad range of activities. For example, the aquatics category includes lane swims and free swims, aquafit classes, and wading pools.

**Figure 5: Drop-in program participation by category (2011)**



Parks, Forestry and Recreation programs are well-used by the public. Registered programs and drop-in opportunities represent a significant proportion of all visits to City recreation facilities and programs.

**Figure 6: Drop-in visits by age category (2010-2011)**



## Other recreation services

Parks, Forestry and Recreation delivers a wide variety of services to Toronto communities. Many of these are outlined throughout the rest of this document. Youth outreach, community engagement, system planning, facility maintenance, and sport development make up just a few examples. Youth Outreach Workers engage youth in and around community centres to encourage their participation in recreation, and to mentor them in their lives. Community Recreation Programmers plan programs, special events and community engagement for every recreation facility. Parks, Forestry and Recreation manages facility maintenance and cleaning schedules, administers dozens of leases and agreements, and thousands of permits. These services support other providers in their ability to provide recreation opportunities. The City also partners with schools to deliver programming. Two examples are the After-school Recreation Care (ARC) programs in 22 schools and seven City recreation facilities and the basic swim skills program called Swim to Survive.



## City of Toronto facilities

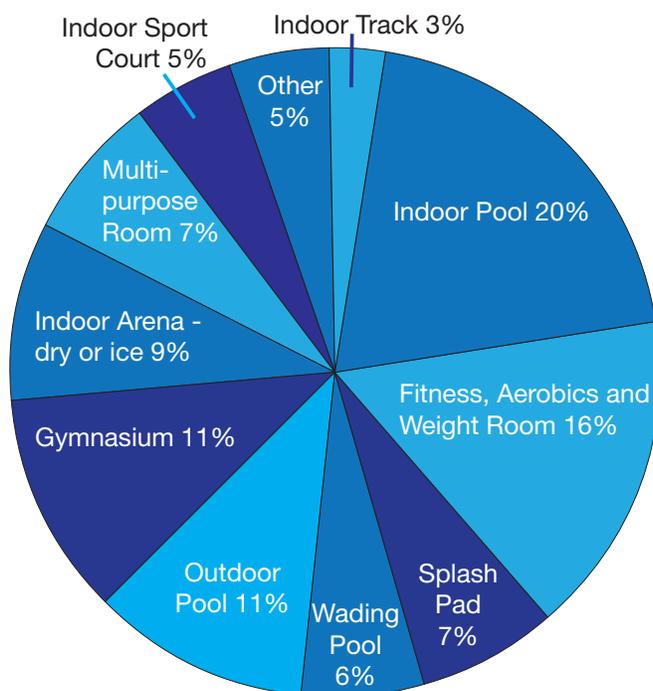
City facilities operated by Community Recreation include:

- 134 Community Centres
- 63 indoor pools
- 59 outdoor pools
- 40 arenas with 48 ice pads
- 2 ski hills
- 1 track & field centre
- 106 wading pools
- 1 Indoor playground

Parks, Forestry and Recreation also operates hundreds of other facilities that support recreation activities. They include:

- 634 tennis courts
- 51 outdoor artificial ice rinks
- 4 stadiums
- Over 1,600 parks covering more than 7,500 hectares of parkland, natural areas and beaches
- 580 kilometers of trail
- 858 playgrounds
- 93 splash pads
- 676 sports fields
- 3 animal attractions
- 5 golf courses
- 51 community gardens
- 7 skateboard parks
- 3 BMX facilities
- 145 bocce courts at 55 locations, and 20 bowling greens at 15 locations

**Figure 7: Recently used facility by Recreation Service Plan survey respondents (2011)**



The Recreation Service Plan survey, conducted in summer 2011, shows that residents use a wide variety of facilities.

### School space agreement

Some City-operated recreation program locations are not in facilities owned by the City. This includes 172 school board facilities that are used by the City and secured through a variety of agreements. Other examples used by the City include churches and Toronto Community Housing buildings.

A common type of agreement is the Shared Use Agreement, through which the City leases School Board facilities and pays per square foot. This type of agreement is most common in Toronto and East York and Etobicoke–York Districts, where there was a history of constructing schools and recreation centres together in one facility. Examples include Secord Community Centre and Ken Cox Community Centre. In many of these locations, the City also uses additional space in schools, obtained through seasonal permits. This additional space would most commonly be school gyms and multipurpose rooms for programs such as summer camps and sport programs.

The City and Toronto District School Board also have an agreement allowing the City to deliver community swimming opportunities in 33 Toronto District School Board schools after school hours and on weekends September through June, and full hours of use for summer months. The agreement also provides City funding to the Toronto District School Board to cover the cost of operating the pools during the school day.



In addition the City has a reciprocal agreement with the Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB). The agreement allows the City to use TCDSB facilities such as gymnasiums and classrooms. In exchange, the TCDSB is provided with ice time at City arenas at no charge.

### Trends in participation

Over the last decade, there has been an increase in registered and drop-in programs. Among registered programs, most of the growth has come from aquatics with modest increases in youth leadership and skating. There has also been an increase in general interest programs (e.g. crafts, hobbies, after-school and learn-to-cook programs), though exact numbers are difficult to report as general interest program standards are in development.

**Table 2: Registered program delivery trends: change in hours (2003-2011)**

	2003	2011	% change
Aquatics	144,700	178,744	+24 %
Skating	8,963	10,568	+18 %
Leadership	3,198	4,457	+ 39 %

The increase in drop-in hours are mostly in aquatics, seniors and sport programs.

**Table 3: Drop-in program delivery trends: change in hours (2003-2011)**

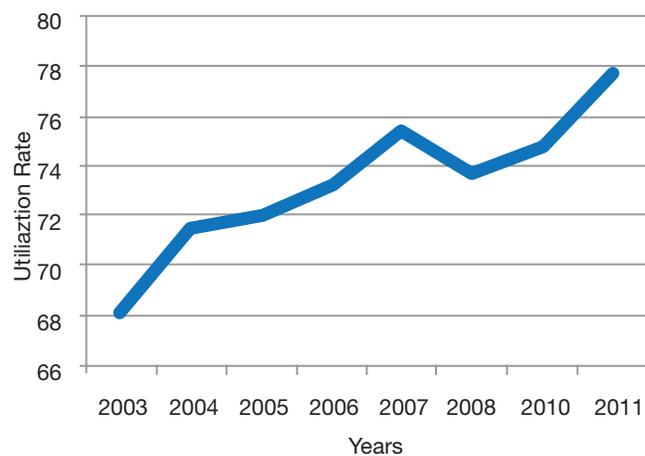
	2003	2011	% change
Aquatics	88,022	125,410	+42 %
Seniors	38,305	52,157	+36 %
Sports (e.g. basketball)	12,004	24,914	+108 %

### Increasing use of Parks, Forestry and Recreation programs

Utilization rate is a measure of registered programs. It captures the number of spaces filled compared to the spaces available in every registered course. The utilization rate for all Parks, Forestry and Recreation programs has increased over the last decade. There are two important reasons for this. First, program planning works to meet demand with supply: if a program is not well attended, it is replaced. Second, the high and increasing demand for recreation means many programs are consistently full and have waiting lists.

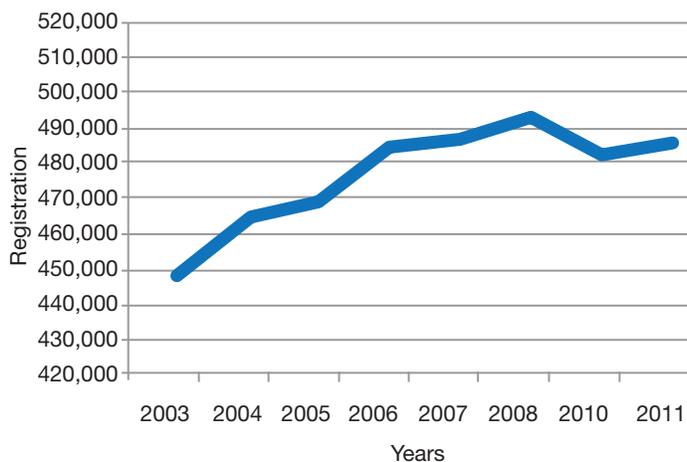
**Program registration is on the rise.** The graph below shows that there has been a general increase in the number of registrations, which corresponds to an increase in the number of courses offered.

**Figure 8: Registered program utilization**



Note: Utilization is defined as the number of used spaces compared to the total available.

**Figure 9: Program registration (2003-2011)**



## 2.2 Recreation services delivered by others

Beyond direct provision, Parks, Forestry and Recreation also supports the delivery of recreation programs and services through partnerships with other City divisions and agencies, community groups and community agencies. The City supports other recreation service providers in a variety of ways, from providing space for programs to providing grant funding. They are outlined in the next four subsections.

### Permits and leases

Parks, Forestry and Recreation facilities are located in neighbourhoods across the city and provide valuable local space to many recreation service providers. Through these facilities, the City provides space to hundreds of community-based organizations for their programs and services.

The permitted use of City space for recreation includes:

- One-time use of parks and recreation facilities for special events, athletics, arts, and social gatherings
- Seasonal use of recreation facilities, such as a gyms, indoor arenas, sports fields, and pools for community-delivered programs
- Annual permits that provide exclusive, and often year-round, access to facilities, such as tennis clubs

**Table 4: Survey question**

Question	Response	Per cent
“Have you or any members of your household participated in a recreation program provided by an organization other than the City of Toronto?”	Yes	61
	No	33
	Don't Know	6

Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff do more than just provide permits. They also work closely with sports organizations, community groups and agencies to ensure that facilities support quality recreation opportunities. Perhaps more importantly, they help facilitate the delivery of recreation programming and special events. In many cases, Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff support groups in planning their activities, and provide other organizational supports.

Community groups that provide recreation programming through the permit system maintain their own systems of attendance and registration. This makes it a challenge to know the full use of City recreation facilities. To gather information that is not currently collected (e.g. attendance at community-run events), Parks, Forestry and Recreation is improving data collection methods. Permits are provided for a wide range of activities both indoors in recreation centres, pools and arenas, and outdoors in parks, on fields and in allotment gardens. Activities also vary widely and include sports, special events, arts, aquatics, meetings, elections and allotment gardens. In 2011, over 300,000 permits were issued to individuals, clubs and organizations. Almost 80 per cent of them were for tennis, soccer, hockey, softball, baseball, meetings, swimming, athletic events, and

general rental. General rental, the largest category, is mostly for multipurpose rooms and gyms that are used to provide arts, general interest and active programming. The capacity building section of this plan provides more detail on how Parks, Forestry and Recreation supports other recreation providers.

**Table 5: Proportion of Parks, Forestry and Recreation’s 10 most common permits issued, by activity type (2011)**

Activity Type (indoors and outdoors)	Per cent of total permits issued
General rental	21%
Tennis	19%
Soccer	10%
Hockey	10%
Softball/Slo-Pitch	6%
Baseball	4%
Meeting	4%
Social events	4%
Aquatics	3%
Athletic	2%

The mix of other permit types (17 per cent) include a variety of sports such as basketball, ball hockey, curling, cricket and volleyball, as well as arts activities like photography and dancing.

In addition, the City provides long-term leases and licenses to enhance the recreation experience in City facilities. Many provide library, recreation or childcare services. Others sell food or skate-sharpening services and equipment sales or rental. A portion of the sales revenue is returned to the City.

Below Market Rent (BMR) leases go to only non-profit organizations that deliver important services, including recreation, to local communities. These leases are provided at a reduced rate that recovers only operating expenses.

### Partnerships with other City divisions and agencies

Parks, Forestry and Recreation collaborates with other City divisions to provide and facilitate recreation. After-School Recreation Care (ARC) is an example of a partnership between Parks, Forestry and Recreation and Children’s Services to provide after-school care at 29 recreation facilities and schools across the city. There were 865 participants in the 2011-2012 school year.

## # Leases, licenses and agreements by the numbers

Parks, Forestry and Recreation leases, licenses and rents space to:

- 15 non-profit organizations through BMR agreements
- 9 Recreation and childcare providers
- 9 Toronto Public Library branches
- 44 Food vending and pro-shop leases and licenses

## # After-School Recreation Care (ARC) by the numbers

- 6 to 14 year olds are the target population
- 29 locations in Toronto’s Priority Neighbourhoods
- \$2.34 per child per day
- 875 children served annually

### Association of Community Centres Facilities

519 Church Street Community Centre

Applegrove Community Complex

Cecil Street Community Centre

Central Eglinton Community Centre

Community Centre 55

Eastview Neighbourhood Community Centre

Harbourfront Community Centre

Ralph Thornton Community Centre

Scadding Court Community Centre

Swansea Town Hall

### Arena Boards of Management Facilities

George Bell Arena

Larry Grossman Forest Hill Memorial Arena

Leaside Memorial Community Gardens Arena

McCormick Playground Arena

Moss Park Arena

North Toronto Memorial Arena

Ted Reeve Community Arena

William H. Bolton Arena

Another example is the Investing in Families initiative, a partnership with Toronto Employment and Social Services and Public Health that helps single parent families on social assistance access recreation and other services. In 2011, the program supported over 1300 children and youth and more than 500 adults through enrolment in more than 11,000 recreation programs and services.

### Recreational opportunities delivered by other City divisions and agencies

Other City divisions and numerous agencies and board-run organizations that have relationships to the City also deliver recreation services. The following are some examples.

- Some historical sites operated by Economic Development and Culture Division offer programming and special events for all ages. The City's own museums play host to summer camps, and a variety of other recreation programs.
- The Toronto Public Library offers mostly drop-in classes and learning opportunities at many of its 98 branches throughout the City. They offer over 1000 programs for children, youth and adults on topics such as health, nutrition, meditation, and languages as well as arts, crafts, and after-school programs such as homework help.
- The Association of Community Centres (AOCCS) are City owned and funded community centres operated by a Council appointed Board of Management. Each of the 10 AOCCS provides a broad range of community, recreation and social service programs, and play an important role in providing recreation in their communities. The core administration activities are funded by the City but programs are funded through fees, donations and grants.
- The Arena Boards of Management are City owned and funded arenas operated by a Council appointed Board of Management. The Arena Boards were established between the 1950s and the early 1970s. They are a significant provider of indoor ice time for hockey, skating and other ice-based activities. The boards' responsibilities include providing safe and full access to high quality indoor ice and to allocate ice time in a fair and equitable manner among local neighbourhood citizens, organizations and user groups.

The City is the largest provider of indoor and outdoor ice facilities in Toronto, between Parks, Forestry and Recreation and the Arena Boards of Management. City-owned rink and arena ice-time is mostly permitted to community providers for hockey, learn to skate and figure skating. More than 4,000 groups, like amateur hockey leagues, rent Parks, Forestry and Recreation ice-time. The Ice Allocation Policy was adopted in 2010 to permit City prime time ice on the

most equitable basis for the greatest number of Toronto residents. It applies to all City-owned arenas and rinks, and ensures equitable distribution to males, females, and persons with a disability.

The City also supports curling activities at three City owned curling clubs. These clubs are operated through a variety of operating models, including Below Market Rent (Tam Heather Curling Club) and directly operated (East York Curling Club).

Other examples of recreation programs delivered by others include programs at the Toronto Track and Field Centre (lease agreement with York University) and Birchmount Community Centre (lease agreement with the Birchmount Bluffs Neighbourhood Centre ).

## Grants

The City also provides annual recreation grants that support community groups to offer recreation, sport, and parks activities. These grants allow the City to address service gaps in recreation or provide support in certain geographic areas of the city. In this way, the City can be involved in supporting recreation in neighbourhoods where no City facility exists. In other situations, the grants support priority projects, such as newcomer youth, and people with disabilities. In 2012, Council awarded 25 grants to 22 organizations totaling \$471,085 through the Community Recreation Investment Program.

**Table 6: Number of approved grants by community type in 2012**

Grant Category	Number of Grants
Youth (including At-Risk & Newcomer/Racialized Youth)	16
People with Disabilities	4
Seniors	2
GLBTTT Community	1
Neighbourhoods	2

## Independent non-profit providers

Non-profit organizations provide a significant portion of recreation services in Toronto. They vary in size and span of service. Some are large organizations that provide many services at several locations, serving thousands of Torontonians every year, such as the YMCA. Others are smaller, providing leisure opportunities at their own or rented facilities, and may serve only several dozen Torontonians. Some of them make recreation a central aspect to their services, while others do so in addition to their main offerings. These include clubs, leagues, neighbourhood centres, Boys' and Girls' Clubs, education institutions, housing groups, faith-based and culture-based groups, settlement services, seniors groups, health facilities, and other organizations that do not fit a common category.

Community based sports organizations provide service across the City through the provision of sports leagues such as basketball, soccer and baseball. These volunteer organizations are an important part of the recreation service sector.

The 211 Toronto directory of community, social, health and government services includes more than 300 providers that list recreation as an activity.

Many are large-multi-service providers with several locations. Others have a single-location. Some provide recreation using City or school facilities. Some 12 organization categories are shown in the chart below, with the number of organizations in that category and two examples. Parks, Forestry and Recreation will work with non-profit and other partners to continue to develop a clear picture of the sector as it evolves.

What follows is a description of some of the larger groups that comprise the non-profit recreation sector, but is not an exhaustive list. Parks, Forestry and Recreation still has work to do in developing more detailed information about providers in the sector. This work will factor into local planning efforts and help us plan our services and facilities – together with partners – to best meet the recreation needs of Torontonians.

**Table 7: Toronto community organizations that deliver recreation services<sup>20</sup>**

Provider category	Number	Examples of organization
Health	52	Centre for Addiction and Mental Health; Mount Sinai Hospital
Cultural	51	Islamic Community of Afghans in Canada; Canadian Arab Federation
Multi-service	49	YMCA of Greater Toronto; Variety Village
Seniors	48	CANES Community Care; North York Seniors Centre
Youth	30	Cabbagetown Youth Centre; East Metro Youth Services
Settlement	29	Dejinta Beesha, WoodGreen Community Services
Family	20	Syme-Woolner Neighbourhood and Family Centre; Metro Mothers Network
Art	7	ArtHeart; Creative Spirit Art Centre
Counselling	6	San Romanoway Revitalization Association; Children's Aid Society of Toronto
Women	6	Rexdale Women's Centre; Canadian Centre for Women's Education and Development
Housing	5	Riverdale Housing Action Group; Houselink Community Homes
Adult	3	St. Christopher House; Fred Victor Centre

### Health care providers

Hospital, mental health providers and long-term care facilities offer a range of recreation services. In most cases, they offer programs such as art, games and light physical activity, on their own premises, often requiring no specialized facilities. In other cases, basic exercise equipment is available.

