



MODULE 5

BUILDING AND ENGAGING COMMUNITY



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MODULE 5 OUTCOME:

Leaders use recreation as a vehicle for strengthening community capacity.

MODULE 5 – BUILDING AND ENGAGING COMMUNITY

- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 Recreation Builds Community
- 5.3 Community Building and the Recreation Leader
- 5.4 Supporting Youth Involvement and Leadership

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- Understand the role of recreation as a vehicle to build community.
- Recognize the importance of public participation in the community building process.
- Define community building and community capacity in a recreation context.
- Describe how to support youth involvement and leadership in community projects.



Government of Yukon/D Crowe

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Yukoners gather regularly to celebrate special events, appreciate the outdoors, participate in sport and recreation, and welcome visitors to enjoy what the Yukon has to offer. Young and old alike are invited to come together and take part in events and festivals steeped in local tradition and culture. They can participate or simply watch fun sport competitions, appreciate music, arts and theatrical showcases, or dance the night away.

In many ways, community festivals and events are the modern day equivalent of the gatherings that have always been part of traditional Yukon culture. Most citizens give little thought to the community-centered, family-based benefits of recreation. Yet, if you were to ask Yukoners how they felt about celebrations or any other recreation activity, they would probably explain how these experiences make people feel good about themselves, their families and their community.

To maximize the potential benefits delivered by any recreation activity, leaders need a clear understanding of the role recreation plays and the potential it has to strengthen a community. These benefits can be amplified particularly when using a community development approach.

A SUCCESS STORY IN WATSON LAKE (aud7)



Meaghen Kimmitt

5.2 RECREATION BUILDS COMMUNITY

Recreation strengthens our communities. *The National Benefits Hub* ([url3](#)) describes the benefits or outcomes delivered by recreation and parks. We already know intuitively much of what the Hub describes; that recreation, parks, sport, arts, culture and heritage activities

- help people grow and be healthy,
- build strong families and communities,
- provide opportunities for those who are disadvantaged,
- protect the environment,
- stimulate the economy, and
- add to the quality of life in our communities.

In other words, the National Benefits Hub provides the research to show that recreation matters!



The Benefits Hub emerged following an economic downturn that resulted in significant funding cuts across the field of recreation in the late 1980's. Leaders gathered evidence and research to support the outcomes or benefits delivered by recreation, parks, sport, arts, culture, heritage and active living and published it as the Benefits of Parks and Recreation (Parks and Recreation Federation of Ontario, 1992) and then as an updated version in the The Benefits Catalogue (Canadian Parks and Recreation Association, 1997). The research was moved online into a searchable database at www.benefitshub.ca in 2011 where it is now managed by the Leisure Information Network (LIN).

5.3 COMMUNITY BUILDING AND THE RECREATION LEADER

Many recreation leaders, particularly those in paid positions, are responsible for coordinating programs, facilities, and outdoor spaces. However, the importance of a fourth area of responsibility described as community building is becoming increasingly evident.

In times of scarce resources, it is clear that even with paid staff, our community programs, services, events, facilities and outdoor spaces are not relevant unless they engage the general public. This is not to say that traditional recreation tasks (e.g. managing facilities, implementing structured programs and overseeing outdoor spaces) are no longer important. However, a community building approach needs to be emphasized because it ensures that Yukon programs receive the base of public support needed to thrive.

Programs, services, events and outdoor spaces take on a new richness when they are specifically designed to engage the public. When a community intentionally plans for recreation that delivers targeted benefits and outcomes (e.g. healthier individuals or stronger communities), recreation becomes something that matters.

As [Module 8 - Planning for Recreation \(mod8\)](#) describes, engaging the community and its citizens goes beyond simply asking people what recreation programs they want. Engaging the community means people get involved in discussing local issues and exploring ways in which recreation can address those issues and make their community a better place to live.

This scanning tool ([pdf3](#)) can serve as an excellent starting point for gathering information to identify a community's strengths and assets as well as areas that may need improving. The scanning tool is an informal conversation starter for gathering information and determining community priorities.

Engaging local citizens is an essential prerequisite for strengthening a community's capacity. Community capacity means people are able to express ideas and develop the knowledge and skills to put them into action. When capacity for recreation is strengthened, leadership develops, not by relying on paid recreation staff to deliver programs and manage a facility, but instead by engaging and empowering the expertise of community members to facilitate recreation opportunities.

In summary, using a community building approach, recreation leaders:

- Ensure appropriate programs and services;
- Facilitate partnerships and collaboration between community organizations, businesses and the general public;
- Provide opportunities for citizen participation and development;
- Build community capacity by ensuring opportunities for training and leadership development; and
- Put policies and mechanisms in place to strengthen recreation leadership, particularly for youth, by providing opportunities for paid and volunteer positions.



5.4 SUPPORTING YOUTH INVOLVEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

Effective leaders encourage the leadership potential in others. That means building community capacity for recreation requires engaging and supporting youth in community leadership opportunities. As role models, recreation leaders also need to find ways to mentor leadership qualities and capabilities in youth.

To thrive in today's constantly changing, interconnected and increasingly complex world, youth need leadership and community development competencies. These competencies prepare youth to apply big-picture thinking, encourage citizen responsibility, advocate for quality of life, act as agents of change, and increase their commitment to continuous improvement. In return, recreation leaders have an opportunity to learn from youth who have grown up in a digital world and bring a fearless and objective point of view, passion and energy.

Recreation and community settings can provide meaningful opportunities for youth to share their own skills and learning while at the same time preparing them to live in a diverse, multi-faceted and technology-driven world. Considering the challenges facing the public education system and imbalance in student achievement levels, “the non-school hours are an underused tool in supporting older youth in their transition to adulthood” (Yohalem, Wilson-Ahlstrom, Ferber, & Gaines, 2006). Investing time in youth mentoring and leadership development results in adolescents who are role models for other youth and ensures that programs, services and events are current and relevant.



Discover how *Active Yukon Youth and Recreate (vid4)*, in this video by filmmaker Sam Finton. Sam is a Whitehorse youth with a passion for film, technology and recreation.

TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL YOUTH PROGRAMMING

Provide opportunities for youth that facilitate:

- a sense of independence through participation in the initiative (e.g. opportunities to demonstrate leadership, to create and implement a program, and/or to receive honorariums);
- situations where youth interact with community and business leaders;
- opportunities for youth to be heard; and
- opportunities for youth to develop skills that will prepare them for the workforce.

EFFECTIVE YOUTH PROGRAMS OFFER:

- caring instructors and group leaders (and have some young staff),
- time to be with friends,
- opportunities to meet new people,
- opportunities for informal socializing with peers,
- a place that feels safe,
- activities that develop new skills, and
- programming that is FUN!

While often taken for granted, recreation can provide important, relevant and meaningful opportunities to invest in youth as our future community leaders. Yukon's Youth Directorate and Executive Council Office support the development of youth leadership through a variety of activities and programs.

