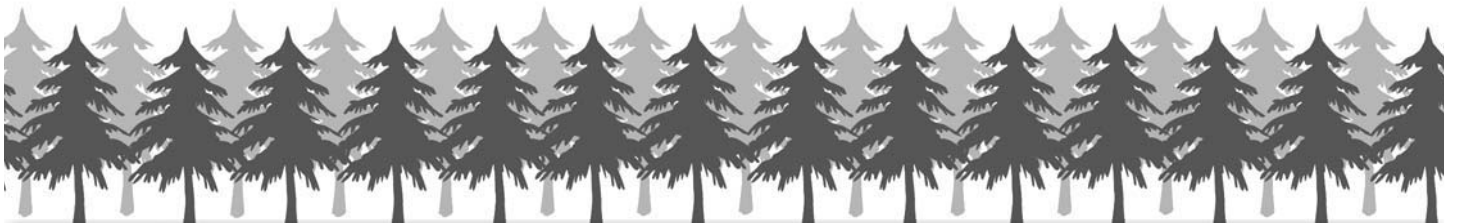


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# ***1. Community Involvement***





# 1. Community Involvement

## Introduction

The philosophy of the importance of community involvement is based on history, current beliefs and trends – along with health and wellness facts. Basically, we believe that people want and need to be connected to each other and find value in being and playing together. Recent research indicates that active, citizen-involved communities have a higher quality of life and are more valued or desirable than others as places to live. Youth and elders/seniors say that positive social or recreational connections to their peers (and others in their community) count for a large portion of how they view their lives and have a huge impact on their happiness. These are important factors to consider when thinking about community involvement beyond the concept of “doing things together”.

Culturally speaking, most ethnic and social groups understand the necessity of communities working together for survival, during a crisis or to do positive things (as in this instance) that benefit many. Our beliefs and habits will also help to determine how much or how little we do together and what types of things those might be. Technology has played a big role in what we do with our time, and increasingly we are spending more time in solitude watching TV, playing video games, or using social networks, and less time physically face-to-face for the sake of being with people.

Community involvement is up against many habits and social changes and people who are burnt out or not taking part for various reasons. The messages that we need to promote are that we gain energy by being involved with each other and have an increased sense of belonging and purpose when we are part of an active, happy, healthy community. People live longer, better and have higher self-esteem and confidence when they are physically and socially active and when they get involved in things beyond their own personal lives.

# 1. Community Involvement

## Ready, Willing and Able – Community Preparedness

Communities, much like individuals, need to be ready, willing and able to work together. Assessing whether or not your community can do things or do more things is a key component of community involvement. Many factors work in favour of increased involvement such as a community having a history of working together, people with the time and energy to get involved, seeking new people to do things and asking what they are interested in, programs or events that are inclusive and encouraging to a wide range of skills as well as general courtesy and kindness being shown at all times.

Factors that work against communities being able to get more people involved are things such as burnout, petty gossiping and bad-mouthing, unresolved issues that are so serious that people are in emotional paralysis (suicide, sexual abuse or fear of gangs or violence), and the same people always doing the “good or fun” jobs and not making room for new blood.

Knowing where your community is at in terms of readiness is a matter of talking to people and doing an assessment – then maybe start small and build on successes that take place. One small event can lead to another and build confidence and capacity at the same time. Slow and steady wins the race – and wins people’s confidence. Going too big or too fast with projects or events can push people away or cause them to be overwhelmed.

Use the factors for success checklist and assessment tools in order to determine where your community, group or organization is at – and ask the question: do we have the capacity to do what we want to do, and if not, what will be done instead?

## Working Together

One person cannot do it alone, or even two or three people. As we know, nothing happens in isolation when working in communities. Everything and everyone is connected. This is especially true in the sport, culture and recreation sector. Being involved in community events, projects, and activities builds stronger individuals, families and communities. It also builds momentum – meaning that the more we see of it, the more we will do it. Getting things going often takes some planning and organizing, but after that, usually... the more people involved the merrier.

In addition to planning and organizing or even attending activities, we also require recognition and celebration. Celebration helps to build our sense of cultural continuity, community spirit and to appreciate or recognize our accomplishments – all combined, this builds and maintains a positive view of life. We work together to improve our communities – and to create a good and healthy outlook so that the habit of doing things together replaces (to a certain degree) doing nothing or doing things in isolation. Setting expectations, for ourselves and others, is part of how we behave – reaching those expectations is part of making dreams come true and depends on all of us working together.