## Cultural and faith-based organizations

Several of Toronto's cultural organizations have well-established, high-quality recreation facilities, such as the two Jewish Community Centres, the Chinese Cultural Centre and the Japanese-Canadian Cultural Centre. They offer a wide range of fitness, health and wellness, and culturally specific recreation programs for all ages. Churches and other faith-based groups provide a significant number of camps and other recreation opportunities throughout the year. These programs make a significant contribution to the recreation service sector by providing culturally responsive programs.

## Multi-service providers

Toronto has several large non-profit providers of recreation services that are dedicated to promoting sports and recreational activity among the general public. These include the YMCA, YWCA, Boys and Girls Clubs, Neighbourhood Centres and Variety Village. The YMCA of Greater Toronto, for example, offers a wide range of camps, physical activity programs and swimming. The YMCA has four Health, Fitness and Recreation Centres in Toronto. The YMCA also operates 12 day camps and 20 "summer clubs" at their Centres and satellite locations, like schools and the Toronto Islands. These recreation opportunities are for children and youth aged 4 to 15. The YMCA also has a fee assistance policy.<sup>21</sup>

Another example of a large direct provider is the Boys' and Girls' Clubs. There are eight Boys' and Girls' Clubs in Toronto with 77 satellite locations serving 35 communities. They provide opportunities for children and youth to stay active and develop leadership and employment skills.

## Educational institutions

Toronto school boards are significant providers of recreation programming and early sports training to children. Schools deliver structured opportunities for student physical activity in class and through extra-curricular recreation programs. Toronto's public schools own a large number of pools, sports fields, gyms, tracks, and playgrounds, and offer both structured and unstructured opportunities for recreation on school grounds. They offer permits for these facilities to community-based and other recreation providers.

Toronto also has many private schools that offer recreation opportunities for students, alumni and the public. Activities include summer camps, tennis, hockey, and aquatics, among others. Toronto's strong post-secondary education sector also maintains some of the largest and highest-quality recreation facilities in the city. The University of Toronto has one of only two Olympic-sized swimming pools in the city, and York, Ryerson, Humber, and George Brown also contribute to the facilities available to Torontonians. The University of Toronto and Ryerson University also operate sports and general interest camps.





## Commercial providers

Commercial providers deliver a large portion of the recreation opportunities available in the City of Toronto, but it is difficult to quantify the number of services or providers. Private fitness clubs tend to offer services to a specific target market in their own facilities. Private providers are able to respond quickly to new recreational trends as they emerge, and offer a full range of activity from beginner to advanced programming. What distinguishes them is their focus on serving clients who are able to pay. Examples of commercial providers include: full-service or focused fitness clubs, single activity centres (e.g. yoga studios) competitive sports and clubs (e.g.

gymnastics clubs, martial arts), and private rental opportunities. Most of the largest commercial sports operators and franchises, and privately owned clubs offer several sports on their site, and the vast majority of martial arts and fitness facilities are commercially operated.

## Conclusion

Torontonians access recreation services from a variety of providers. Individual choices about where and how to access recreation are influenced by multiple factors, including location, income level, age, available free time, and a host of personal preferences. Parks, Forestry and Recreation is focused on meeting the needs of all residents, especially children, youth, and seniors. In addition, Parks, Forestry and Recreation works with other providers to coordinate access to services, reduce barriers and increase participation. As individuals and families progress through the various stages of life, they access opportunities in different parts of the sector, and the services provided by Parks, Forestry and Recreation will continue to play a central role in introducing residents to lifelong activity.

## 3. Context and trends

Service planning does not take place in isolation. It is affected by social and economic changes at regional, national, and global levels. These trends affect who Torontonians are, where they live, how they work, and how they participate in recreation. Awareness of the shifting context within which services are provided is necessary for service planning. This chapter outlines the context and trends that affect Parks, Forestry and Recreation's directions in recreation service delivery.

### 3.1 Social and demographic trends in Toronto

Understanding the population living in the City of Toronto is fundamental to service planning and delivery.

#### Population

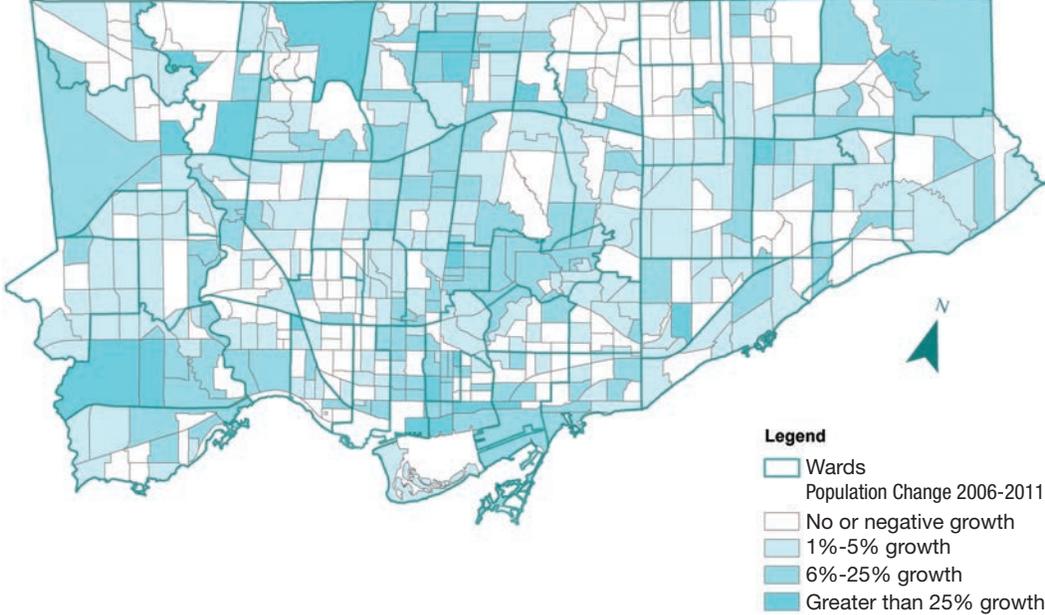
Demographic trends in Toronto echo demographic trends across Canada. According to the 2011 census, the population of seniors and older working adults in Toronto is growing. As elsewhere in Canada, there are fewer youth and young working adults, and a greater-than-expected number of newborns and young children (0-4 years).

Toronto continues to be a city that newcomers choose to call home. In 2006, 11 per cent of Torontonians had been in Canada less than five years. According to the 2011 census, 45 per cent of Torontonians had a mother tongue other than English or French. In the same year, 47 per cent of Torontonians self-identified as a visible minority.

In 2009, 20 per cent of Torontonians (515,000) self-reported as living with a disability that affected their ability to participate in desired activities.<sup>22</sup> In the future, the aging population will increase the demand for accessible facilities and programs.

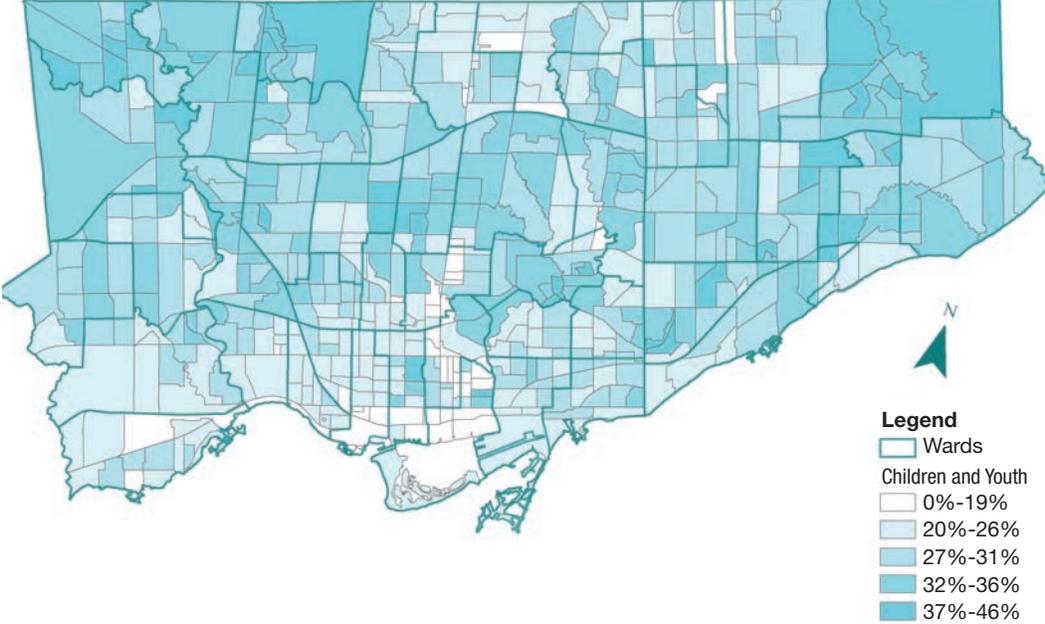
Four areas of Toronto that show strong population growth are the downtown core, northern Scarborough (Rouge-Malvern), Sheppard Avenue close to Yonge Street, and the western Lakeshore.

**Figure 10: Map of population growth in Toronto (2006-2011)**



Since children and youth are the primary users of City recreation programs, it is especially important to consider areas with high and growing populations of children and youth, as well as population growth in general. Working-age adults are especially concentrated in the downtown core, children and youth in the northwest and northeastern parts of the city. The southwestern and north-central neighbourhoods have higher than average populations of seniors.

**Figure 11: Geographic concentrations of children and youth in Toronto (2011)**



## Income

Over the last decade there has been an increase in poverty in Toronto. A growing segment of the population is living below the Low-income Cut Off (LICO)<sup>†</sup>. The rate of family poverty in Toronto rose from 13 per cent in 1981 to a high of 20 per cent in 2001.<sup>23</sup> In addition, data from Statistics Canada shows that the geographic concentration of poverty in Toronto has grown over the last 30 years. Then, just 18 per cent of the city's low-income families lived in neighbourhoods where more than a quarter of them had low incomes. At the time of the previous census in 2006, 46 per cent of low-income families lived in neighbourhoods with concentrated poverty.<sup>24, 25, 26, 27</sup>

Toronto is a destination of choice both for newcomers to Canada and for those seeking improved economic opportunities. In 2006, 35 per cent of all low-income persons in Ontario lived in the City of Toronto. Recently, the economic downturn has been reflected in other trends: social-assistance caseloads in Toronto rose 29 per cent between 2007 and 2010, and visits to food banks rose by 25 per cent over the same period.<sup>28</sup>

**Table 8: Toronto Low-income Cut Off (2012)**

1 person	\$23,298
2 persons	\$29,004
3 persons	\$35,657
4 persons	\$43,292
5 persons	\$49,102
6 persons	\$55,378
7 or more persons	\$61,656

## 3.2 National trends in leisure and health

Over the last 20 years, Canadians have become less active. Between 1981 and 2009, measures of fitness declined for Canadians of all ages and both genders, while measures of body fat increased.<sup>29, 30</sup> The prevalence of overweight and obese Canadians has also increased.<sup>31</sup> This trend mirrors a reduced participation in sports. The most recent Canadian survey shows a 17 per cent decline in sport participation among Canadians, due in part to the aging population, but also due to lack of free time and lack of interest.<sup>32</sup> Canadians are becoming more sedentary because of lifestyles that include more desk jobs, transportation by car, and more screen time during leisure hours.<sup>33</sup>

Active lifestyles contribute to significant savings in health care costs. One study estimated an annual savings of \$150 million if 10 per cent of physically inactive Canadians became active.<sup>34</sup> Leading an active life benefits individuals as well as society in general.

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<sup>†</sup> The Low-income Cut Off is defined every year by Statistics Canada as being the level of income at which individuals or families are spending 20 percent more than the median family on basic expenses (shelter, food and clothing). It is adjusted for family size and for the size of the municipality in which a family lives. In 2010 the LICO for a family of four living in a city of more than 500 000 people was \$42 065 before taxes.

In the last few years, the number of Canadians who are moderately or very active has increased slightly, a recent and fragile positive trend.<sup>35</sup> Despite the modest increases, inactivity remains a problem among children and youth. Only seven per cent of Canadian children and youth attain the recommended level of 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity per day.<sup>36</sup> This is due to less physical education in school, decreasing rates of active transportation to and from school, and increased screen time.<sup>37, 38</sup> Childhood obesity in Canada has tripled over the past three decades.<sup>39</sup> Overall, Canadian children and youth are less active, less fit and weaker than they were a generation ago.<sup>40</sup> Increasing rates of obesity may lead to high societal costs. Obesity and the associated adult-onset diabetes represent costs of \$4.3 billion in Canada, and rates are increasing.<sup>41</sup>

There are a number of reasons for inactivity: lack of leisure time is frequently reported. This trend pushes people to choose more individual pursuits instead of organized physical activity. Lack of leisure time may also be a contributor to other trends that indirectly affect recreation, such as a decline in volunteerism.<sup>42</sup>

Participation in specific activities differs by gender, region and neighbourhood based on local culture, amenities and interest. Across Canada and particularly in Ontario, male children are consistently more active than female children. Activity levels for both genders decrease with age, though Canadian women are increasingly participating in sport. In Canada, participation in organized sports has decreased, with baseball as the primary example. Conversely, the slight increase in active leisure in the last six years has been achieved through increases in mostly self-directed activities such as jogging, cycling, and walking as well as drop-in and leisure activities such as fitness, yoga, and lane swimming.<sup>43</sup>

### **3.3 Toronto leisure and health trends**

Compared to the rest of Ontario, Torontonians are less overweight and have lower rates of obesity, but both factors are still on the rise in the city. Over one in five youth and one in four adults are overweight or obese in Toronto, and the majority of children and youth aged six to 19 are not meeting the recommended daily requirements for physical activity.<sup>44</sup> Torontonians are not active enough.

At the same time, Toronto has experienced dramatic growth in the fitness industry. In the last decade, businesses such as yoga, dance, martial arts studios, and fitness centres have expanded. There are a significant number of service providers in these areas, serving mostly the adult population. Children, youth and seniors, on the other hand, generally have fewer program options through commercial providers. Recreation trends are also affected by the growth of newcomer communities in Toronto, as demonstrated by the increasing popularity of sports such as cricket.

High facility costs for recreation services such as aquatics, skating, and hockey result in little interest among market providers. Therefore, the City and school boards remain key to providing facility and programs for these recreation activities, especially for children and youth.

### 3.4 Trends in municipal recreation service provision

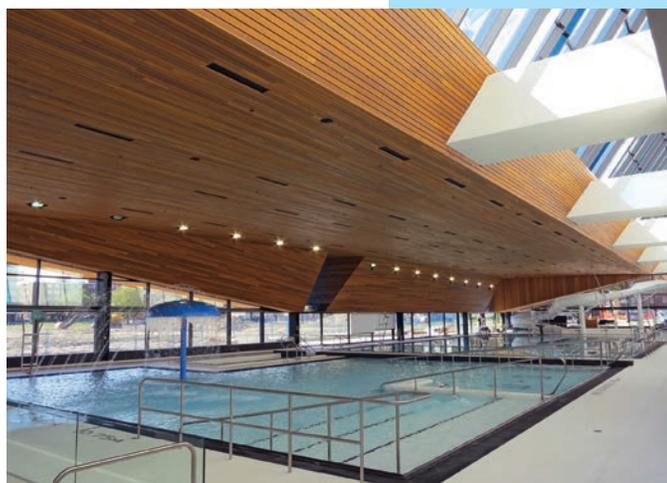
A review of municipalities across Canada shows that other cities are facing similar challenges to Toronto. Other municipalities are focusing their resources on serving children and youth, reducing barriers to participation for low-income residents, and investing in making programs accessible to everyone regardless of ability. Increasingly, municipal recreation services are being delivered through partnerships with other community agencies. Services are also increasingly being delivered out of multi-service facilities, which are better able to adapt to emerging recreation needs than single-use facilities.

#### Reducing financial barriers

It is increasingly common for municipal councils to adopt policies that reduce barriers to participation in recreation and boost funding to meet this goal. Strategies vary by jurisdiction, but there is wide agreement that fees, lack of knowledge about programs, linguistic-cultural factors, transportation and facility costs all contribute to barriers that should be addressed. Barrier-free access for children and youth is consistently named as a goal.

#### Accessibility

Municipal recreation providers are significantly affected by legislation mandating improved accessibility for persons living with a disability, such as the *Accessibility for Ontarians with a Disability Act (AODA 2005)*. This legislation reflects a growing consensus that public services should be universally accessible. Creating accessible facilities will require significant capital investment, particularly for older facilities.



#### Integrated service delivery

There is a growing trend in Canadian municipalities towards delivering community-based programming through partnerships, especially with community based, not-for-profit organizations and volunteer groups.<sup>45</sup>

Canadian municipalities are focusing on providing introductory level recreation opportunities, and have adopted an integrated service delivery model that blends direct provision with partnerships.

#### Facilities

As populations change and evolve, so do their recreation needs. This presents a challenge for recreation facilities, which are inflexible assets that cannot be relocated, and are costly to upgrade or repurpose. Toronto, in particular, faces the challenge of aging recreation infrastructure. By the end of 2012, Parks, Forestry and Recreation facilities will have an accumulated maintenance and repair backlog of almost \$300 million. Other municipalities are choosing to build multi-use community centres that can better adapt to changing community needs.

## Climate change

As the Canadian climate continues to warm, outdoor skiing and skating will become increasingly costly to sustain, and outdoor activities in the spring and fall will be held in more summer-like conditions. Cities across Canada are planning more opportunities for cooling in the summer, such as the addition of pools and splash pads.



### Ontario Summer Games by the numbers

- 2,500 athletes
- 28 sports
- 368 coaches, 113 managers, 281 officials
- 21 provincial sport organization representatives
- 1,200+ volunteers



### PanParapan American Games by the numbers

- 11,000+ athletes
- 48 sports
- 250,000 visitors to Toronto
- 20,000+ volunteers needed

## 3.5 Multi-sport games in Toronto

The City of Toronto hosted the 2012 Ontario Summer Games in August. The Summer Games proved to be an opportunity to increase the profile of recreation and sport in Toronto and a stepping-stone to hosting future national and international events.

Toronto will host the 2015 PanParapan American Games. They will endow the Toronto region with new and updated recreation and sport venues including a new aquatics centre, athletics stadium, velodrome and two additional Olympic-standard pools. The City is poised to leverage the Games to promote the importance of active, healthy lifestyles and to take full advantage of the new recreation and sport infrastructure through legacy program planning.

