

**OFFICE OF
THE CITY AUDITOR**

REPORT
**EQUITABLE RECREATION
PROGRAMMING AUDIT**

JUNE 6, 2024

Report Summary

BACKGROUND

The City of Edmonton strives to provide a variety of recreation programming to meet the diverse needs of the community and provide equitable access to Edmontonians regardless of age, gender, identity, ability, family status, ethnicity, race, religion, or income level.

In August 2022, City Council passed a motion that the City Auditor, as part of the proposed 2023 Office of the City Auditor Work plan perform an audit of the City's equitable recreation programming.

AUDIT OBJECTIVE & SCOPE¹

The objective of this audit was to determine whether the Community Recreation and Culture Branch (CRC) has an effective approach to providing equitable recreation programming for all Edmontonians.

This audit does not conclude on the appropriateness of any specific program or resource allocation decision made by Administration.

WHAT WE FOUND

Overall, the City and CRC have expressed their commitment to equitable recreation programming in various guiding documents and through various activities. We found that the Branch developed numerous programs directed at increasing equitable recreation programming for all Edmontonians (See Appendix 1).

However, we also found that CRC does not have an effective approach to planning and providing equitable recreation programming for all Edmontonians.

We found the following areas to improve CRCs approach:

¹ We conducted this engagement in conformance with the Institute of Internal Auditors' *International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing*.

- Consistently reach out to the broader public to identify barriers and programming needs.
- Develop an integrated plan that aligns, integrates, and coordinates the various activities. The plan should focus on equity concerns and set priorities for program development, partnership agreements, and resource allocation. In addition, the plan should include performance tracking and communication tactics to effectively support the overall vision for equitable recreation programming.
- Define and document program objectives and track if programs are meeting their objectives.
- Develop documents to guide staff through the process of planning recreation programming.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1 We recommend that the Community Recreation and Culture Branch, in collaboration with the Community Services Department's communications area, improve how it obtains information on recreation programming needs from the broader community to identify access barriers and inform equitable recreation program planning.

Recommendation 2 We recommend that the Community Recreation and Culture Branch develop and implement an integrated plan to assist with the development and delivery of equitable recreation programming. The plan should include:

- A defined vision and goals
- Performance measures and targets
- Allocation model for rental of recreation facilities
- Communications plan to increase awareness of recreation programming

Recommendation 3 We recommend that the Community Recreation and Culture Branch identify and track minimum objectives for each programming type (registered program, spontaneous use, drop-in) and individual programs to assess if they are meeting their objectives.

Recommendation 4 We recommend that the Community Recreation and Culture Branch develop documented guidance for how to consider concepts of equity, inclusion, and accessibility when planning recreation programming.

WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT

The City and CRC are committed to providing equitable recreation programming for all Edmontonians. Conducting a community needs assessment, developing an integrated plan for equitable recreation programming, and tracking and reporting on performance measures will:

- Demonstrate this commitment.
- Show that decisions on equitable recreation programming are supported, transparent, fair, and evidence-based.
- Help CRC prioritize program development, partnership agreements, and resource allocation.

In addition, enhancing program delivery by the City and through partnerships and rentals, will support informed decision making, identify gaps and opportunities, and improve the overall delivery of equitable recreational programming.

Equitable Recreation Programming Details

DEFINING EQUITY

Equity refers to fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement for everyone, while at the same time striving to identify and eliminate barriers that have prevented the full participation of some individuals and groups. Equity is different from equality, which focuses on treating everyone the same way. Equity recognizes that each person has different circumstances and allocates the exact resources and opportunities needed to reach an equal outcome (see Exhibit 1). Equitable recreation programming is about providing accessible and inclusive programming for all Edmontonians.