# 1. Community Involvement

## Understanding a Community Development Approach

Many people use the term community development to describe what we do in our work and volunteer activities. It is often defined as the planned (and unplanned) evolution of all aspects of a community – meaning the structured and grass roots way a community goes about its business and how it changes over time. We've spent many years building the community development skills and capacity of those working in the formal system (paid workers), but only moderate attention has been paid to general community members and volunteers. Sport, culture and recreation relies on people doing more for themselves and having less dependency on others to do it for them. This makes it very important to learn about and use tools and approaches that increase community awareness, generate interest and encourage increased participation.

This is a form of community development that supports communities to become more engaged, better prepared for change and better able to meet expectations. It is a clear example of the difference between being involved (showing up) and being invested (taking on tasks or leadership roles). One of the factors of success for sport, culture and recreation programming is community involvement that builds capacity to take over or lead various projects – particularly by involving youth. The greater the investment – the greater the gain for everyone.



### The Northern Context

Everything and everyone is connected in the north. When it comes to community participation, we are all in it together – setting good examples, having fun, finding solutions to social issues and building a more positive, healthy future for ourselves and those around us. We are proud of who we are and where we are from. We respect our elder's wisdom and seek their involvement in everything we do. We also recognize how important our children and youth are, and we try to help them be everything they can be. As more people learn about northern Saskatchewan, the more we are seen as unique – not just because of the geography and huge distances – but because of the people and the “northern way of being”.

If we did not help each other and ourselves, not only would community programs not happen, but we would not survive. Our need to work together is really a need – not just something nice to do. Northerners care about each other and our communities so we appreciate the fact that almost everyone works hard, volunteers where they can and shows up when there is an emergency or something critical to do. That's the northern way.

“This is the first step in turning our community around and making it a better place to live, and I believe we have the people here who want to help us accomplish that.” – Garry Finlay, Principal of Charlebois School, at a community school meeting, Cumberland House

# 1. Community Involvement

## What's Important to Know?

- ★ There's a role for everyone in a community development approach.
- ★ Paid workers, volunteers, youth, government agencies, funders and supporters (at all levels) are all involved – each doing different but complementary things to reach common goals.
- ★ Community development is based on local decision making, shared leadership, capacity building and active participation.
- ★ There is a big difference between being involved and being invested.
- ★ There are good reasons for people to get involved and work together – but there are also good reasons why they don't – our job is to figure out which is which and get things going.
- ★ In community development nothing is done in isolation – it is all connected.
- ★ Increasing community involvement means setting a good example and extending an open invitation.

## Tips and Advice

1. Understand your community and find ways to determine its capacity to do things.
2. Try to resolve past problems but don't let them stop progress.
3. Start small and build on successes.
4. Even the most troubled communities can do something – figure out what it is.
5. Youth and children are the catalysts to get things done – help them become leaders.
6. Don't let the negative people or comments get you down, shield them off with good work.
7. Include everyone's perspective, particularly if what you are doing affects them.



### Story

At Canoe Lake, the Recreation Director invites community members to public meetings and gets a lot of involvement in putting on special events such as festivals, camp outs, cultural camps, community canoe trips, sport leagues and tournaments (i.e. hockey, floor hockey, volleyball, slo-pitch, fastball). Last year was the first year for a tri-community Winter Festival where events were held in each of the three neighboring communities. Canoe Lake hosts many events because it has the community involvement to make it happen and happen well.

“Since our new arena is open every night for public skating, broom ball and hockey, we have noticed a decrease in vandalism in the community.” – Roger Bird, Montreal Lake First Nation

“Getting people with disabilities involved in the Northern Saskatchewan Games and Cultural Festival and Zone 9 (now Team North) has been a new and good experience for the disabled people in the north.” – Gary Tinker Federation

## Toolbox Connection

In the toolbox you will find the following tools related to this section:

- Ten Steps to Effective Community Involvement
- Skills Checklist
- Factors to Consider – Community Involvement
- Tips for Working In and With Your Community
- Community Readiness Checklist
- Getting the Community Involved
- How to Solve Problems
- Conflict Resolution Techniques
- Facilitation Tips