# 4. Quality

## Principle

Providing the highest quality programs and services to enhance the health, quality of life, and wellbeing of residents.

## Introduction

Quality is a key component of all recreation programs. In order to ensure programs are safe and meet their intended outcomes, Parks, Forestry and Recreation implements several quality standards, including program content and curriculum, staff certification and training, and staff-to-participant ratios.

Many Parks, Forestry and Recreation programs have established content and curriculum, including swimming, skating and summer camp programs. This ensures that programs are purposeful and provide the best opportunity for skill development.

Staff are required to have a variety of certifications, including aquatic leadership, High Five Principles of Healthy Child Development, and nationally recognized fitness and coaching certifications. Staff receive training on an annual or seasonal basis, including program specific training as well as policy and procedures. All staff are trained in first aid and emergency procedures and workplace health and safety.

Staff-to-participant ratios ensure that participants are adequately supervised and receive the appropriate amount of instruction. Programs with the lowest ratios tend to be preschool programs and learn to swim programs. A typical school age children's program instructor-to-participant ratio is 1:10.

Delivering programs and services of consistent high quality ensures that participation in recreation translates into better health, quality of life, and well-being for residents. It also ensures that Torontonians have the opportunity to exercise, develop skills and engage in positive social experiences in safe and welcoming environments.

Parks, Forestry and Recreation continually strives to improve the quality of its services and facilities. The Recreation Service Plan sets a number of directions for improving the quality of recreation services across the City that responds to input from the public and stakeholders, as well as research and recognized standards of program quality.

## Definition of quality

For the purposes of the Recreation Service Plan, quality refers to the standard of programs, services, and facilities that provide the greatest benefit to participants.

## Quality components in recreation programs

- Staff-to-participant ratios
- Staff training
- Appropriate equipment and supplies
- First-aid and emergency procedures
- Program curriculum
- National and provincial program standards

### What we heard on quality

According to a survey of Toronto residents conducted annually since 2001, overall customer satisfaction ratings of City community centres are consistently high. In that time, over 90 per cent of respondents indicated that they were satisfied with their visit to a City of Toronto community centre. In the most recent version of the survey, 93 per cent of community centre visitors were satisfied or very satisfied. When asked about program quality, 9 out of 10 respondents said they are satisfied.

“I grew up in Peterborough in the 1970s where there was nothing to do whatsoever in terms of things being offered by the City. I continue to be so impressed by how much you can do with your kids in Toronto for free or low cost.”

– Survey respondent

The Recreation Service Plan survey respondents and participants at the public and stakeholder consultations were asked to comment in greater detail on the quality of recreation programs and services. In addition, consultations were done with stakeholder and focus groups, including permit holders, youth groups, special needs participants, and a variety of others. While the overall customer satisfaction ratings, as outlined above, are generally positive, these more focused consultations revealed specific concerns about maintenance practices, cleaning, and upkeep of facilities. Similarly, respondents commented on keeping equipment, tools, and signage in a state of good repair. Many made suggestions on how to improve customer service, such as ensuring that facilities are staffed appropriately, and that staff are equipped with the tools and training they need. These comments indicate that while the overall feedback on the quality of Parks, Forestry and Recreation facilities and services is high, there are areas that require further work.

#### Future directions: Quality

- 1 Improve consistency and quality of all recreation programs and services by advancing quality standards, monitoring and evaluation.
- 2 Strengthen the customer service experience as part of the development and implementation of a division-wide Customer Service Improvement Strategy and by improving facility conditions.

# 1. Improve consistency and quality of all recreation programs and services

Children are the largest group of users for recreation programs in Toronto. Children’s programming is evaluated according to the standards of the HIGH FIVE program, a nationally recognized quality standard for organizations that provide recreation and sports programs to children aged six to twelve.

Parks, Forestry and Recreation sets high standards for all staff working with children. Mandatory staff training includes HIGH FIVE, Workplace Health and Safety, Recognition and Reporting of Child Abuse, Accessibility Standards for Customer Service, and First Aid Certification.

**Table 9: HIGH FIVE Principles for successful children’s programming**

HIGH FIVE Principles for successful children’s programming	
Caring Adult	Supervisor provides a supportive environment.
Friends	Supervisor fosters positive peer interactions.
Participation	Children are given a voice and allowed to participate in decision-making.
Play	Play emphasizes fun, creativity, and cooperation.
Mastery	Children are given tasks that show they are succeeding.

In addition to these mandatory training components for all staff, aquatics staff are required to hold specific aquatic certifications that are recognized through the Lifesaving Society. In addition to Standard First Aid, lifeguards are required to hold a current National Lifeguard Service certification, the standard measurement of lifeguard performance in Canada. Similarly, swimming instructors are required to hold a current Lifesaving Society Swim and Lifesaving Instructor award in order to teach any of the swim programs in City facilities. To ensure staff maintain the required skill level, the Ontario Public Pool Regulations prescribes re-certification of the aquatic qualifications every two years.

Parks, Forestry and Recreation has operating criteria that has been developed specifically for aquatics programs, summer camps and skating. The operating criteria ensures that safety standards and program requirements have been met within the program area through training and program monitoring. Specifically, programs such as the Guardian, Preschool and Ultra Swim in aquatics and the Learn to Skate program in skating have standardized curricula that are consistent City-wide. These programs are planned specifically to maximize skill development and progression. A number of program areas such as gymnastics and martial arts have also undergone similar curriculum based reviews.

Other program areas such as Arts and Heritage and General Interest require individual program plans at the local level but do not have a standard curricula that is followed city-wide. City-wide program teams will be working towards developing standard curriculum and ensuring that those standards are monitored on a regular basis through annual program auditing.

While programs for children are guided by HIGH FIVE standards, programs for other age categories do not yet have a similar set of program standards. Parks, Forestry and Recreation is enhancing its capacity to develop standards for all

program areas to ensure adequate physical activity, and to respond to evidence-based research on the benefits of recreational activities on health and social development.

Parks, Forestry and Recreation uses a variety of tools to evaluate the success of City recreation programs:

- A course, registration and facility booking database (CLASS) that contains participation and program utilization information.
- Program evaluations done by some instructors or programmers, but not consistently across the system.
- Program assessments for children’s programs through the HIGH FIVE program.
- Feedback from participants, the public and permit holders.
- Input from the local organizations, such as community centre advisory councils.

Parks, Forestry and Recreation faces challenges in improving data collection and reporting on the quality its services. Permitting data, for instance, does not yet exist in sufficient detail to support in-depth service planning. Further, differences in service delivery and recording methods across Toronto’s four districts make comparisons difficult. Although the City of Toronto collects data from a variety of sources, there is no comprehensive source of information, which makes providing consistent analysis a challenge.

To meet all its service and program goals, Parks, Forestry and Recreation data collection systems and reporting need to improve. Much of this work is already underway. Since 2011, Parks, Forestry and Recreation has been developing consistent descriptions, standards and outcomes for registered and drop-in programs. This involves consolidating course titles and coordinating the FUN Guide production schedule. Developing reporting tools for staff to assist in planning, monitoring and maintaining programs is also part of the project.

“Gather client satisfaction surveys from every participant at the end of each program session so that feedback can be provided on the instructor and improvements can be made for the program or service.”

– Survey respondent

## Recommended actions

- 1.1 **Expand quality standards to all age groups and recreation program areas, focusing on safety, health and skill development.** This will ensure that programs and services are provided to a consistent standard across the City. Quality standards support a positive customer experience both by improving quality and delivering consistent program content, program length, and program cost, regardless of service location.
- 1.2 **Develop a system to measure and report on the achievement of recreation program standards.** Improved data collection and analysis will provide system planners with information about who is using which programs and where quality improvements need to be made. Parks, Forestry and Recreation will be better able to set clear and achievable targets, report on progress, and achieve its service objectives. The public will also be able to access more information about what to expect from programs and services.

## 2. Strengthen the customer service experience

The City has established standards for customer service. These include customer complaint processes, standards around response times on resident requests, and a Toronto Public Service Charter of Expectations. Parks, Forestry and Recreation has a Customer Service Improvement Team that is collaborating with teams in other divisions across the City to strengthen customer service.

Parks, Forestry and Recreation uses various methods to gather feedback from the public including: participant feedback forms, focus groups, program surveys, and needs assessments. Parks, Forestry and Recreation has a complaint tracking system to log, assess, and resolve issues in a timely manner.

City staff maintain logs and facility checklists to track maintenance and cleanliness. These checklists set ongoing maintenance and cleanliness standards. Maintenance supervisors conduct regular facility visits to ensure cleanliness of facilities and to address concerns raised by the public.

The HIGH FIVE program assessment for children's programming also evaluates site safety and whether the environment is welcoming for participants, particularly children. When a program scores low the Community Recreation Programmer and Community Recreation Supervisor meet to develop an action plan for improving the quality of the environment for that program.

Participants in the public consultation mentioned the age, state of repair, and cleanliness of recreation facilities as an issue. In 2012, Parks, Forestry and Recreation has over \$300 million in outstanding State of Good Repair (SGR) projects, nearly half of which are related to pools, arenas, and community centres. Larger facility capital needs will be addressed in the facilities plan, which will be discussed in section 7 on equitable access.



### Parks, Forestry and Recreation's aging facilities by the numbers

- Over half of Toronto's recreation centres are between 25 and 49 years old
- One quarter are over 50 years old

## Recommended actions

- 2.1 **Develop and implement a Customer Service Improvement Strategy** that includes measuring and tracking levels of customer satisfaction of both services and facilities. Additional customer service actions include improving the facility permitting process, the program registration process, and the availability of information online, all discussed in subsequent chapters.
- 2.2 **Implement and monitor consistent facility cleaning and maintenance standards at all community recreation facilities.** This work will include identifying gaps in maintenance service, developing benchmarks for cleaning standards, and implementing citywide standards for cleaning.
- 2.3 **Advance identified State of Good Repair facilities projects.** Over the next five years, Parks, Forestry and Recreation is merging amenity, work-order and State of Good Repair databases to improve efficiency, accuracy and responsiveness in addressing State of Good Repair issues.

## Conclusion

These directions, and their associated actions, will work together to improve the quality and consistency of recreation programs and services across the City. Stronger systems of measurement and reporting will support efforts to enhance the consistency of the customer experience in using recreation facilities and participating in programs. A focus on getting the small things right, such as improving the cleanliness of facilities and making repairs faster, also supports a positive customer experience. These directions and actions support the broader city-wide customer service initiatives, which Parks, Forestry and Recreation will continue to advance.

Quality directions	Recommended actions
1. Improve consistency and quality of all recreation programs and services by advancing quality standards, monitoring and evaluation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>1.1 Expand quality standards to all age groups and recreation program areas, focusing on safety, health and skill development.</li><li>1.2 Develop a system to measure and report on the achievement of recreation program standards.</li></ul>
2. Strengthen the customer service experience as part of the development and implementation of a division-wide Customer Service Improvement Strategy, and by improving facility conditions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>2.1 Develop and implement a Customer Service Improvement Strategy.</li><li>2.2 Implement and monitor consistent facility cleaning and maintenance standards at all community recreation facilities.</li><li>2.3 Advance identified State of Good Repair facilities projects.</li></ul>

## 5. Capacity building

### Principle

Providing recreation programs and services of social, economic and physical benefit to all participants and that create a sense of community, belonging, and vitality.

### Definition: Capacity building

For the purposes of the Recreation Service Plan, capacity building is an approach to community development that involves communities in the planning and delivery of services.

### Introduction

Recreation has an important role to play in supporting individuals and helping to build strong communities. When we build capacity to plan and deliver recreation, individuals and groups benefit. Individuals benefit by satisfying a need for belonging, and by developing key skills such as leadership and accountability. At the same time, communities benefit from the collective efforts of those involved, ensuring that services reflect diverse needs. A sense of belonging and shared responsibility motivates community members and organizations to work together.

The 2013–2017 Recreation Service Plan seeks to improve access and increase participation in recreation in Toronto’s communities. In order to do this, Parks, Forestry and Recreation must work with residents, organizations who provide recreation, and other partners. The long-term vision is for all City services and agencies, along with school boards, colleges and universities, non-profit agencies and commercial providers to share information and work together to ensure all residents can access quality recreation opportunities.

Parks, Forestry and Recreation has set a number of directions for increasing engagement and capacity building in every community. This section lays out those objectives, shows how Parks, Forestry and Recreation is working to meet them, and makes recommendations for improving on work that is already being done. The directions respond to what we heard from the public and stakeholders.

### What we heard on capacity building

During the public consultation process, the top three themes that emerged relating to capacity building were volunteering, community development, and the need to enhance partnerships.

Toronto residents and stakeholders were interested in enhancing the way that the City partners with other recreation providers. They saw partnerships as key to expanding local capacity. They said sharing facilities and resources is needed to provide relevant, responsive and accessible programs. For stakeholders and the public, partnerships also meant working better with Toronto’s school boards, non-profit, and commercial providers in the service sector. Respondents felt this was a way to make sure everyone could participate in recreation programs.

Volunteering was one of the strongest themes in the consultation. Stakeholders and members of the public were keen to see improvements in the City’s approach to engaging, orienting, supporting, and recognizing volunteers. They

saw opportunities to volunteer as especially important for the growing seniors population, and as a way to prepare youth for employment.

Many believe public recreation services and facilities are vital to their communities, and wanted to see facilities used to their full capacity, including underused spaces such as multipurpose rooms and lobbies. They indicated that recreation helped link them to other services such as child care, health care, civic information, food security, and newcomer settlement.

Residents and stakeholders widely agree on the link between recreation and community: developing connections with fellow residents around recreation helps foster a sense of pride and belonging. They saw it as the City's responsibility to encourage participation in community by organizing and supporting community events and programs.

Based on the feedback from the public and stakeholders, and on relevant research data, Parks, Forestry and Recreation developed these directions.

#### **Future directions: Capacity building**

3. Maximize the use of recreation facilities as core community assets.
4. Enhance engagement and partnerships with local residents, other recreation providers, and schools to enable coordinated recreation service planning in Toronto and address service gaps and overlaps.
5. Increase and simplify opportunities to volunteer.

### **3. Maximize the use of recreation facilities as core community assets**

Recreation centres are natural gathering places that are important for community building. Many community organizations use community centre space to provide programs and services. In many neighbourhoods, the recreation centre is the only community-oriented facility, and the only place to access municipal services.

In addition to other groups using recreation facilities to deliver services, residents also come to community centres with a variety of needs: employment, child care, housing, and health. While Community Recreation does not deliver those services, recreation staff regularly refer and connect residents to a wide range of City and community services and agencies. In this way, recreation centres act as a bridge to a wide variety of community services.

“By providing social, recreational and fitness programs, you are encouraging people to participate in their community. [My] Centre allowed me to make new friends, help my community and build my self-esteem.”

– Survey respondent



I love the fact that [the] community centre is so vital to our neighbourhood.

– Survey respondent

Having a Community Centre brings people from all walks of life together. Many people I know don't even know their neighbour's name! So having a community centre unites everyone together.

– Survey respondent

Parks, Forestry and Recreation recognizes the need to make recreation centres as welcoming as possible, so that residents feel comfortable in a safe and enjoyable environment. This will ensure that residents continue to use these vital community assets. Parks, Forestry and Recreation is developing a plan to improve the quality and consistency of information that is available at recreation facilities.

**Table 10: Hours of indoor and outdoor permits issued by facility type (2011)**

Multipurpose room rentals and general indoor	850,665
Tennis, basketball and other sport courts	770,458
Parks, diamonds, fields and greens	431,803
Ice surfaces	98,773
Gymnasiums	38,910
Pools	21,151
Kitchens	12,109

**Table 11: Top five permits issued by activity type (2011)**

General rentals	21%
Tennis	19%
Soccer	10%
Hockey	10%
Softball and Slo-Pitch	6%

In 2011, over 15,000 permit groups delivered programming using City recreation facilities, both indoors and outdoors. This includes everything from one-time events such as birthdays, to seasonal permits for other providers, and to ongoing permits like for tennis clubs. Their inclusion in the service mix extends Parks, Forestry and Recreation's ability to provide services that recognize local diversity.

Overall, permit groups are satisfied with their permits. In 2008, Parks, Forestry and Recreation conducted a phone survey of permit groups that received 340 responses. Some 93 per cent of respondents were either satisfied or very satisfied with the quality of their permitting experience. In addition, over 97 per cent of respondents said they would obtain another permit for the location they used, and over 99 per cent said they would recommend the location to others.

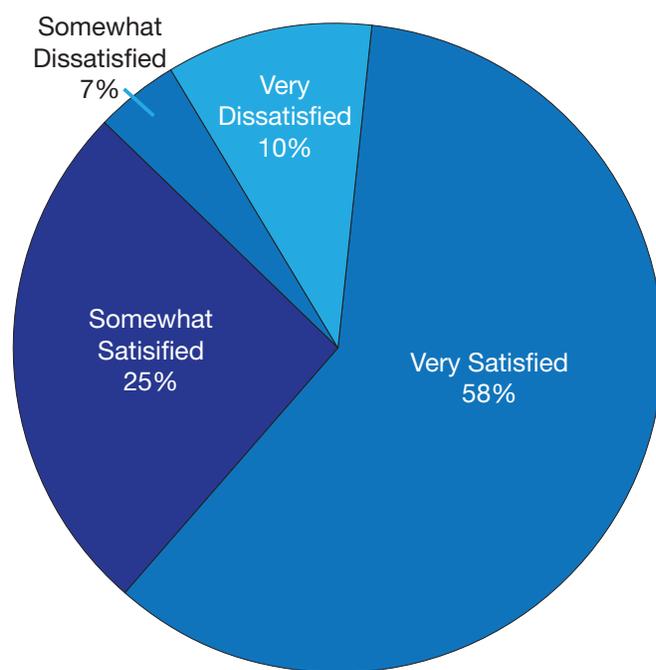
The Permit Allocation Policy provides guidelines for decision-making when demand for permits at Parks, Forestry and Recreation facilities exceeds the available space. Likewise, the Ice Allocation Policy ensures equitable distribution of prime time ice at City rinks.

Parks, Forestry and Recreation partners with community organizations to facilitate new recreation opportunities and to build on existing programs. Organizations that meet certain partnership criteria are eligible to have their permit fees waived for the use of multipurpose rooms, gyms, kitchens and pools. Through this process, Parks, Forestry and Recreation is able to work with

community partners to expand on existing program offerings. This also allows Parks, Forestry and Recreation to maximize facility use. In 2011, there were 11,700 partnership permits issued. Permit partnerships are an effective way of increasing participation in recreation by providing new recreation opportunities and addressing gaps in service.