Exhibit 1: Equity recognizes everyone starts from a different place and different investments may be necessary so all can enjoy the benefits of recreation



Source: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

RECREATION PROGRAMMING

Recreational programming in the City of Edmonton is provided by:

- The City (for example: registered programs, spontaneous use or drop-in recreation facilities, and admission to attractions).
- Rental groups (for example: renting space in recreation facilities) and partnerships in City owned and operated facilities.
- Partnerships in City owned but partner operated facilities (for example: two Edmonton ski organizations operating ski hills on City land). The City currently has 58 partnership agreements in place for partner-operated and City-owned facilities.
- Private organizations (for example: commercial and non-profit organizations that receive no support or involvement from City).

The Community Recreation and Culture Branch (CRC) in the Community Services Department delivers public recreation that includes sport, leisure, and heritage programming. These activities take place in a variety of facilities, parks and open spaces, such as ice arenas, leisure and recreation centers, outdoor pools, golf courses, neighbourhood parks and attractions.

In addition, CRC works with numerous partners to provide recreation programming in various ways. This can be through providing space in City facilities, having partners operate City facilities, giving financial support through operating grants, leases and licensing agreements.

The City's vision for recreation is:

The City of Edmonton will approach recreation from a holistic and sustainable perspective to address the broad continuum of community recreation needs required by citizens.

Either directly by CRC or through partnerships, the City

provides a wide variety of registered programs, drop-in programs, and spontaneous use access to meet recreation needs of a diverse population.

In 2023, the CRC revenue and expenses related to recreational programming were approximately \$64 million and \$113 million.

Conduct Community Needs Assessment

KEY FINDINGS

We found that CRC connects with current recreation programming users through satisfaction surveys and feedback given during a program, and responds to stakeholders programming requests. CRC also uses some informal benchmarking and trends research from other communities and recreation organizations to compare current program offerings.

However, we found that CRC has not consistently asked the broader public to help identify barriers to attending their recreation programming or to identify their programming needs. As well, CRC is not actively soliciting information on recreation programming from individuals in the larger community who are not already engaged in recreation programming.

CONDUCT COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

For recreation programming to be equitable, it should be accessible and inclusive to individuals from all identity groups. These identities can vary based on race, gender, income, ability, English language proficiency, and many other factors.

Our research found that best practices² stress the importance of assessing community needs to obtain residents' perspectives on recreation needs and barriers. These perspectives can guide future decisions regarding recreation programming, resource allocation, and other factors that require strategic planning.

We found that CRC does not consistently reach out to people in the broader community who do not use recreation programming or facilities. As a result, CRC may not be aware of broader programming needs or potential barriers that prevent

² The Canadian Parks and Recreation Association and its American counterpart the National Recreation and Parks Association.

individuals or certain groups from using City programming or facilities.

The City has guiding documents and programs for the inclusion of many of these groups, such as the *Accessibility Policy*, the Corporate Accessibility Plan, and the Leisure Access Program. We also found that CRC makes efforts to ensure certain communities and individuals can participate in programs. For example, people who are deaf or hard of hearing in aquatics, youth after school program, and fitness programs for women and girls. While these documents and actions represent important components of the City's efforts toward ensuring equity in recreation programming, CRC may not have a good understanding of how well they are serving different segments of Edmontonians. For example:

1. What are the different segments of the community in the City of Edmonton that have equity concerns?
2. How large are these groups and where are they concentrated?
3. What barriers or inequities are experienced by various groups?

From 2016 to 2018, CRC commissioned several consultation activities related to the development of a new Community & Recreation Facility Master Plan titled the Approach to Community Recreation Facility Planning in Edmonton. The consultant used several different mechanisms to learn the perspectives of residents, organized groups, and community stakeholders. While these activities focused mainly on informing the City on facility development, it also touched upon the utilization of recreation facilities. However, it did not specifically address equitable recreation programming.

WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT

Without a consistent approach to assessing community needs CRC may not be aware of broader programming needs or potential barriers that prevent individuals from using City programming or facilities.

Understanding community needs would assist CRC in strategically planning equitable recreation programming, allocating resources and measuring progress towards addressing inequities or gaps.

