
8. Effective Programming – Finding a Balance



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Introduction

The term programming includes everything that is done with and for the community in sport, culture and recreation. It includes after school programs, community games, special events, physical activity programs and promotion, and a wide range of projects that appeal to a mix of interests, ages and abilities.

There is always a high demand and rarely enough resources (human, financial and physical space) to address them, resulting in the need to be sure that priorities are identified and met, and that there is enough diversity in what is being offered to provide something for most – not everything for everybody.

Some programs are favorites and very popular and may never change, like community festivals, others come and go depending on things such as expressed interests, knowledge held by staff about what else is going on, and the demographic make up of the community. Effective programming starts with an assessment of need – then a plan – then action and evaluation.

Program Planning – Six Steps

A process that helps to find a balance and identify and meet community expectations and needs includes the following:

1. Determine needs and assets – know the community, who's in it, what are the strengths/assets and limitations of the community and what programs, talent, and services exist as well as what people want and need.
2. Generate program ideas – consider the gaps and ask people their ideas about how to fill them with programs, activities and events. Make sure that different ages, interests, genders, cultures and other factors are kept in mind.
3. Make program decisions – ensure that programs being offered fit within the organization's mandate and ability to deliver them. Priorities need to be set, decisions made and a balance offered between old favorites and new initiatives.
4. Develop a program plan – create an annual plan (not too detailed) that outlines the programs offered, when, who is in charge, costs, partners, time frame and the target group.
5. Implement the program design – provide details about each program such as specific dates and time lines, promotion, equipment needed and what the backup plan is if things have to change for one reason or another.
6. Evaluate the program – assess what went well and what could have been improved in order to make adjustments or to determine the real value of the program. The results of evaluations are often written up and reported to all interested parties.

“Creativity is inventing, experimenting, growing, taking risks, breaking rules, making mistakes and having fun.”
– Mary Lou Cook

Knowing How to Balance Needs & Demands

Programming is all about balance and keeping things interesting, relevant and realistic in terms of resources available and community expectations. Each age group has a different idea about what they might like to have offered and no one group can do it all. Partnerships, volunteers, family support and good old fashioned “help yourself” all have a place in community activities.

Considerations such as gender, all abilities and people with disabilities all need to be made as well as finding ways to include those who normally don't take part, or who are shy, or have barriers to participation or for whatever reason are not normally involved. Without trying to be everything to everybody, tough decisions need to be made and it is useful to know what is really needed, what is highly valued or cherished, what things might be desired but could be provided by others, and what might help bring people together or generate new interest.

Good program balance considers going beyond what people are familiar with and takes some risks to provide something different, even if no one has heard of it or knows about it.



The Northern Context

In northern Saskatchewan we like to have a lot of programs and as much diversity as possible. This isn't always possible due to the cost of things and the number of volunteers we have. We are very proud of what we can do with the resources we have, but we want to keep things grounded in our own culture and way of doing things. When programs come from other places we sometimes have to change them a little to fit into our community values.

Usually anything to do with sport, culture and recreation is well received and well liked. It's important to keep in mind that elders and children need different things, but they also want to do some things together – sometimes it is challenging to find ways to keep youth, families and communities all doing what they want (which is different) and doing things together (which they like). Fortunately, in the north, we have the habit of everyone doing everything so it's not too hard to make this happen.

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What's Important to Know?

- ★ Knowing your community helps to build relationships as well as effective programs.
- ★ Community leaders are often the people with the skills, and connections you need.
- ★ Good programs require careful planning but should be flexible and open to changes.
- ★ Programming should avoid duplication, fill gaps and be balanced – try new things but do it more than once to let the community get used to something different.
- ★ There are lots of ways to know if you are hitting the mark with programming – ask people what they “really” think and how they would improve things.
- ★ Getting people to show up is one thing – getting them to come back again is another.
- ★ Benchmarks for progress and results are used to know where you started and if programming is actually making a difference in both the short-term and long-term

Tips and Advice

1. Keep a good balance in programs so that there is something for everyone.
2. Don't get too diversified or spread too thin so that there's no real focus.
3. Find ways to include whole families in activities.
4. Gather information about what programs exist and what is needed – fill gaps.
5. Develop an annual program plan and let people know what's happening.
6. Include new ideas and leave room for spontaneous possibilities.
7. Recognize and celebrate successes – brag a bit and toot your own horn.



Story

The Community & School Recreation Coordinator Program in Ile-a-la-Crosse provides sport, culture and recreation programs that have many benefits to the community as a whole. Every year an annual program plan is made, with the community's input. Based on program evaluations, we know that 81% of the programs offered in one year had a physical activity component. This included sports, recreational games and dance. Keeping these kinds of records and statistics helped the steering committee to evaluate what had happened and to continuously improve, set priorities, and share our successes with others.

“Buffalo Narrows wanted to meet a need for more physical activity opportunities. They started a Fitness Club called “Buff & Narrow”. Youth and community members are participating who never actively participated in any sporting event being offered in the community before. Overall the program promotes better active living, physical activity and recreation for all teens and adults.” – Rhonda Williams, Recreation Director, Buffalo Narrows

“In Grandmother's Bay we host a special event once a month regardless of how large or small with the idea to bring the community together. Overall there is a balance of activities in the community through the school and Band recreation. There is a plan to focus on more physical activity and developing more sports. Their cultural aspects are more dominant than sport and recreation.” – Lydia McKenzie, Grandmother's Bay

Toolbox Connection

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

- Program Planning in Northern Saskatchewan
- Community Needs Assessment
- Planning for Different Ages
- Programming for People With Disabilities
- Program Evaluation
- Workshop or Event Evaluation
- Attendance Record
- Accident Report (example)
- Permission Slip (example)