Language barriers can make the permitting process difficult, as information is only available in English. In consultations, both residents and community centre staff stressed the importance of making multilingual materials widely available. Currently, permit applications are available online, but the process must be completed in person or by mail. Respondents to the Recreation Service Plan survey who said they had completed a permit application were, overall, satisfied with the process. However, there is room for improvement, as 17 per cent were dissatisfied.

**Figure 12: Survey question: “How satisfied were you with the permit application process?”**



Permit application processes vary depending on the district and facility. For example, all ice surfaces and sport field permits are issued through the district Customer Service offices. The full-time recreation staff at each recreation facility handle gymnasium, multipurpose room and kitchen bookings. Swimming pool permit processes vary by district. For example, in Scarborough, the division’s Customer Service unit handles all the permits, whereas in the other districts, full-time staff at the permitted location manage the process. Moreover, permit records are administered facility-by-facility. Residents may phone to determine availability and cost, but must book and finalize the permit in person or by mail. This method of permit administration provides local flexibility, but can also be hard to navigate and can lead to unused facility capacity.

## Recommended actions

- 3.1 **Improve the permitting system to enhance facility use and customer service by providing information and access to permits online.** An online permitting system will make it easier for residents and community organizations to find the space they need, as well as improve customer service. It will help ensure that recreation facilities are used if demand exists, which will increase opportunities for participation in recreation and may increase revenue.
- 3.2 **Enhance reporting standards for permits to better understand the use of facilities, and to achieve equity goals through permitting.** A more centralized permit process will improve permit management and data collection, which will provide valuable information on the use of facilities, and help achieve equity goals. For example, we know that roughly one in five permits goes to a general rental (mostly in multipurpose rooms), but we know less about how many residents were served, in what age groups, and if they are engaged in physical activity. Data improvements will translate into more informed decision-making and better access to permit information for residents and permit groups.

## 4. Enhance engagement to support local planning

Residents, other providers and key community services all play vital roles in supporting the delivery of recreation services. Ongoing engagement is essential to the planning and delivery of high quality recreation programs and services. Recreation is most successful in delivering benefits to individuals and communities when participants have a sense of ownership and investment in the programs.

“Do more outreach to newcomer communities, including providing space for volunteer groups or somehow allowing volunteers to run their own recreational programs, like Asian folk singing groups.

– Survey respondent

Parks, Forestry and Recreation engages communities in several ways to address the needs of residents, and to maximize the benefits of recreation. Engaging more children and youth in recreation is an essential step in the development of healthy communities. Participation in recreation contributes to improved self-esteem, self-empowerment and academic performance. It creates resiliency and has a positive effect on development and personal growth by promoting a healthy transition into adulthood.

Parks, Forestry and Recreation’s Youth Outreach Worker (YOW) program reaches out to youth and connects them to recreation services. The program supports youth to become positively engaged in their communities. It builds self-esteem, trust, and cooperation among its participants through recreation. In

addition, the program provides links to employment services and other social services that youth may need.

Youth Outreach Workers support civic engagement through Youth Advisory Committees in communities. They advise on recreation needs, and on creating youth-led opportunities within their communities. Through this involvement,

youth have the opportunity to socialize with their peers in a positive, youth-friendly environment.

Another way that Parks, Forestry and Recreation engages the public is through Community Advisory Councils. Advisory Councils provide feedback to staff on program and special event planning. Advisory councils and community groups work with recreation staff, advocate on community needs and issues, and contribute to a sense of community ownership. They also enhance programming by providing input and suggestions, directly assisting with program operation, and fundraising to enhance what the City already offers.

Not all community centres have advisory committees, but recreation staff regularly gather resident and participant input using a variety of methods including surveys, suggestion boxes, open houses and focus groups. Parks, Forestry and Recreation is developing additional tools to support capacity building at the local level. This includes enhancing staff access to important planning information, such as neighborhood demographics and information about other community service providers. These tools will help community centre staff better match services with needs and find ways to fill gaps in service delivery. These tools will also help centre staff engage their communities.

The Toronto recreation service sector is made up of multiple service providers. The City is a direct provider, and also facilitates recreation through many partnerships with other providers. Some of these joint recreation services are coordinated at a local level, while others are citywide. The City works with other providers to gather their input on our services, and to share in sector level service planning that responds to emergent needs.

Both the Toronto District School Board and the Toronto Catholic District School Boards are important partners in the delivery of many recreation programs and services. Parks, Forestry and Recreation leases many school facilities, which furthers the capacity to provide programs. Schools provide recreational opportunities through the use of gymnasiums and pools, and through after-school activities, through Parks, Forestry and Recreation opportunities, and through other providers. In addition, schools are an important avenue in helping to promote Parks, Forestry and Recreation programs. A shared strategy that helps to increase recreation participation, capitalize on opportunities, share resources, and enhance communication would be beneficial.

As part of a commitment to community capacity building, Parks, Forestry and Recreation also works with City divisions and external partners to address local gaps or overlaps in service. One example is Parks, Forestry and Recreation's participation in the Neighborhood Action Partnerships in priority neighbourhoods. Neighbourhood Action is an innovative



## Advisory and community groups by the numbers

- 30+ active advisory committees
- 200+ community groups that advise recreation centre staff on program and community development

### Toronto Sport Leadership Program

Partnerships help Parks, Forestry and Recreation go over and above what we accomplish through our youth outreach and programs. In partnership with the school boards, United Way, YMCA and funders such as Toronto Community Foundation, Canadian Tire Jumpstart Foundation and the Ontario Trillium Foundation, Parks, Forestry and Recreation has helped youth stream into coaching, instructor and leadership positions. Since 2004, 800 youth have graduated from the Toronto Sport Leadership Program. They are employed in programs such as skating, skiing, tennis, lifesaving, wading pool, swim instructor, basketball, soccer, Adapted and Integrated, fitness, and aquafit. In its eighth year, new partners are coming on board to help the program and youth grow.

## **Toronto Food Strategy and Parks, Forestry and Recreation**

Community gardens, kitchens and events are important elements in the development of a healthy, accessible food system.

Parks, Forestry and Recreation supports Public Health's Toronto Food Strategy by teaching food skills in communities. Recreation staff work to program kitchens, support special events, and facilitate community gardens. In 2011, Parks, Forestry and Recreation offered 350 food-based programs at 51 community centres across the city.

At community centres across this city, recreation staff integrate community garden activities with other recreation activities such as cooking, or youth and seniors programs. They also facilitate the community experience of growing a garden collectively. As well, Parks, Forestry and Recreation's Children's Garden Program helps to ignite children's interest in gardening as an active form of leisure.

Community centre kitchens are also home to an array of activities that bring people together to learn new food skills, share favourite recipes and tips, meet new people, and prepare food for a community events.

In many cases, Parks, Forestry and Recreation provides access to space for community groups that want to run kitchen programs. For example, every Friday in the summer, Thorncliffe Park Women's Committee organizes a community market. They have been using the Jenner Jean-Marie Community Centre kitchen each week to prepare food to sell at the market, offsetting the costs of their programs.

initiative to build stronger, safer, healthier neighbourhoods in underserved communities by bringing together residents, governments, community agencies and businesses.

Similarly, the City is developing a coordinated approach to improving the quality of out-of-school programming through the Middle Childhood Strategy, led by Children's Services and Parks, Forestry and Recreation. The Middle Years Strategy will guide integrated system planning, providing a foundation for future cross-sector partnerships that will enhance recreation services citywide.

## **Recommended actions**

- 4.1 Support the expanded use of community engagement** at recreation facilities across the City to gather input, collaboratively plan programs and promote community development. This would include advisory councils, outreach, and survey tools. It will also involve developing strong relationships with other divisions and City agencies to address gaps and overlaps in service delivery.
- 4.2 Develop local recreation plans with residents and local stakeholders that respond to community needs.** This will include enhancing relationships with community service providers, other recreation providers and schools. The plans will be built on information and advice gathered from the public and stakeholders, as well as information about local demographics and service delivery data.

## 5. Increase and simplify opportunities to volunteer

Many see volunteering as the highest form of recreation. It is an active way to invest in one's community. Volunteers increase the capacity of Parks, Forestry and Recreation to deliver recreation programs and services. Volunteers are involved in a variety of capacities, including assisting with programs and special events; participating in advisory groups and Youth Committees; helping out at Welcome or Information desks; or engaging in promotion and fundraising activities.

Parks, Forestry and Recreation recognizes the need to enhance and increase volunteerism in order to extend the benefits of recreation to more residents. This is true for both special events like the 2012 Ontario Summer Games and the upcoming 2015 PanParapan American games, as well as through regular recreation programming. In 2008, Parks, Forestry and Recreation implemented a Volunteer Manual to provide practical guidance, resources, and tools for staff and volunteers. Parks, Forestry and Recreation is currently exploring ways to create an online database to track volunteerism and donations in conjunction with other City divisions. An enhanced approach to volunteerism will include coordinated recruitment, training, placement, monitoring and recognition.

### Recommended actions

#### 5.1 **Develop a centralized volunteer management system**

to maintain information on volunteer opportunities, and enhance the ability of recreation staff to connect volunteers with positive opportunities. This system would support the retention of volunteers through recognition opportunities, as well as measuring their impact.

#### 5.2 **Leverage the volunteer engagement efforts of the 2012 Ontario Summer Games and the 2015 PanParapan American Games**

to provide a legacy of volunteer supports to community recreation in Toronto. Continuing to engage some of the estimated 20,000 volunteers that are required to deliver the Games once they are finished will provide a significant boost to volunteerism in Parks, Forestry and Recreation.

### Definition of a volunteer

A person who, without financial compensation, contributes time and service to assist Parks, Forestry and Recreation. City volunteers do not undertake any function or activities that are performed by City employees. Volunteers do not replace, displace or substitute for staff, and are always supervised by a City employee.

### # Volunteers by the numbers

- 5,500 Torontonians volunteer at recreation centres
- Over 1200 volunteers took part in the Ontario Summer Games
- 20,000 volunteers will be needed to deliver the 2015 PanParapan American Games

## Conclusion

Capacity building is about making the best use of City resources to maximize the opportunities, as well as the social, economic, and physical benefits of community recreation. Engaging residents in volunteer opportunities or in providing input and advice in planning helps create better outcomes and a sense of belonging. Making the best use of facilities in the community recreation system, and for the benefit of the community, means that more people will be more active, supporting healthy communities and healthier residents.

Capacity building directions	Recommended actions
3. Maximize the use of recreation facilities as core community assets.	<p>3.1 Improve the permitting system to enhance facility use and customer service by providing information and access to permits online.</p> <p>3.2 Enhance reporting standards for permits to better understand the use of facilities, and to achieve equity goals through permitting.</p>
4. Enhance engagement and partnerships with local residents, other recreation providers, and schools to enable coordinated recreation service planning in Toronto and address service gaps and overlaps.	<p>4.1 Support the expanded use of community engagement.</p> <p>4.2 Develop local recreation plans with residents and local stakeholders that respond to community needs.</p>
5. Increase and simplify opportunities to volunteer.	<p>5.1 Develop a centralized volunteer management system.</p> <p>5.2 Leverage the volunteer engagement efforts of the 2012 Ontario Summer Games and the 2015 PanParapan American Games.</p>

## 6. Inclusion

### Principle

Ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to access and participate in programs and services that are planned, delivered, and managed in a way that recognizes diversity and encourages participation of marginalized and racialized people and groups.

### Introduction

Recreation has an important role to play in supporting individuals and helping to build strong communities. When we build capacity to plan and deliver recreation, individuals and groups benefit. Individuals benefit by satisfying a need for belonging, and by developing key skills such as leadership and accountability. At the same time, communities benefit from the collective efforts of those involved, ensuring that services reflect diverse needs. A sense of belonging and shared responsibility motivates community members and organizations to work together.

### What we heard on inclusion

Comments from participants in the consultation process indicate that Parks, Forestry and Recreation should focus on communications and outreach to improve access to recreation, especially for those not currently using City programs. Consultation findings also point to the need for continued accommodation of people with special needs and disabilities.

Residents and stakeholders reported a general lack of information on recreation programs, and a lack of program promotion. There was a particular interest in increasing awareness of community centres, the programs offered, registration opportunities, and permitting information. Some comments indicated that expanding promotions was a key component to attracting residents not currently served by programs and services, especially newcomers. It was frequently mentioned that promotion and communications should be proactive and multilingual to increase accessibility for Torontonians facing language barriers. Many residents praised the FUN Guide, but wanted readability and accessibility improved in upcoming editions.

Residents and stakeholders approved of the outreach efforts of Parks, Forestry and Recreation, but also indicated that it was not sufficient to reach all the communities in need of services. Respondents said efforts to reach out to youth, newcomers, and seniors should be a priority. Many wanted to see simplified processes, especially when registering for programs, accessing permits, and applying for the Welcome Policy.

### Definition of inclusion

For the purposes of the Recreation Service Plan, inclusion refers to actions taken to overcome non-financial barriers and increase the involvement and participation of others.

[These programs] are the backbone of the city and our communities, and they are not frills or extras for a lot of people. These programs are what makes communities livable, and provide outlets for young people to spend time productively.

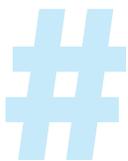
– Survey respondent

Respondents wanted to see enhanced services for people with a disability, regardless of their age, interest or type of disability. This was the case for both facilities and programs offered. Participants also noted that the type of programming offered was not always reflective of the local community. They identified a need for intergenerational programs and non-traditional sports, such as cricket.

#### **Future directions: Inclusion**

6. Increase awareness among residents of the City's recreation services by developing a comprehensive outreach and communications strategy.
7. Improve access for underserved residents, including people with a disability.

## **6. Develop a comprehensive outreach and communications strategy**



### **FUN Guide by the numbers**

- 2 FUN Guides are published each year
- 100,000+ copies for each citywide distribution
- 275 locations receive the FUN Guide including community centres, libraries and other service providers
- 338,000 visits to the online FUN Guide in 2011

Every year, Parks, Forestry and Recreation reaches more residents. Since 1999, the FUN Guide has been the main marketing tool for Parks, Forestry and Recreation programs and services. The Guide is distributed in print and is available online in a format that is accessible to the visually impaired.

Parks, Forestry and Recreation recognizes the need to improve communications with the public and stakeholders as a way to encourage more participation in recreation and physical activity. This includes outreach to schools, faith-based organizations and settlement agencies regarding the benefits and opportunities available through community recreation.

Residents who do not speak English can currently phone 311 to speak with an operator who can access interpreters in 150 languages. Creating multi-lingual promotional materials and outreach through ethnic media will be considered as part of the communications strategy. There is also a need to better utilize social media as a way to communicate with residents, and with youth in particular.

Parks, Forestry and Recreation provides over 63,000 registered programs annually. These programs are very popular and often have waiting lists. Registrations have increased steadily over time.

There are four ways that Toronto residents can register for recreation programs: online, in-person at civic centres and community recreation centres, using the automated touch-tone phone, and over the phone by talking to a customer service representative. Registration begins on a different day for each of Toronto's four districts to avoid overloading the system. Instructions for registration are listed in the FUN Guide and online.

**Table 12: Registration method for Parks, Forestry and Recreation registered programs (2011-2012)**

Registration method	All registrations	Welcome Policy registrants	For seniors (60+) programs
Internet	47%	43%	17%
In-person at a recreation centre or civic centre	35%	36%	66%
Telephone operator-assisted	11%	14%	10%
Automated telephone (TTR)	8%	7%	7%

Online registration is the most popular method of enrollment. Nearly half of all registrations are made online. A satisfaction survey for each registration method reveals that registrants are generally satisfied with the methods they used. However, people were at least 20 per cent more likely to be satisfied with in-person registrations than with other methods. Residents are generally satisfied with online program enrollment, but there is still work to be done to increase registrant satisfaction. Welcome Policy recipients use similar registration methods, though with slightly less use of the automated options (phone and internet) and slightly more use of in-person and over the phone options. Seniors, on the other hand, tend to use in-person services much more, and the internet much less for their registrations.

Whatever registration procedure they choose, Torontonians are quick to enroll in recreation programs. Most registrations happen on the first four available registration days after the release of each FUN Guide. There has been a steady increase in the number of participants registering over the internet, and during this first hour of registration, internet and automated telephone methods account for almost all of the registrations. As a result, Parks, Forestry and Recreation needs to ensure that online and automated methods are easy to understand and navigate for all residents.

Despite the growing popularity of the automated registration options, in-person registration options remain important for seniors and some low-income residents.

A recreation website [should be] searchable by location, sport, etc. For example I enter my postal code and preferred activity and it brings up a map highlighting locations near me and provides me with program times, contact info and cost.

– Survey respondent

Parks and Recreation personnel should attend a beginning of the school year assembly at every elementary school to tell the students about their local recreation services, what's offered, when registration is and who can be contacted. This is in addition to a flyer indicating the same that can be sent home with the students.

– Survey respondent

## # Registration by the numbers

- 47 per cent of registrations are made online
- 60 per cent of registrations happen on the first four days of registration
- 7am-8am on the first registration day is when the registration hits its peak
- 90% are by internet and automated telephone in the first hour of registration for each district

The registration process can be quite daunting for families who are new to Toronto and perhaps have English as a second language. Parks and Recreation should have programs as part of the newcomer orientation to encourage that social opportunity.

– Survey respondent

## Recommended actions

- 6.1 **Improve city-wide and local promotion of programs and services by implementing a comprehensive communications strategy** to increase public awareness, especially in hard-to-reach communities. This will include enhancements to the FUN Guide and website, as well as the use of social media to reach youth, and other innovative ways of reaching under-served populations, where appropriate. These steps will help reach a diverse audience that is reflective of the communities across Toronto.
- 6.2 **Continue to offer registration and customer service in a variety of ways.** This will ensure that residents can access recreation programs using the mode of registration they prefer, especially seniors and low-income residents.
- 6.3 **Improve registration and Welcome Policy application processes to make it easier for everyone to register for programs** and to improve the customer experience. This will increase the number of residents who participate in programs by reducing the non-financial barriers to participation.

## 7. Enhance and improve access for underserved residents

To increase access among residents facing significant barriers to recreation, Parks, Forestry and Recreation works with other City divisions and community agencies. Underserved residents may include newcomers, citizens in high-needs communities and racialized populations. Examples of interdivisional collaboration that have enhanced access to recreation among residents facing barriers include Investing in Families and the Toronto Newcomer Initiative.