RECOMMENDATION 1

In collaboration with the Community Services Department's communications area, improve how the Community Recreation and Culture Branch obtains information on recreation programming needs from the broader community to identify access barriers and inform equitable recreation program planning.

Responsible Party



Branch Manager, Community Recreation and Culture Branch



Accepted by Management

Management Response

Consideration will be given to pursuing a multi-disciplinary approach that includes qualitative and quantitative survey methodologies that will provide a foundation through which to identify needs to guide both short-term and longer-term plans including budget requirements (insight, targeted surveys, community engagement, jurisdictional scans). The Branch will reference the Approach to Community Recreation Facility Planning in Edmonton as it outlines a comprehensive process to broadly assess recreation and sport demand indicators, along with other existing mechanisms, to effectively assess

program needs.



Implementation Date

March 31, 2025

Develop an Integrated Plan

KEY FINDINGS

The City has expressed its commitment to equitable recreation programming in various guiding documents and through various programs. For example:

- The City's *Recreation User Fee Policy* (2014) includes an objective to provide "a consistent and equitable process that encourages accessibility and participation".
- The City's *Approach to Community Recreation Facility Planning in Edmonton* (2018) includes a guiding principle that states, "Access to Community Recreation Facilities is equitable".
- The 2023-2026 Community Services Business Plan includes general objectives and goals for addressing equity.

In addition, CRC directed numerous programs at increasing equitable access to recreation activities (see Appendix 1).

However, CRC does not have an integrated plan that operationalizes this commitment in a way that aligns, integrates, and coordinates the various activities it conducts to address equity concerns.

In addition, CRC has not evaluated its activities as a whole to better understand the overall impact they are having on delivering equitable programming to Edmontonians. This is because CRC has not defined any performance measures related to equitable recreation programming, or the data needed to support those measures and track if the City is meeting its equity goals.

CRC is collecting some operational data on registered programs and has a dashboard that CRC staff and management use to access that data. Also, CRC collects a limited amount of identifying data on participants. However, it is not using any of

the data collected to determine if recreation programming at the City is equitable.

We also found that CRC does not have a documented allocation model to allocate its limited resources to maximize their use and best support its program offerings to meet the City's equity goals. In addition, after CRC has assigned resources to meet the direct programming needs, they make any additional inventory in recreation facilities available as rental space. Rental allocation procedures for gymnasiums, arenas, sports fields, and aquatics treats rental groups equally when determining the total rental hours available for each group. However, there is an inherent bias that favours historical groups when assigning the rental hours to specific program time and location.

LACK OF INTEGRATED PLAN

To effectively address the complex nature of equitable recreation programming, the best practice is an integrated, coordinated approach. This approach should be supported by a plan with a defined vision for equitable recreation programming. The plan should include: goals, measures, targets, and processes that collect, share, and evaluate meaningful data to gauge progress towards the goals and enable data supported decisions.

One of the goals included in ConnectEdmonton, the City's Strategic Plan 2019-2028, is for Edmonton to be "*a neighbourly city with community and personal wellness that embodies and promotes equity for all Edmontonians*". The City Plan sets out guiding strategies for achieving this goal. This includes the values and outcomes envisioned for how public space is to be used, made equitable, and kept safe and secure, and how communities are made vibrant and inclusive. CRC does not have a plan that links the daily work of recreation planning staff to these values and outcomes.

This lack of an integrated plan for equitable recreation programming has led to:

- CRC staff missing a consolidated direction and goals to guide their efforts and current activities that address recreation programming equity concerns.
- Limited coordination of activities between CRC business areas, rentals, and partnerships.

Missing Direction and Goals

Currently, CRC has an organic, fluid, historic approach to recreation programming planning. Each specialized area – Aquatics, Dryland (includes indoor and outdoor physical activity experiences), and Arts History and Nature Experiences (AHNE) – has their own way of doing things. Next year's plans are in large part based on last year's plans but tweaked based on various inputs. There is a Program Governance Group with representatives from each of the three specialized areas that meets regularly to discuss programming. However, this is limited to programming provided by the three areas. Third party providers (partnerships and rental groups) in large part plan their own programming.

This could lead to duplication of effort focused on one equity group, or not enough effort focused on another group. We observed that program decisions are made operationally with a limited holistic viewpoint. For example:

- The sensory accessibility program provides sensory bags, weighted lap pads, quiet areas, and noise canceling headphones to people with sensory needs at various City attractions. Although staff indicated the initiatives were beneficial and well received in those communities (individuals with sensory challenges), its continuing impact cannot be measured against goals or other baselines because those have not been established.
- The forest bathing program is a guided meditation and facilitated walk in a forested area to help users reconnect with nature. This program came about as a suggestion from third party instructors instead of identifying a need or market survey.

- AHNE programs are planned based on a variety of factors such as last year's program, new ideas brought forward by stakeholders, and instructor and space availability. In June, 2023, AHNE reported that they had booked 468 courses for that program year. However, they cancelled 104 (22 percent) of them due to low registrations. Some programs were planned with limited research to determine if the program would meet a need or if there would be sufficient demand for the program. An integrated plan will help link programming efforts to a vision or common goals.

Limited Coordination of Activities

In responding to requests for more programming from some groups, different business areas in CRC have initiated various programs (see Appendix 1) or worked with partners to bring in programs. CRC does not consistently link and guide these activities in an integrated and coordinated way. This could lead to duplication of effort focused on one equity group, or not enough effort focused on another group. For example:

- Women's Only swimming was implemented 20 years ago (recently changed to Women, Girls and Transgender Swim). Women on Weights began 5 years ago with federal government funding for lifelong fitness programs focused on women and girls. Another example is For Girls by Girls, a drop-in program to help girls aged 8-17 build confidence. This program is in its second year. While these programs focus on women and girls, they were created by separate areas within CRC and at different times and not as a coordinated effort to increase participation of women and girls in recreation programming. As no goals were identified, it is unclear what impact these programs have had on the participation of women and girls.
- CRC rents out City recreation facilities and enters into agreements with partners to operate City owned recreation facilities. However, the areas that administer City-run recreation programs (aquatics, dryland, and

AHNE) do not facilitate the rentals or partnerships. These are completed by different groups within CRC and there is limited coordination between the various groups. In addition, there is no requirement for partners to report on how they achieved intended outcomes. Therefore, CRC is unable to accurately determine if rentals and partnerships are contributing, positively or negatively, to the equity goals of the City.

LACK OF PERFORMANCE MEASURES

Performance measurement is a systematic approach to collecting, analyzing, and evaluating how “on track” a program or business area is to achieve its desired outcomes, goals, and objectives. CRC is currently not evaluating its activities as a whole to better understand the overall impact their work is having on delivering equitable programming to Edmontonians. This is because CRC has not identified its equity goals, created performance measures to track progress towards those goals, or identified the data needed to support those measures, to track if the City is meeting its equity goals.

The Community Services Business Plan 2023-2026 has identified three performance measures:

- Overall satisfaction
- Number of lives touched by recreation centres and attractions
- Number of Leisure Access Program participants

However, these measures do not address equity in recreation programming.

The City's *Approach to Community Recreation Facility Planning in Edmonton (2018)* identifies guiding principles that serve as the lenses by which community recreation facilities and amenities are to be shaped and influenced. Two of the nine guiding principles are linked to equitable programming. Those two principles are:

- Access to community recreation facilities is equitable
- Community recreation facilities are inclusive

However, there are no performance measures to determine if CRC is applying those principles.

Limited Data Collection and Usage

According to best practice, parks and recreation agencies should conduct data collection and analysis to understand what gaps and inequities in distribution of recreation programming may exist.