The Investing in Families (IIF) program is an innovative partnership with Toronto Employment and Social Services, Toronto Public Health and Parks, Forestry and Recreation. It uses a case-based approach to help mostly single-parent families on social assistance. Through IIF, Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff work with families to remove their barriers to participation through the provision of subsidies for programs, equipment and transportation. In 2012, the Investing in Families program received a Toronto City Manager's Award for achieving a high and measurable standard of excellence.



### Toronto Newcomer Initiative by the numbers

- 10 of 18 settlement workers were in Parks, Forestry and Recreation facilities working directly with newcomers
- 172 newcomer-focused recreation programs in 20 facilities
- 5000 estimated participants

Parks, Forestry and Recreation played a central role in the City of Toronto Newcomers Initiative, a federally funded pilot project that ran in 2011. Newcomer-focused programs were developed in communities to attract residents who might not otherwise participate. Program participants were also offered help in registering for the Welcome Policy and with applying for employment opportunities. Parks, Forestry and Recreation's involvement in the Newcomer Initiative enhanced partnerships with local newcomer service agencies, which has resulted in greater opportunities to serve newcomers through recreation centres. A good example is the two automated information kiosks for newcomers that are now located at Wellesley and Driftwood Community Centres. They were provided by the Ontario Council for Agencies Serving Immigrants. The Newcomer Initiative pilot is now finished and is informing the development of the Toronto Newcomer Strategy.

In the Recreation Service Plan survey, Parks, Forestry and Recreation asked residents if recreation centres were welcoming to newcomers, accommodating to those with a language barrier, and meeting the culturally-diverse needs of Torontonians. A majority of respondents agreed; however some people from racialized backgrounds were less satisfied. These results tell us that the foundation is in place, but that we cannot lose sight of active inclusion as a principle of service.

Parks Forestry and Recreation recognizes that the lack of recreational access for the Aboriginal community is a gap. Focused discussions with the Aboriginal community and community organizations on how to build bridges and remove barriers to participation is needed.

The City of Toronto strives to ensure that all residents can participate in public recreation programs regardless of ability, and offers inclusive programming for people with disabilities. Parks, Forestry and Recreation has dedicated staff, equipment, and facilities to meet the needs of people with a disability. The demand for accessible services continues to increase.

According to an estimate from the 2010 Canadian Community Health Survey, approximately 20 per cent of Torontonians, or 515,000 people, identify themselves as having a disability that affects their ability to participate in recreation. Not all participants with a disability identify themselves as such when using recreation services, and not everyone who has a disability desires or requires special attention. This makes it difficult to capture the real number of people Parks, Forestry and Recreation serves who have a disability. Similarly, only a portion of the population who self-identified in the survey take part in Parks, Forestry and Recreation's programs and services.

### **Newcomer Learn-to-Skate Partnership**

In the winter of 2012, Parks, Forestry and Recreation partnered with the Royal Bank of Canada and various schools to offer a free learn-to-skate program for children living in Toronto's newcomer communities. The diverse partners worked to cover the costs of ice-time, skating equipment and instructors to reduce barriers to participation. At the end of the program, 130 students accessed quality skill-building recreation.

“It is very challenging to get information and know what is available as a newcomer. I needed someone to introduce me. It was easier after I knew my way around. I imagine it would be even more challenging if I didn't speak English.

– Survey respondent

I want to see diverse images because that tells me I will be accepted and accommodated in the programs. Diverse staff also help to make the programs more accessible to diverse residents.

– Survey respondent

## Services for people with a disability

**Adapted & Integrated services** are offered City-wide, and are led by specially trained staff. Adapted programs are designed for people with disabilities. Integrated services involve the inclusion of people with disabilities into standard programming. The majority of demand for service is for children and youth, though there is increasing demand for pre-school and adult programming.

**A multi-sensory environment** is available for people with cognitive disabilities. The Snoezelen Room, in the Scarborough District, is a unique facility that allows individuals to benefit from gentle stimulation of the primary senses: sight, touch, hearing and smell.

**Warm water pools** have temperatures of 88 degrees Fahrenheit and are available in each district. They are used to accommodate the needs of those with muscular, circulatory, or neurological impairments who require warmer temperatures.

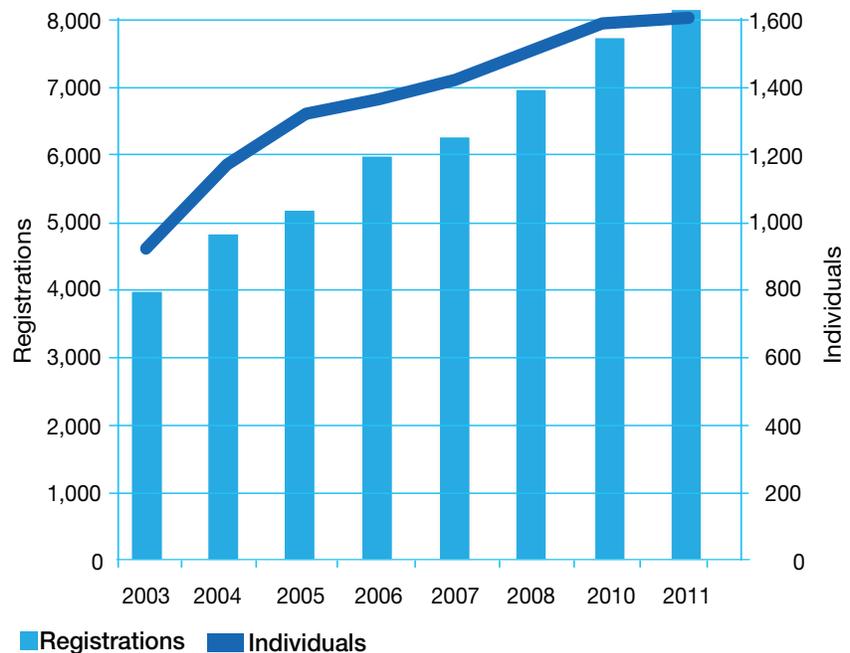
**Communications** – The section of the FUN Guide with A&I services is printed with large fonts to reduce barriers for people with visual impairment. Text telephone (TTY) service is also available for registration and other processes.

In recreation, as with other services, people with a disability are entitled to the same level of access as all residents. The Province of Ontario is expanding accessibility standards through the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (2005 AODA)* in the following five areas: Customer Service, Employment, Information and Communication, Transportation, and the Built Environment.

Parks, Forestry and Recreation is upgrading facilities to make them more accessible, training part- and full-time staff, and enhancing communication services, such as an accessible website.

In 2011, there were 430 courses offered for people with a disability including adapted aquatics, summer camps, and social clubs. Programs are well used, with over 1,400 individuals attending these programs in 2011. Parks, Forestry and Recreation also supports the participation of people with a disability in general recreation programs. Parks, Forestry and Recreation provides integration workers to accommodate individuals with a disability. One staff member can provide support to between one and three people, depending on participants' needs.

**Figure 13: Individual and registration trends in Adapted and Integrated programs 2003-2011**



Providing accessible and adapted services for people with disabilities requires trained staff and expertise. Parks Forestry and Recreation provides training in the areas of behaviour management, personal care, crisis management, empathy, and various types of non-verbal communication. Staff also receive in-depth training on human rights and customer service, as well as on specific disabilities and emergency response.

Parks, Forestry and Recreation also has a Disabilities Steering Committee to advise on the provision of accessible recreation services.

Parks, Forestry and Recreation provides equipment to enable the delivery of programs for people with a disability. Sledges are used for skating and hockey. Beach wheelchairs are used for access to the City's beaches. Water-chairs are used to increase access at pools with ramps, and chair lifts are used to lift people into pools without a ramp. This equipment needs to be maintained and replaced on an ongoing basis.

The City has improved facilities, making them more wheelchair accessible, and is working to expand accessibility by providing options for hearing and visually impaired users. Parks, Forestry and Recreation facilities are in different phases of conversion to full accessibility. Of City-owned facilities, 24 per cent are physically accessible, 25 per cent of locations are considered partially accessible and 51 per cent are not accessible. Physical accessibility refers mostly to accessibility for people in wheelchairs. Future facility audits will include measures for other disabilities, such as visual and cognitive. The *AODA* requires full accessibility by 2025. Parks, Forestry and Recreation will need to consider this in future capital budget planning budgets.

## Recommended actions

- 7.1 **Improve outreach to underserved residents**, including youth, newcomers, seniors, and people with a disability. This would build on existing strategies and programs, such as youth outreach (YOWs), and other inter-divisional projects such as Investing in Families and the Toronto Newcomer Strategy.
- 7.2 **Create tools and strategies as part of local planning to support work with diverse and newcomer populations** with varying recreational needs. This important work will also be supported corporately through the Equity, Diversity and Human Rights division of the City Manager's Office.
- 7.3 **Strengthen partnerships with service agencies and organizations that work with underserved populations** to promote City recreation programs. Continue to work with these organizations to address gaps and overlaps in service.
- 7.4 **Ensure continued compliance with disability legislation**, including continuing to update facilities to reduce barriers. Develop indicators to assess facility, equipment and service accessibility.

## Conclusion

This chapter outlined strategies for reducing or eliminating non-financial barriers to participating in recreation programs. These strategies will help everyone by providing better public information about programs, improving the registration system, and making facilities more accessible. Making recreation programs and services more inclusive will be of particular benefit in increasing participation among under-served segments of the City's population, such as youth, newcomers, and people with disabilities.

Inclusion directions	Recommended actions
6. Increase awareness among residents of the City's recreation services by developing a comprehensive outreach and communications strategy.	6.1 Improve city-wide and local promotion of programs and services by implementing a comprehensive communications strategy.
	6.2 Continue to offer registration and customer service in a variety of ways.
	6.3 Improve registration and Welcome Policy application processes to make it easier for everyone to register for programs.
7. Improve access for underserved residents, including people with a disability.	7.1 Improve outreach to underserved residents.
	7.2 Create tools and strategies as part of local planning to support work with diverse and newcomer populations.
	7.3 Strengthen partnerships with service agencies and organizations that work with underserved populations.
	7.4 Ensure continued compliance with disability legislation.

# 7. Equitable access

## Principle

Providing equitable recreation access on a geographic and demographic basis for all residents of Toronto.

## Introduction

This chapter will focus on how Parks, Forestry and Recreation will work to reduce the demographic, geographic, and cost barriers to recreation.

Parks, Forestry and Recreation strives to serve all Toronto residents, regardless of where they live or their ability to pay, because an increase in participation in recreation and physical activity has benefits for the city as a whole.

## What we heard on equitable access

In the consultation process, the top three barriers to accessing recreation were identified as insufficient program space, the cost of programming, and distance to recreation opportunities.

Thirty-one per cent of respondents to the Recreation Service Plan survey who did not participate in City programs cited cost as the reason, more than any other factor. Respondents with the lowest incomes were more likely to identify cost as a barrier to participation. Over 90 per cent of all respondents support subsidy programs as a means to provide access for low-income Torontonians.

In addition to cost barriers, respondents said that demand for desirable programs was exceeding capacity, resulting in waiting lists. They said that not only were programs full, but that there was inconsistent programming from one facility to the next. These inconsistencies in programming, along with a lack of recreation facilities in many neighbourhoods, were perceived as significant barriers to participation. Many respondents suggested that Parks, Forestry and Recreation should provide the same basic programs in every community centre, at convenient times, in order to increase participation.

## Definition of equitable access:

For the purposes of the Recreation Service Plan, equitable access means that all Toronto residents should be able to participate in recreation, regardless of their age, location, financial or other barriers.

## Future directions: Equitable access

8. Develop a service planning system that plans for age groups and recreation program types at both the city-wide and local scales.
9. Enhance the consistency and equity of service delivery across the city.
10. Refocus subsidy investments to reduce barriers and increase participation in recreation.
11. Increase participation in recreation by developing two city-wide programs for children and youth

## 8. Develop a service planning system



As the Toronto population has grown over the last decade, Parks, Forestry and Recreation has experienced an increase in demand for programs and services. The number of people on waiting lists has increased by an average of 3.5 per cent per year between 2002 and 2011.

Over the next five years, child and youth populations will remain stable, but as baby-boomers age, the population of seniors will rise. The overall population will also rise over the next five years. Most of Parks, Forestry and Recreation's programs are designed for certain age categories. The majority of program hours are for children and youth. Children are more likely to participate in registered programs, while youth and adults participate through drop-in programs such as sports, fitness and aquatics, which are more flexible and can better accommodate busy schedules.

Children, youth, and seniors are not as consistently well-served in all areas of the city by private, commercial recreation providers. These age groups have limited incomes and face transportation barriers to participation. Parks, Forestry and Recreation delivers programs and services to maximize the participation of all groups, such as offering adult services primarily through drop-ins to accommodate busy schedules.

Over 154,000 Torontonians registered for programs in 2011, most of them children and youth. Table 13 compares the proportion of participants to their share of the population in four age categories. It indicates that children make up almost two-thirds of registrants in Parks, Forestry and Recreation's programs.

**Table 13: Comparing the age of registrants to Toronto's population (2011)**

Age Category	Share of registrants	Share of population	Difference
Children 0-14	62.1%	15.4%	+46.7%
Youth 15-24	14.9%	12.8%	+2.1%
Adults 25-59	16.4%	57.4%	-41.0%
Seniors 60+	6.7%	14.4%	-7.7%

In 2010-2011, Parks, Forestry and Recreation conducted a survey of 15,000 participants in 1,000 drop-in programs. The survey found that people of all ages use drop-ins. Adults use drop-ins the most, but when put in context of their share of the total population, drop-in programs are also well used by seniors, youth, and children. Overall, adults and seniors are served well through drop-ins, whereas children are more likely to participate in registered programs. Youth use both types of programming.

**Table 14: Comparing the age of drop-in participants to Toronto's population (2011)**

Age Category	Share of drop-in visits	Share of population	Difference
Children 0-14	19.8%	15.4%	+4.4%
Youth 15-24	19.5%	12.8%	+6.7%
Adults 25-59	34.7%	57.4%	-22.7%
Seniors 60+	25.9%	14.4%	+11.5%

Toronto's seniors population is expected to increase strongly in the coming years. Between 2011 and 2031, the City projects a one-third increase among people 65 years of age and older. Parks, Forestry and Recreation focuses on seniors through senior-specific programs, and to increase access, provides a 50 per cent fee discount for seniors on registration for adult programs. In addition, seniors use many permits for community recreation space, and organize programs for themselves.

Parks, Forestry and Recreation is working with other divisions on the development of a Seniors Strategy to ensure opportunities exist across the city for seniors to stay active. This is especially important for low-income and socially isolated seniors.

Parks, Forestry and Recreation will work to create local programming that is more responsive to changing demographics. In order to create relevant recreation opportunities, programmers in every facility will be provided with demographic and service profiles of surrounding neighbourhoods. Among other factors, these demographic profiles will include languages spoken at home, so that culturally relevant programs can be designed, delivered and promoted.<sup>‡</sup>

Parks, Forestry and Recreation delivers recreation programs under categories such as aquatics, camps, skating, skiing, arts, and fitness and wellness. Each has requirements that guide the high quality provision that Torontonians have come to expect. In the next five years, Parks, Forestry and Recreation will develop plans for each of these program areas that correspond to the local and demographic requirements described above.

### **How Parks, Forestry and Recreation serves working age adults**

While children, youth and seniors are the primary focus of Parks, Forestry and Recreation programming, working-age adults benefit from participation in City programming. They do so mostly through drop-ins, where roughly one-third of participants are adults, such as in leisure lane swimming, weight rooms and fitness centres. Adults also make good use of City facilities through permits. Moreover, many adult sports leagues use indoor and outdoor City facilities for a wide range of activities.

<sup>‡</sup>Data from the 2011 Canada Census on spoken language will be available on October the 24th, 2012.

## Recommended actions

### 8.1 **Develop recreation plans for recreation program types and age categories.**

The 2013-2017 Recreation Service Plan will be supported by more detailed plans that support service delivery by program area, such as aquatics or sports. It will also be supported through program plans by age category, such as children and seniors. Together, these planning lenses will enable coordination with other service delivery systems, such as child care, education and sports. These plans will also support the local planning of recreation services.

### 8.2 **Provide supports to recreation staff in planning, creating, and delivering innovative and well-used programs.**

In order to respond to local needs, recreation staff require planning tools, including updated demographic and participation information. This will allow them to plan and innovate to respond to changing local needs.

## 9. Enhance the consistency and equity of service delivery across the city

It is probably not practical to offer all programs all over the city, but certain things such as swimming lessons should be conveniently available to all low-income residents who qualify regardless of where they live.

– Survey respondent

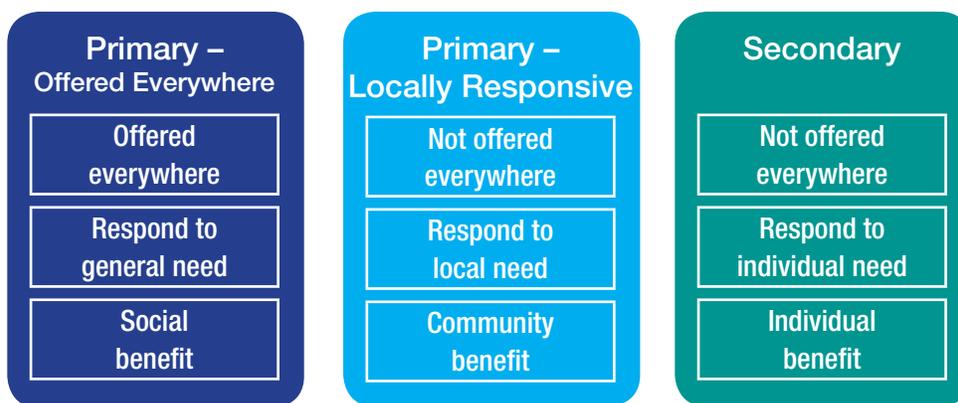
Achieving the right program mix at recreation centres was a common theme during the public consultations. Residents want to know what to expect from their local recreation facility. Stakeholders and other service providers want to know what the City's primary programs are, so that they can effectively plan their services and avoid duplication. As demand for recreation increases, and facilities reach capacity, it becomes necessary to have a method for determining what programs and services should take priority.

The 2013-2017 Recreation Service Plan recommends the use of a tool to help prioritize the delivery of primary programs. The primary program tool will help guide local and system planning for the consistent delivery of programs.

Primary programs are introductory programs that set the stage for lifelong participation in recreation. They focus on physical literacy, health, and life-skill development, and are delivered in group-based settings. This maximizes the use of community centre space. Certain primary programs will be delivered in all community centres, whereas some will respond to local needs.

Secondary programs are likely to respond to individual needs and provide individual benefits. Local planning processes will take into account the secondary programs delivered by others and programs will be considered when a similar service does not already exist. Figure 14 illustrates the recreation program categories, and Table 15 provides some examples to further demonstrate the distinction between primary and secondary programs.

**Figure 14: Community Recreation primary and secondary program categories**

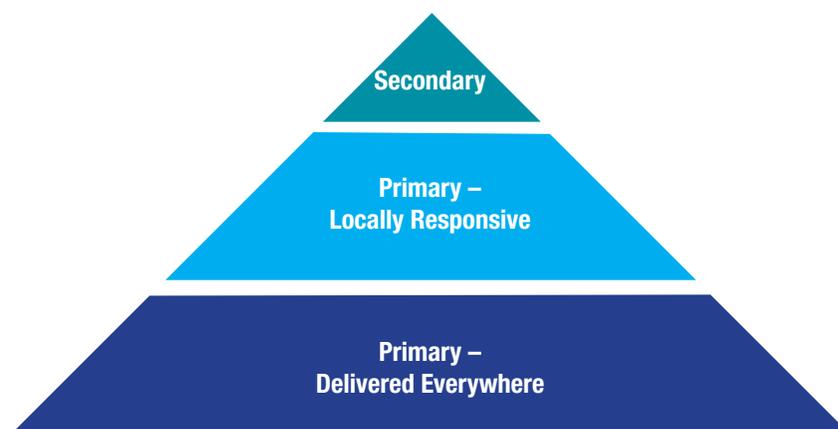


**Table 15: Examples of primary and secondary programs by program area**

Program area	Examples of primary	Examples of secondary
Swimming	Ultra levels 1-9 Public swim	Masters swim clubs Private lessons
Camps	Adventure camps Activity camps	Advanced gymnastics camps Horseback riding camps
Skating	Learn to skate Public skate	Power skating Goalie skills
Fitness and Wellness	Beginner pilates Cardio Hi/Low	Private personal training Specialized fitness programs
General Interest	Ball hockey Family games	Private guitar lessons Requires a specific facility
Seniors	Badminton Arts and crafts	Advanced clogging Advanced tap dance
Skiing and Snowboarding	Learn to ski Learn to snowboard	Freestyle snowboarding Instructor training levels

The primary program model will be used to review existing programming and will serve as a tool to address community programming needs. The model will be used to develop age-based and program-based planning. It is estimated that over 80 per cent of current Parks, Forestry and Recreation programming falls under the “primary” program category. As indicated in the pyramid model in Figure 15, this will be the foundation of the City’s programming.

**Figure 15: Community Recreation’s program model**



In addition to the challenge of delivering the right mix of programs at recreation centres, the City faces the challenge of delivering services equitably. There are two important challenges in measuring service equity by ward or other geographic measure. First, it is difficult to determine the correct level of municipal service in a service sector that has many providers. Some wards are well served by City programs, and others are better served through other providers or a combination of providers. Secondly, Parks, Forestry and Recreation lacks the data to definitively measure and report on the ability for residents to access recreation, whether directly delivered by Parks, Forestry and Recreation or by another provider.

The size, age and location of facilities also affect residents’ ability and interest in accessing recreation. Facility investment should work to maintain and increase access to recreation.

Currently facility development is driven by several factors, including upcoming special events (like the 2015 Pan/ParaPan American Games), population growth, and the lack of existing facilities. Current planning processes and growth patterns can create a challenge to the equitable provision of facilities. For example, funding from development obtained through Section 37 of the *Provincial Planning Act* may support the upgrade or construction of new local recreation facilities. However, that funding may only help meet the additional demand brought on by the new development, and not address other system-wide priorities for service improvement or enhance equitable access to recreation. There are also significant pressures to keep existing facilities in good working order. Over half of Toronto’s recreation centres are between 25 and 49 years old. A quarter of them are over 50 years old. Parks, Forestry and Recreation’s State of Good Repair backlog continues to grow year after year. In 2013 it will reach \$300 million.

Past patterns of development, transportation and recreation in various parts of the city have also contributed to the present challenges. In some neighbourhoods, recreation was primarily delivered at school facilities. Non-school recreation facilities in those same neighbourhoods were smaller, and designed to serve mostly the immediate local area. In other areas, the focus was on fewer but larger multifunction facilities that served many neighbourhoods. In these areas, residents usually travel farther to these facilities. Different expectations and capacities for service delivery over time created the diverse arrangement of facilities we have today.

Population trends and access to public transit are other important factors in facility planning. Filling the gaps in underserved areas will involve identifying the needs and priorities of communities, recreation facility trends and changing demographics.

## Recommended actions

- 9.1 **Implement the primary program categorization as a tool for planning** that will enhance the consistency of the programs provided throughout the City. Primary programs are introductory programs that set the stage for lifelong participation in recreation.
- 9.2 **Develop a measure for service equity, focusing on participation rates and residents' ability to access recreation in their community.** Potential approaches include improved tracking of drop-in and permit based usage, and a survey of resident's ability to access recreation. It is also necessary to enhance partnerships and data sharing with other service providers.
- 9.3 **Develop a 20-year Parks, Forestry and Recreation facilities plan to guide facility planning and required investments.** One of the most significant ways the City can improve access to recreation for residents is to fill geographic gaps in service delivery with new facilities. The facilities plan will prioritize investment, maintenance and repair of existing and new facilities. The plan will utilize data related to population growth, principles of equity, and the continual improvement of service to the public.

## 10. Reduce financial barriers to participation

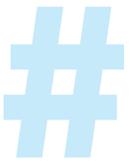
The data collected through the Recreation Service Plan consultation confirmed that cost is a barrier to participation. Welcome Policy, Priority Centres, and free drop-in programs make up Parks, Forestry and Recreation's most important subsidies. Regardless of income, the Recreation Service Plan consultations demonstrated wide support (92 per cent of respondents) for subsidy programs that improve access for low-income Torontonians. In addition, awareness of subsidy programs, like the Welcome Policy, is increasing among the Toronto population. Awareness of the program has doubled over the last ten years.

### Welcome Policy

In 1999, City Council established the Welcome Policy to provide a fee subsidy to help low-income individuals and families access Parks, Forestry and Recreation programs. To be eligible for the Welcome Policy, applicants must be City of Toronto residents and have a before tax family income of less than Statistics Canada's Low Income Cut Off (LICO). Social assistance recipients automatically qualify for Welcome Policy and can be approved by their caseworker.

### Welcome Policy objectives

1. Make recreation accessible to individuals and families:
  - a. With the greatest financial need
  - b. Regardless of where they reside
2. Enhance community development
  - a. Promote the mixing of people with different needs, cultures and incomes



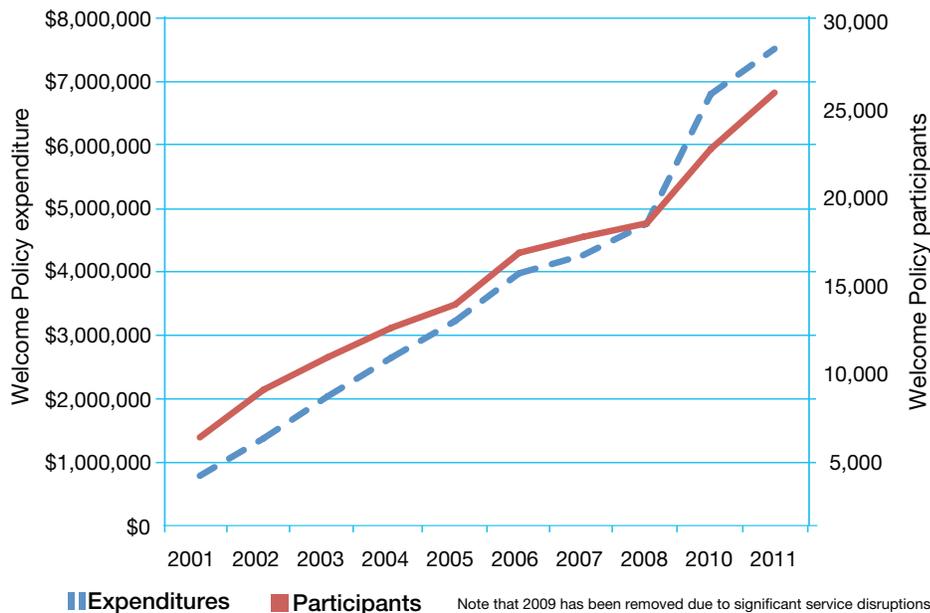
## Welcome Policy by the numbers

- 24,204 Toronto residents used the Welcome Policy in 2011
- 4 per cent of Toronto’s low-income population uses the Welcome Policy
- 7,500 more people annually are expected to use the Welcome Policy through the conversion to a dollar-based subsidy
- 1-in-5 people in Toronto know about the Welcome Policy

The Welcome Policy is widely promoted through Parks, Forestry and Recreation community centres, on the City’s website, and in the FUN Guide.

In May 2009, the application process for the Welcome Policy was transferred from Parks, Forestry and Recreation division to the City’s Toronto Employment and Social Services (TESS) division. This resulted in a more efficient and simplified application process for social assistance recipients by eliminating the administrative process of proving eligibility. TESS caseworkers promote the Welcome Policy to low-income people on social assistance, and those in search of employment. This partnership has proven to be a successful example of integrated service delivery between City divisions.

**Figure 16: Welcome Policy participation and expenditure**



Participation through the Welcome Policy has increased since its inception. Welcome Policy expenditure sits at over \$10 million annually. Demand for the subsidy is high: on average, the seasonal allocation is fully expended within three weeks of program registration.

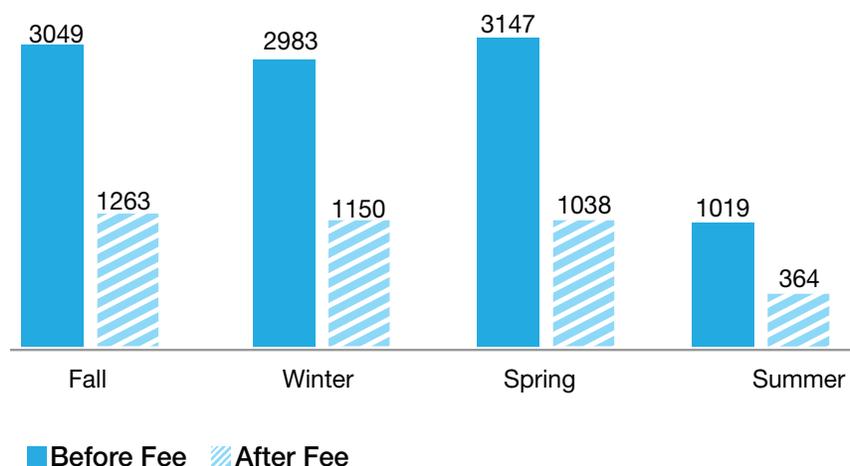
Initially the Welcome Policy provided recipients with a set number of programs per year. In September 2012, the Welcome Policy was converted to a dollar-based credit. Participants can now use these funds to register for the programs and services of their choice. Children and youth (0 to 24 years) receive \$455 annually. Adults and seniors (25 and older) receive \$212. This gives Welcome

Policy participants more options in how they can apply their subsidy to recreation programs. As a result, the subsidy is expected to reach 7,500 more people each year. Preliminary fall 2012 registration data show increases in both the number of Welcome Policy users (23 per cent) and registrations (33 per cent) over the previous year.

### Priority Centres

Priority Centres were established in 1999 as a way to increase access to recreation in neighbourhoods with high levels of low income by eliminating program fees. There are currently 22 Priority Centres approved by Toronto City Council where all programming is free of charge for children, youth and seniors. Priority Centres are an effective way to enhance access to recreation for people facing affordability barriers. The introduction of adult fees has demonstrated that fees constitute a significant barrier to adult participation in these communities.

**Figure 17: Comparing adult registrations at Priority Centres in the four seasons before and after the introduction of fees**



In the year since adult fees were introduced, there has been a 62 per cent decline in adult registrations at Priority Centres. Moreover, three quarters of the adults who registered for programs at Priority Centre before the fees were introduced have not registered for programs at any City recreation facility since the fees were introduced. Those adults who continued to use the Priority Centre's registered programs used Welcome Policy very little, overall approximately two per cent. This shows that Welcome Policy may not be a suitable substitute for free adult registered programs at Priority Centres.

### What is a "Priority Centre"?

A Priority Centre is a recreation centre where selected recreation programs and services are available at no charge in communities with a high incidence of low-income (over 30 per cent). From their establishment in 1999 until 2011, all programs and memberships were free at Priority Centres. In 2011, fees for adult programs were introduced at Priority Centres, but programs for children, youth and seniors remain free.

### Objectives

1. Reduce barriers to recreation in high needs communities by eliminating fees and reducing administrative hurdles.
2. Enhance community development through outreach and the mixing of people with different needs, cultures and incomes.
3. Provide opportunities to increase participation in local community and recreation.

### Current Priority Centres

1. Antibes Community Centre
2. Chalkfarm Community Centre
3. Dennis R. Timbrell Recreation Centre
4. Driftwood Community Centre
5. Elmbank Community Centre
6. Falstaff Community Centre
7. Harrison Pool
8. Jimmie Simpson Recreation Centre
9. John Innes Community Recreation Centre
10. Kingsview Village Community School
11. Lawrence Heights Community Centre
12. Masaryk-Cowan Community Recreation Centre
13. North Kipling Community Centre
14. Oakdale Community Centre
15. Oakridge Community Recreation Centre
16. O'Connor Community Centre
17. Regent Park North Recreation Centre
18. Regent Park South Community Recreation Centre
19. Rockcliffe Middle School
20. Scadding Court Pool
21. Secord Community Centre
22. Wellesley Community Centre

Priority Centres are meeting the intended objective of overcoming affordability barriers. Administrative barriers are also reduced as there is no need to prove income level to access programs, allowing Parks, Forestry and Recreation to focus on program delivery.

**Table 16: Comparing Priority and non-Priority Centres (2011)**

	Priority Centres	Non-Priority Centres
Local access – average distance traveled (in kilometres)	1.8	2.7
Utilization rate (per cent)	84	79
Average number of registrations per participant	2.7	2.8

There is a perception that Priority Centres are not used appropriately, and that some residents take too many courses, or that residents living outside of the neighbourhood travel great distances to access the free programs. However, a review of Priority Centre usage shows that centres are used appropriately, and in fact serve local residents well. In 2012, the average number of course registrations per individual at Priority Centres is roughly the same as at non-Priority Centres, showing that individuals do not register in a larger number of programs just because they are free. Participants generally travel less to reach Priority Centres than they do to reach other centres, which indicates that Priority Centres are serving local residents.

The original method for designating Priority Centres resulted in inequitable geographic distribution, since their placement was dependent upon the presence of appropriate facilities within qualifying census tracts. As well, the number of low-income residents has increased. This has resulted in an increase in the number of low-income census tracts (where over 30 per cent of residents are below LICO) from 67 in 1996 to 89 in 2006, the most recent report on low-income demographics.

While Priority Centres are an effective way to serve concentrated populations of low-income families, there is a need for a revised method for determining designation. This report recommends

the implementation of such a method. This report also recommends that the term “Priority Centre” be replaced with a more generic term in order to avoid the potential for stigma associated with the designation as a “Priority Centre.”

## Explanation of the new method

The revised method is intended to serve the highest number of low-income census tracts with the fewest Priority Centres. This will distribute access to free programs offered at Priority Centres equitably around the City. The new method retains some of the principles of the old method, including the use of census tracts to identify areas of the City where the need is greatest. In addition, the 30 per cent low-income trigger for the establishment of Priority Centre status is retained, both for consistency and because it is an effective threshold for identifying communities in need of support.

A key difference in the new method is the identification of a “catchment” area for a Priority Centre. The average user of an existing Priority Centre travels 1.8 km to take a program. A slightly more conservative distance of 1.5 km was used to identify recreation facilities that could serve an eligible census tract. Under the new method, one centre can serve multiple census tracts. The old method assumed centres only served the census tract it was in. The new method better reflects the travel patterns of Toronto’s recreation participants, which commonly includes going a short distance to a nearby recreation facility. The method not only identifies Priority Centres that are within low-income census tracts, but ones that are nearby as well.

Another key difference is the method for determining when a recreation centre should no longer be a Priority Centre. This approach is expected to provide stability in serving neighbourhoods where additional investment in access to recreation is required. The new method requires a significant reduction in local poverty levels before supports are removed.

By consistently reviewing Priority Centres every five years to coincide with updated income data from the most recent census, the designation of Priority Centres will remain current and be fairly applied over time. Statistics Canada will release the 2011 family low-income data in summer 2013.

Where there are options for serving a high-needs census tract, the most appropriate centre is identified through a centre’s location and capacity. The location factor considers proximity to the greatest number of low-income census tracts, and the presence of physical barriers like ravines and train tracks. The capacity factor includes the number of hours that a centre is programmed, and whether the facility provides a range of recreation opportunities through amenities like multipurpose rooms, pools and gyms. A centre’s capacity is also put in context of the number of low-income families to determine an appropriate level of service. This flexibility also allows for future shifting of Priority Centre status from a current facility to another one, if it can be shown to better serve the area’s low-income population. A shift like that would follow from the local planning exercises named in this Plan and involve public consultation.

### **An equitable and consistent method for identifying Priority Centres**

1. Select the minimum number of Priority Centres so every qualifying census tract (one with greater than 30 per cent low-income families) would be served by a Priority Centre within 1.5 km.
2. Remove Priority Centres only if no census tract within 1.5 km has greater than 25 per cent incidence of low-income families.
3. Review Priority Centres every five years using updated census information.

### Definition of a census tract

Small and relatively stable areas of similar economic status and social living conditions. Census tracts usually have a population of 2,500 to 8,000. There are approximately 500 census tracts in the City of Toronto.

Perhaps the most significant benefit of the new method is that it allows for more low-income neighbourhoods to access recreation than the previous method. It increases the geographic equity of investment in access to recreation, as is shown in a comparison of the four districts. The tables below compare the number of Priority Centres using the new method and those that are currently funded, showing how the new method improves equity. Note that this analysis was conducted using the 2006 census date on income.

**Table 17: Comparison of the currently funded and new method of selecting Priority Centres (using 2006 census data)**

	Low-income census tracts (using 2006 census)	Number of Priority Centres	Number of low-income census tracts served (within 1.5km)	Number of low-income census tracts unserved
Currently funded	89	22	47	42
New method	89	39	81	8

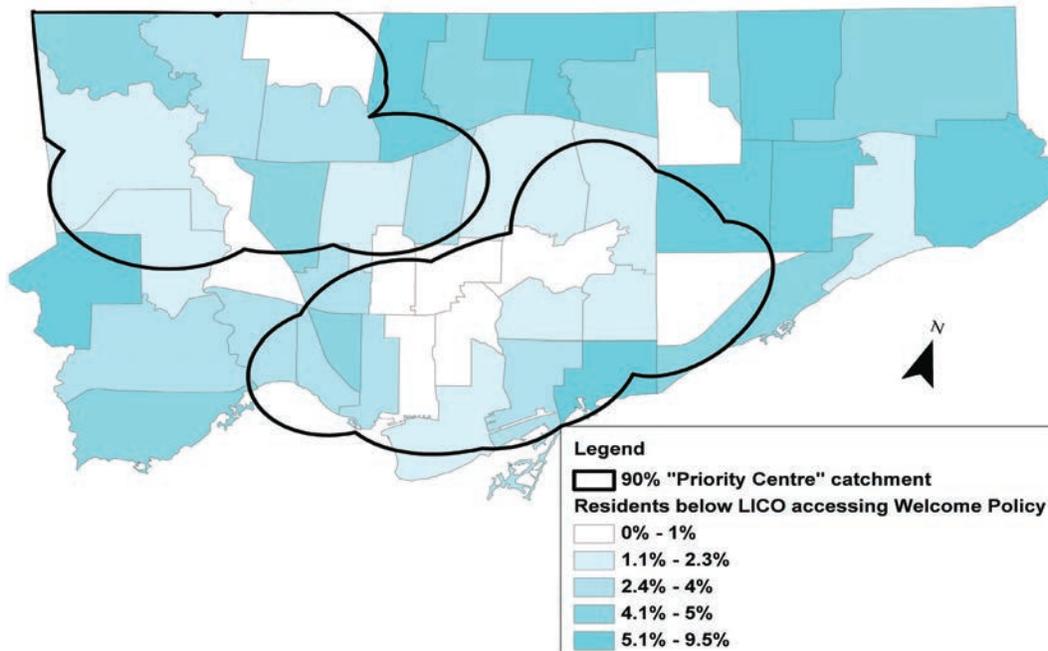
**Table 18: Improvement to district equity using the new method of selecting Priority Centres (using 2006 census data)**

	Number of Priority Centres			
	Etobicoke - York	North York	Toronto & East York	Scarborough
Currently funded (22)	6	6	9	1
New method (39)	10	10	9	10

The approach to offering free programs at the current 22 centres leaves 42 census tracts unserved. Under the new method only eight census tracts are more than 1.5 km from a Priority Centre. These low-income areas do not have a recreation facility of sufficient capacity to serve as a Priority Centre. While this leaves some residents less well served, on average more low-income residents will be closer to a Priority Centre.

The Welcome Policy is an effective tool to provide access where Priority Centres are too far to provide access. Priority Centres work well in high needs areas, and Welcome Policy fills in the gaps. The map below shows that fewer people need the Welcome Policy when they have access to a Priority Centre.

**Figure 18: Comparing where Priority Centre and Welcome Policy registrants live (2011)**



*The cloud-like bubbles represent 90 per cent of where Priority Centre registrants live, using data from 2011. The darker colours mean more low-income residents are registered using the Welcome Policy. The darkest wards are mostly outside of where Priority Centre registrants live. Note: Antibes Community Centre was not included as free programs were introduced there only recently.*

At the same time as the number of Priority Centre locations are expanded, the policy should be renamed to minimize the potential for negative perceptions of the local community to arise.



## Recommended actions

- 10.1. **Continue Welcome Policy provision** as a means to support access based on income. Welcome Policy use has increased dramatically since it was implemented a decade ago, and it continues to meet a critical need in communities across the City. Because poverty exists in every census tract, the Welcome Policy is an important tool to ensure that residents can afford to take programs at a recreation centre near them.
- 10.2. **Implement the equitable distribution of free programs at designated recreation centres (currently called “Priority Centres”)** based on the revised method for identifying locations recommended above, which focuses on serving neighbourhoods with high concentrations of low-income residents. At the same time, implement a new way of identifying “Priority Centres” that avoids the potential for negative perceptions of communities associated with this label. Offering free programs at designated centres not only eliminates financial barriers to accessing recreation programs, it also eliminates the non-financial barrier of the Welcome Policy process. Further, free programs benefit residents whose incomes are very low, but not low enough to qualify for Welcome Policy under the LICO test.

## 11. Increase participation in recreation by developing two city-wide programs for children and youth

With program demand and wait lists growing, the City must find new ways to meet the goal of increasing participation, especially for children and youth. Limited facility capacity is a barrier to expanding services that enhance child and youth involvement in skill-based recreation programs, especially swimming and leadership skills among young Torontonians.

### Swim to Survive program

Every child, regardless of income or where they live, should be able to learn basic swim survival skills. These skills are not innate, so they must be taught. The 2012 Canadian Drowning Report, indicated that of the 347 preventable water deaths in Canada, 27 (approximately 28 per cent) occurred in Ontario. Newcomers are one of the largest groups at risk. Many lack water safety education and in-water experience. The Lifesaving Society estimates that about half of Canadian children do not take traditional swimming lessons, even though swimming is the second most popular activity in Canada among school-age children five to twelve years old.

The Swim to Survive program is a nationally recognized course developed by the Lifesaving Society. It is delivered in Toronto through school board facilities, large non-profit providers such as the YMCA, and at City recreation facilities. The program teaches three basic in-water skills to prevent drowning in the event of an unexpected fall into deep water: roll into deep water, tread water for one minute, and swim 50 metres. The Lifesaving Society estimates that if every child in Canada could pass the skills in the Swim to Survive program, half of drownings would be prevented.

The Lifesaving Society receives funding from the Ontario Government and from Barbara Underhill's Stephanie Gaetz Keepsake Foundation to facilitate the delivery of the Swim to Survive program through schools in Ontario. The funding is not guaranteed year after year.

In the 2011-2012 school year, the City, in partnership with the Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB), delivered the Swim to Survive program to approximately 5,300 grade four students. That corresponds with about 95 per cent of all grade four students enrolled in the TCDSB. The City partners with the TDCSB to directly deliver the program. The City coordinates scheduling and transportation, teaches the swim survival skills, and provides a program completion certificate.

The City's Swim to Survive partnership with the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) is different. The City does not directly deliver the Swim to Survive program to TDSB students. The TDSB employs their own aquatics staff to deliver daytime swim programs to students in their schools and the City provides the certificates of completion. In the 2011-2012 school year, 2,663 of 16,746 grade four TDSB students participated in the Swim to Survive program. This accounts for about 16 per cent of all grade four TDSB students. There is an opportunity to enhance participation in the program through a renewed partnership with the TDSB that works to remove barriers to full enrollment, including pool availability, transportation, and scheduling.



The 2013-2017 Recreation Service Plan proposes to work with Toronto's school boards to expand the Swim to Survive program to all grade four students. The school boards agree that grade four would be the best target grade for this program. This initiative will also help to increase safety of leisure swimming in public pools. The standard swim admittance policy allows access to recreational swims without adult accompaniment if children can pass a facility swim test and are at least 10 years old. Most grade four students turn 10 in that year. The proposed program will increase the number of children staying active and learning basic survival skills, while maximizing the use of both City and school pool facilities.

Perhaps most importantly, a universal, free, school-based delivery model helps to eliminate cultural, financial and geographic barriers to introductory swimming skills.

The expansion of the Swim to Survive program will require additional City investment for staffing resources, transportation, equipment and program materials. Implementation efforts will build on the current foundation of partnership with both school boards and current funders to identify contributions, responsibilities, and to collectively reduce barriers to participation.

## Youth Leadership program

Every young person—regardless of where they live or their financial situation—should have the opportunity to gain basic leadership skills that will better prepare them for employment and meaningful involvement in their communities.



Currently, Parks, Forestry and Recreation offers a wide variety of youth leadership programs. These include: aquatic leadership such as National Lifeguard Service (NLS) certification, summer camp counsellor-in-training programs, babysitting courses, and the partner-based Sport Leadership program. In many cases, these programs provide a pathway to employment as a Parks, Forestry and Recreation part-time leader, swim instructor or camp counsellor. Youth also go on to take leadership and employment roles with a variety of employers across the city. In 2011 there were over 2,000 youth participating in Parks, Forestry and Recreation leadership programs.

Parks, Forestry and Recreation has identified grade nine youth (ages 14-15) as a priority age group for a broad based, free Youth Leadership Program. Grade nine students are in a transitional school year. Most are attending a new school, meeting new friends and making decisions more independently. This is a critical age for youth to engage in meaningful experiences, develop a sense of belonging with peers, and benefit from appropriate role models.

Across the City of Toronto, Youth Leadership programs are delivered by a variety of community organizations. In addition, several City divisions are working together to integrate and align strategies for youth programming and outreach. The 2013-2017 Recreation Service Plan proposes the development of a citywide Youth Leadership program model. This program model would be developed in partnership with other City divisions and community organizations. It would be free of charge, and universally accessible across the city.

This program model will focus on providing supports to youth, using a positive youth development approach (building on the skills of all youth) as opposed to a deficit based approach (addressing negative behaviours). The program will be centered on cognitive, emotional, social and physical skill development. The goal is to provide youth with the tools needed to thrive in their communities.

Once a model is developed, the implementation of a universal Youth Leadership program will require additional City investment for staffing resources, program materials, promotion, and outreach. Parks, Forestry and Recreation's Youth Outreach Workers (YOWs) will play an integral role in implementing the Youth Leadership program. YOWs will partner with local secondary schools and community organizations to promote the program and seek input from youth on the program model.

## Recommended actions

- 11.1 **Expand the current Swim to Survive program** to ensure universal, free access for all grade four students across Toronto, in partnership with the school boards.
- 11.2 **Develop a Youth Leadership Program model** with other city divisions and community partners to build leadership, civic engagement, and employability skills.

## Conclusion

Equitable access to recreation programs in Toronto is supported by the directions outlined in this chapter. Improved planning will strengthen service delivery by considering age groups across the City, while addressing local issues. Improving the consistency of programs offered at every centre in the City and planning to address gaps in service through a 20-year service plan will help deliver services to neighbourhoods across the City in similar ways. In the meantime, two new programs to be offered everywhere will provide opportunities for increased participation in recreation.

This chapter also provides a recommendation for a clear and rational process for expanding Priority Centres across the City. In combination with Welcome Policy and existing free programs such as drop-ins, the new method for selecting locations for free programming will dramatically enhance access to services, and provide that access more equitably throughout the City.

Equitable access directions	Recommended actions
8. Develop an ongoing service planning system that plans for age groups and recreation program types at both the citywide and local scales.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>8.1 Develop recreation plans for recreation program types and age categories.</li> <li>8.2 Provide supports to recreation staff in planning, creating, and delivering innovative and well-used programs.</li> </ul>
9. Enhance the consistency and equity of service delivery across the city.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>9.1 Implement the primary program categorization as a tool for planning.</li> <li>9.2 Develop a measure for service equity, focusing on participation rates and residents' ability to access recreation in their community.</li> <li>9.3 Develop a 20-year Parks, Forestry and Recreation facilities plan to guide facility planning and required investments.</li> </ul>

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10. Refocus subsidy investments to reduce barriers and increase participation in recreation.

10.1 Continue Welcome Policy provision.

10.2 Implement the equitable distribution of free programs at designated recreation centres (currently called “Priority Centre” based on the revised method for identifying locations, and rename the policy.

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11. Increase participation in recreation by developing two city-wide programs for children and youth.

11.1 Expand the current Swim to Survive program.

11.2 Develop a Youth Leadership Program model.

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## 8. Conclusion

The objectives of the 2013-2017 Recreation Service Plan are to increase participation in recreation, reduce financial barriers and increase local access to recreation for Torontonians. The directions and recommended actions are based on significant input from residents and stakeholders, the documented benefits of recreation, and the demographic and leisure trends facing Toronto.

The 2013-2017 Recreation Service Plan makes programs for children, youth and seniors a priority, in order to promote lifelong health and wellbeing. Parks, Forestry and Recreation recognizes that community recreation facilities are important community assets and play a role in building strong communities. The plan proposes ways to ensure that every recreation centre in the City provides the same menu of basic services, regardless of where they are located.

Parks, Forestry and Recreation will balance consistency of programs across the City with the flexibility to respond to local needs. This will be accomplished through the implementation of a new primary program planning model. Parks, Forestry and Recreation service planning will integrate local, age, and program plans to ensure that Parks, Forestry and Recreation services are sensitive to demographic and geographic trends. The quality of individual programs will be enhanced through the development of standards and measures where they are absent.

Registration will be streamlined to be more efficient and user friendly. Lastly, Parks, Forestry and Recreation will expand outreach and sector partnerships to ensure coordinated planning, reduce duplication and maximize access to recreation for residents.

The continuation of financial support to low-income residents through the Welcome Policy will ensure that residents have access to recreation. In addition, the expansion of the current Priority Centre approach, while giving this approach a new name, will ensure that neighbourhoods facing the greatest financial challenges will receive free programs and services in their local communities, reducing financial and geographic barriers to access. The continued provision of free drop-in programs will ensure that all residents continue to have access to the benefits of participation in recreation. With the development of two, citywide programs, children and youth will gain life-skills through the Swim to Survive and Youth Leadership programs.

Finally, the directions in this report will strengthen Parks, Forestry and Recreation's capacity and service planning infrastructure. It will improve data quality by developing consistent practices and providing staff at all levels the tools to use them effectively. A customer service strategy will ensure that the benefits of recreation are promoted widely, and make it easier for residents to participate in programs. As part of the implementation of the 2013-2017 Recreation Service Plan, a facilities plan will be developed to support future facility investment to improve equitable access across the city. This Recreation Service Plan will align service planning efforts with both Parks and Forestry, and with other City divisions.

Once approved, an implementation strategy will be developed to guide service planning over the next five years.

# Appendix 1

## Recreation Service Plan engagement and consultation summary

### Process

During the spring and summer of 2011, Parks, Forestry and Recreation conducted a survey and public consultation sessions. The City hosted four public meetings, nine focus groups, and 15 stakeholder sessions. More than 4400 comments were gathered from all sources.

The following is a summary of those comments. The six consultation questions were organized by the Recreation Service Plan's guiding principles. The comments received reflect the principles and were categorized according to the major themes within each principle. Responses to the eight open-ended survey questions were categorized using the same themes. Overall, comments from the general public paralleled those of stakeholders and focus group participants.

### The questions asked at the consultation sessions:

#### Quality

1. In your opinion, what are the most important areas that the City of Toronto needs to focus on in providing high quality recreation programs and services?

#### Capacity Building

1. How can Parks, Forestry and Recreation help to strengthen communities and who can we partner with?
2. How can we attract, support, and retain volunteers?

#### Inclusion

1. How can Parks, Forestry and Recreation engage communities and groups who do not participate in recreation programs and services?

#### Equitable Access

1. What do you think the barriers are to achieving equitable recreation opportunities across the City and how can they be overcome?
2. Does the current mix of programs and services support the principle of equitable access to all City residents? Please explain your answer.

## The survey's eight open-ended questions:

1. Please suggest ways that the City can ensure that its recreation programs are accessible to all.
2. Please suggest ways that the City can improve the overall quality of its recreation facilities.
3. Please suggest ways that the City can improve the overall quality of its recreation programs and services.
4. Please suggest ways that the City can ensure that everyone has the opportunity to take part in recreation programs and services that meet their needs.
5. Please suggest ways that the City can ensure that its programs and services enhance life skills, social skills and community involvement for you and your family.
6. Please suggest ways that Toronto Parks, Forestry and Recreation can improve its permitting services.
7. Please provide any other suggestions for how Toronto Parks, Forestry and Recreation can improve the recreation programs and services it provides.

**Table 19: The ten most common themes of the Recreation Service Plan engagement**

Theme	Per cent of total comments
1. Improve promotion and communication	13%
2. Increase volunteering opportunities	12%
3. Address the mix, type, quality and relevance of programs	11%
4. Enhance partnerships	8%
5. Reduce cost barriers	7%
6. Improve the physical environment	5%
7. Enhance outreach	4%
8. Improve geographic access	4%
9. Reduce process barriers	3%
10. Enhance community development	3%

## Other survey questions

Several other questions were asked in the survey. Many of the responses are either represented in the body of the 2013-2017 Recreation Service Plan, or at the end of the sections below. The survey was not a random sample of Toronto's population. Therefore, key variables (i.e. income, ethnicity, household size and district) were used to weight survey responses. This post-implementation stratified random sample methodology was used to improve the representativeness of the sample by reducing sampling error.

## Comment summaries by theme

Below is a summary of participant comments under the Recreation Service Plan's four principles. Comments have been summarized to reduce duplication, while ensuring that all comments are reflected. The proportions presented at the end of each theme summary are of the 4,404 comments. Nine per cent of all comments were of a general nature or not applicable to recreation.

## Comments on quality

4% of all comments

### **Facility maintenance contributes to quality recreation opportunities.**

A number of comments were made about better maintenance practices including cleaner and better upkeep of facilities. It was noted that aging facilities should be updated and investment in new equipment was requested. Participant said that existing facilities do not meet the growing population and demand.

3% of all comments

### **Registration, Welcome Policy application and permit processes can be complicated.**

Both online and phone methods are stressful for users. It was also noted that there is too much documentation required for registration. Suggestions were made about the timing of registration (e.g. upon the completion of the last session or not during holidays). Some participants felt that the Permit Allocation Policy and lack of information are a barrier to the permit process. The complexity of the Welcome Policy application process was considered a barrier as well, especially for newcomers and non-status residents.

2% of all comments

**Staff are a key component to recreation quality.** The quality of recreation programming and services is dependent on the consistent quality of staff training and qualifications. Their customer service skills, attitudes, and sustained relationships when dealing with participants are important. Supervision and program ratios should be maintained at an adequate level.

1% of all comments

**Lack of funding impacts the quality of programming.** Inconsistencies in funding across the city lead to inequities in quality programming. A large number of people were opposed to recreation service cuts.

1% of all comments

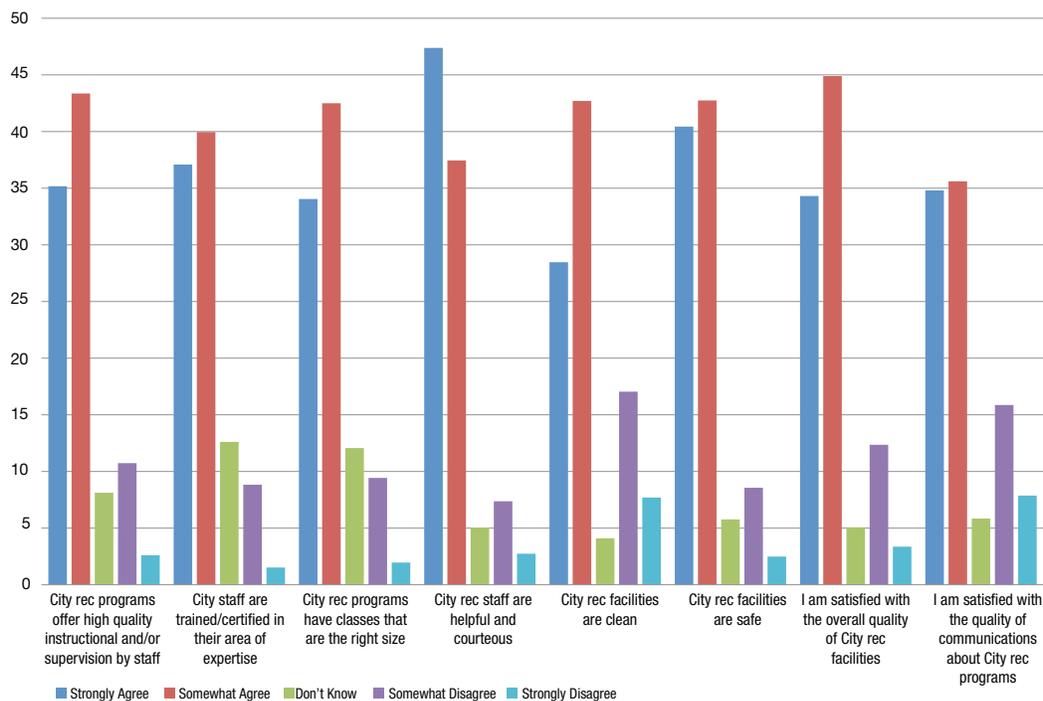
**The size and length of programs and courses affect quality and use.** Some respondents experienced classes that had too many participants for the number of instructors. Many commented that consistent program quality standards should be used across the city. A mix of comments was received about the length of program sessions, including the desire for longer classes.

**A recreation facility's ambiance, indoors and outdoors, contribute to the ability to welcome residents and make people feel safe in their community.** The indoor and outdoor environments of recreation centers should be welcoming and safe. Historic and perceived dominant use by certain groups is a barrier to providing a welcoming environment.

1% of all comments

**There was a mix of comments about the quality of City-run versus privately run programs and services.** Many believed that the City runs higher quality programs, and that the City should continue to run recreation programs. Others believed the City can improve the quality of its programs to match those of other sectors.

**Figure 19: Survey responses on quality**



Comments on capacity building

**Participants showed a desire to see volunteer opportunities increase.** In particular, there is a desire for “meaningful,” “fulfilling,” and “creative” opportunities with a higher level of responsibility. Youth, seniors, and newcomer populations were identified as populations where volunteerism could be cultivated. Attracting a diversity of volunteers will require the removal of barriers to volunteering, which include: the timing of volunteer opportunities, a cumbersome application process, insurance & liability issues, and transportation costs.

12% of all comments

- Comments stressed the need to adequately manage and support volunteers. This includes available staff support for volunteers, adequate and consistent orientation and training, and communication channels which facilitate information sharing with volunteers.

- Volunteer appreciation and recognition was identified as a critical means of retaining volunteers by demonstrating that their contribution is valued (e.g. recognition events, volunteer awards and certificates) .
- A number of incentives were suggested to attract and retain volunteers including free or reduced program fees, priority access to programs, food, free transportation, monetary compensation, and opportunities to attend events.
- Students were identified as a good source for volunteers. Exchanging volunteer hours for community service hours (high school students) or program/practicum credit (college/university students) was suggested as an effective means of attracting student volunteers.
- Some wanted to see more opportunities for volunteers to develop their own programs/initiatives as a means of capacity building and providing opportunities that are meaningful to volunteers. Conversely, many stressed that volunteers should not be a substitute for paid staff.
- Comments reflected a need to raise awareness regarding the need for volunteers and existing volunteer opportunities. A variety of methods for publicizing volunteer opportunities were suggested including flyers, social media, and direct outreach to schools, community organizations and social networks. It was noted that having clearly articulated job descriptions and volunteer roles would facilitate volunteer recruitment, as would conveying the benefits of volunteerism.
- Comments reflected a desire to see volunteerism linked to future employment for volunteers by providing references/letters of recommendation, offering skills training, connecting volunteers to mentors, professional networks, job opportunities and hiring volunteers.

**8% of all  
comments**

**Partnerships are a way to enhance City and community capacity to deliver recreation.** Comments recognized that many partnership opportunities exist across the private sector as well as other city agencies for Parks, Forestry and Recreation to share facilities, equipment and funding. The most common suggestions included collaborations with local organizations, non-profits and school boards. Partnerships can help Parks, Forestry and Recreation with registration, staffing, training, costs, market knowledge and promotion. They can also help develop a coordinated referral system with service providers like healthcare facilities, specialized agencies and permit groups. Participants want Parks, Forestry and Recreation to promote their permit groups and other agencies better in the FUN Guide, in facilities, and on the website. Other service providers with expertise should help in program planning and development. Many expressed a desire for a clear partnership strategy, including a review of current practices and policies pertaining to partnerships.

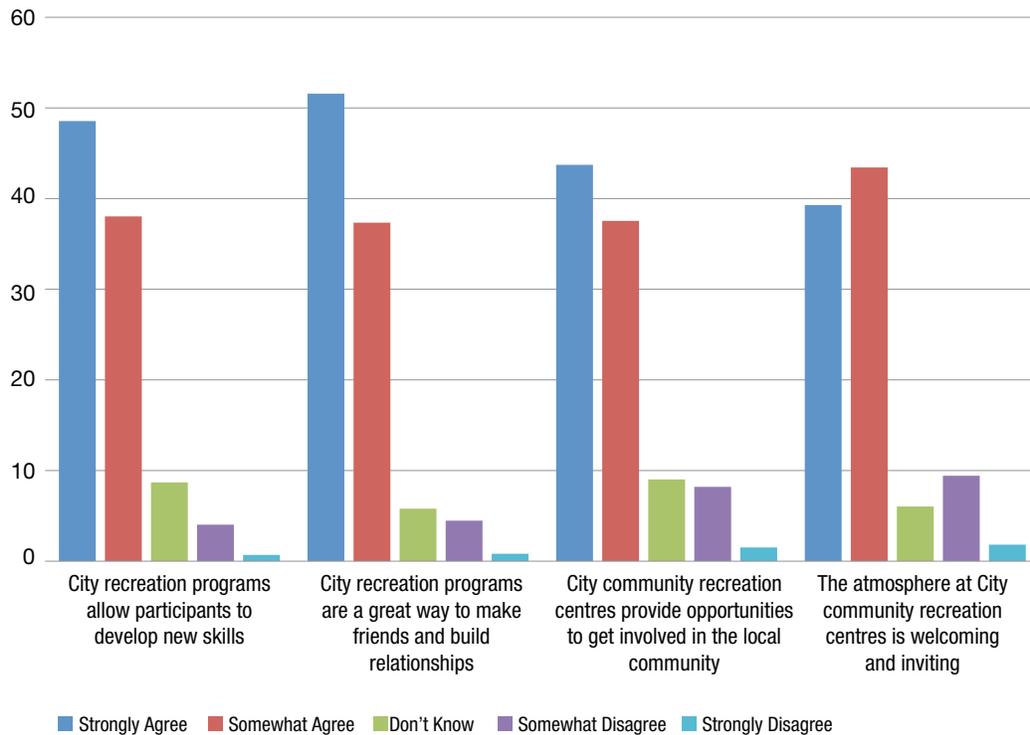
**Participants identified Parks, Forestry and Recreation as playing a role in community development.** Comments recognized that Parks, Forestry and Recreation helps residents, especially youth, give back to their community and create a sense of belonging. Respondents would like Parks, Forestry and Recreation to encourage cultural interaction, tolerance, and understanding, such as learning about the aboriginal community. They can also bring the community together and encourage participation through organizing and participating in community events as well as funding community initiatives. Also, participants would like recreation centres to provide space and easier, cost-effective access to permits for community and non-profit groups. Centres should act as a one-stop hub that can provide childcare, newcomer and counseling information and services, food banks and educational programs in a safe environment.

3% of all comments

**Parks, Forestry and Recreation could enhance its role in preparing youth and other local residents for employment.** There was a desire for Parks, Forestry and Recreation to offer job readiness, job training, and apprenticeship programming. This could include hosting job fairs, mentorship opportunities, partnering with employment organizations, and hiring local community members.

1% of all comments

**Figure 20: Survey responses on capacity building**



## Comments on inclusion

**8% of all comments**

**The need for better promotion and communication of facilities, programs was one of the strongest themes in the consultation.**

Respondents said, information about registration, permits and programs should be easily accessible for everyone, while promotion should be targeted to those facing barriers. Social media, email lists, advertising in public places, and distributing flyers and newsletters to residents were identified as desirable dissemination methods. Other promotional methods included organizing community events, open houses, tours of facilities, and program trials. Respondents also identified promotion through schools, community groups and agencies – especially for newcomers. Some stated that advertising in local and ethnic media would be a good way to let newcomers and local communities know about programs and services.

**4% of all comments**

**Engagement participants said community outreach was important, in need of increase and improvement.** Suggestions for improved outreach include: staff going out to the community, one-on-one outreach, outreach conducted with or via community organizations and community leaders. Outreach among youth, newcomers, and seniors were noted as priorities.

**3% of all comments**

**Participants felt that services for people with disabilities could be enhanced.** This included compliance with relevant legislation, broad acknowledgement of special needs, more programs and services for all age groups. Respondents would like to see a general increase in one-on-one support programs in all program areas. A number of requests were made to make facilities more accessible including accessible washrooms. It was suggested that enhanced staff training could help accommodate those with specific needs to improve interaction with participants.

**2% of all comments**

**Participants said that program cost is connected to inclusion, though affordability was more often mentioned in response to equitable access questions.** For inclusion, they suggested population-specific rates such as for children, youth, seniors, newcomers, and multi-child families.

**2% of all comments**

**Participants said programs should reflect Toronto's changing demographics and community needs.** It was noted that inclusion encompasses accommodation for different needs and interests. Some participants did not think the programs and facilities are needed everywhere, but should be flexible, and tailored to different communities. It was also expressed that local input in the planning and development of programs should be encouraged to ensure that community interests and needs are reflected in programming.

**Language was often stated as a barrier to programs and services.**

Gaining access to information about recreation programs and services, navigating the registration process, accessing the Welcome Policy, and participating in English-language programs, are common challenges for those residents whose first language is not English. Multi-lingual promotion and communication materials, multi-lingual staff and translators, and language-specific program offerings were suggested means of increasing access for these residents.

2% of all comments

**Staff skilled at working with communities was noted as an important aspect of inclusion.**

Comments reflected a desire for staff who are knowledgeable about the local community, as well as respectful and sensitive when working with different cultural communities. There were also calls for staff reflective of the local community, including hiring community leaders.

1% of all comments

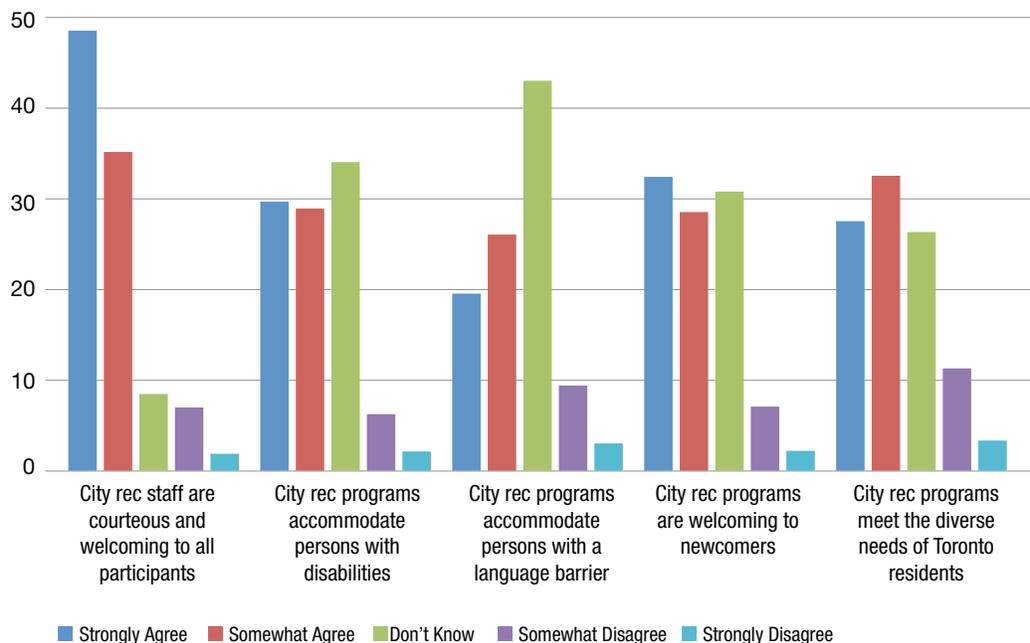
**To enhance inclusion, participants felt that there needs to be more dialogue between staff and residents.** Suggested methods included Q&A sessions, information forums, consultations, and suggestion boxes.

1% of all comments

**Incentives were suggested as a way to include more people in recreation.** Proposals included offering food, rewards, as well as class, and community service hours.

<1% of all comments

**Figure 21: Survey responses on inclusion**



## Comments on equitable access

5% of all comments

**Some participants were generally satisfied with program availability, but others identified the lack of program availability as a significant barrier.** Low program capacity and full programs were the most often cited explanations. Many people suggested the need for a greater number of the most popular programs. Others said there should be greater program variety. Respondents wanted to see the use of a progressive learning model (like in aquatics programs), higher levels of instruction, and competitive sports programming. Many comments were made about the desire for family and intergenerational programs where various age groups can participate together.

4% of all comments

**Cost is a barrier to participation in recreation.** Many identified high and inconsistent program fees, high permit fees, Welcome Policy caps, citywide fee inequities, cost of program equipment and the distribution of Priority Centres as equity barriers. Seniors, newcomers, low-income populations and people with disabilities were identified as the most vulnerable.

4% of all comments

**Proximity to facilities, poor transportation options, lack of local program availability, and inconsistent program availability were identified as barriers.** Suggestions included offering core programs in every community, and the use of satellite locations (like schools and churches) where not possible. Mobile programming was also suggested. Senior and low-income residents were identified as groups most disadvantaged by geographic barriers.

2% of all comments

**Promotion and the lack of information were also cited as barriers to equitable access, though more often mentioned in response to inclusion questions.**

2% of all comments

**Over half of comments made with respect to age equity, identified youth as the population in need of more programming and better program variety.** The next highest age category mentioned was seniors. The levels and intensity of programs will be important adjust as the population ages. Program age requirements were mentioned as a barrier. Respondents named children, youth and seniors as the most important age groups for Parks, Forestry and Recreation programming.

2% of all comments

**Programs planning should reflect demographic trends and community needs.** Research should be conducted about the needs of various populations through community consultation, and the use of surveys. Consult with non-users to find out why they are not involved in programming.

2% of all comments

**Operating and program hours do not accommodate the needs of all work schedules.** Extended operating hours (including weekends) was a suggested solution. The need for more summer programming was expressed. A number of participants suggested concurrent programming for adults and their children in an effort to improve access.

**Comments expressed a need for culturally relevant programs,** including ethno-specific programming, particularly to attract and retain newcomers.

1% of all comments

**Program enrollment, attendance, and waitlists were suggested as ways to inform which programs to offer and discontinue.** Program cancellations were mentioned as an obstacle, and that low registrations should be addressed by combining programs instead of cancellations.

1% of all comments

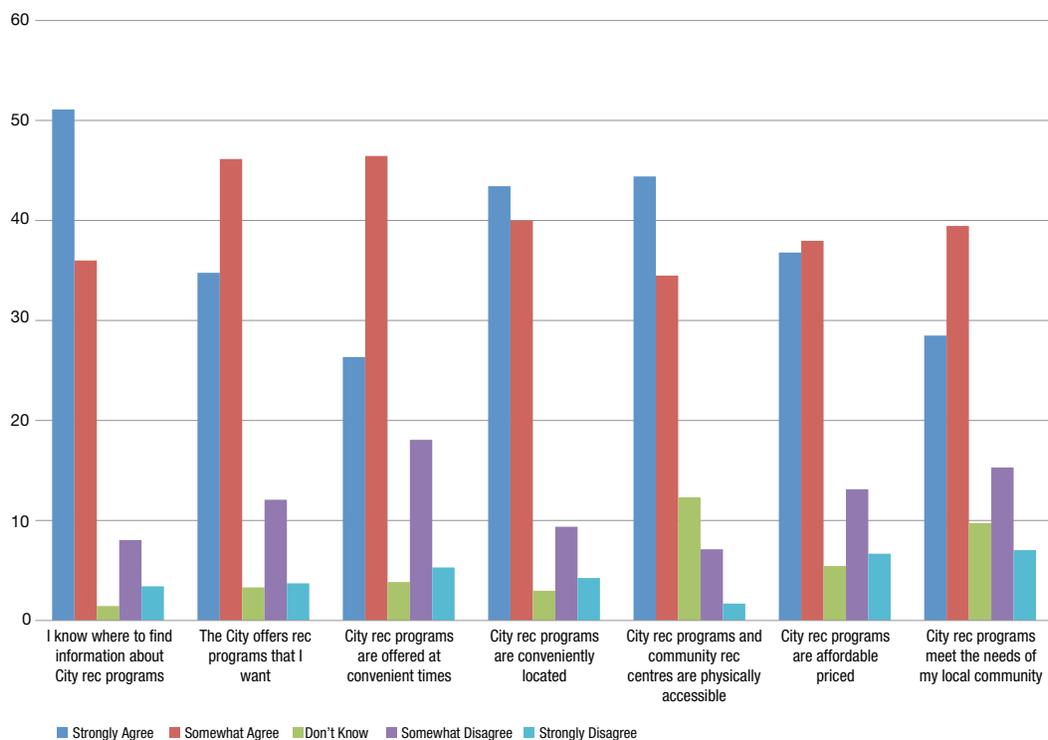
**More women’s only programs and drop-in space was suggested.**

<1% of all comments

**Greater attention to facility and amenity design, including bicycle and car parking, and building access could reduce barriers to recreation.**

<1% of all comments

**Figure 22: Survey responses on equitable access**



# Endnotes

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