CRC collects some data on registered programs such as facility attendance, program fill rates, number of attendees, and estimated revenue. CRC staff and management use a dashboard to access that data. Also, CRC collects a limited amount of identifying data on participants through customer satisfaction surveys. Examples include age, gender, postal code, and whether participants are part of a group (racialized minority, Indigenous, and LGBTQ2S+). While this data keeps operational areas informed about their daily work, CRC is not using the data to determine if recreation programming at the City is equitable.

In addition, partnerships are a key aspect in the delivery of recreation programming to Edmontonians. The Council Policy, *Enhancing Community Facility Services Through Partnerships* contains provisions for the establishment of a performance monitoring process to ensure ongoing positive partnerships. Our review of six partnership agreements found that some contained requirements for providing some financial output information to the City. However, none of the six agreements contained requirements to report to the City on how the facility or land was actually used, number of users, program fill rates etc. Without this data, CRC cannot gauge how partnerships are contributing to the City's equitable goals.

Finally, CRC does not consistently use socio-demographic data to support resource allocation or compare it to programming and partnership data to understand what gaps and inequities in distribution of recreation programming may exist.

There are options to increase data gathering and usage. What data to gather depends on overall performance measures implemented to track progress against equity goals and specific program objectives. Some examples of data usage to help understand gaps and inequities are:

- Membership scans and drop-in ticket sales by facility and type (child, youth, senior, and adult) to monitor how many and when each of these segments come into a facility. This information can be compared to community-specific characteristics (for example: demographic make-up, income).
- Data for programs aimed at increasing participation for specific groups. For example, youth membership scans and youth drop in ticket sales between 1:00 pm and 5:30 pm on weekdays by facility and quadrant to give an indication of how successful the Youth in Action and after-school youth pass programs are at a specific location, by ward, or overall.
- Program offerings by partners and the City classified by target audience (child, women, seniors, etc.). CRC could use this information to determine if the program split by target audience is consistent with the actual split from census data. It could also be merged with census data to determine if programs are being offered in areas at or near where the target audience lives.

LACK OF RESOURCE ALLOCATION PROCESS

CRC's resources include its inventory of recreational space, funding, and staffing. Resource allocation involves balancing competing needs and priorities, and determining the best course of actions to maximize the use of limited resources in achieving the City's equity goals.

CRC does not track, record, or allocate resources in a way that facilitates equitable distribution of resources. For example, they are currently not tracking expenses by program to provide information on the allocation of funding.

There are many factors that impact allocation of resources. Some factors are fixed. For example, the location of recreation facilities and attractions such as the Valley Zoo and Fort Edmonton Park dictates where some programs can be held. Other factors are more volatile such as demand for programming. For example, pickleball has become popular but squash has been on the decline. However, once CRC has established equity goals, it can then determine how to allocate its limited resources to maximize their use and best support those equity goals.

Gymnasium, Arena, Sports Field, and Aquatic Rentals

After CRC identifies its direct programming offerings, they make any additional inventory in recreation facilities available as rental space. Rentals can be for one-time use such as a birthday party, or a recurring activity such as pool time for various swim clubs. For recurring rentals, CRC signs rental agreements with individuals, organizations, or businesses.

CRC uses an allocation process for renting time in gymnasiums, arenas, sports fields, and aquatics, that aims to be fair and equitable to all eligible renters. It also considers the best use of facilities and the standard of play for each sport.

CRC also considers a variety of other factors when allocating time to rental groups. This includes a group's historical usage, the age of the people in the group, and the amount of demand for the space.

However, we found that using historical use to support allocation of rental time is not equitable to new organizations. Groups with historical use have a 'first right to access' to the space and time slot that they had the previous year. This is done to provide a sense of security to community organizations and Edmontonians. However, as a result, new organizations might have trouble in getting "high" desirable locations and time slots.

CRC has made efforts to address the first right to access in arenas by separating non-prime and prime time and setting certain criteria. For example, if group A's entitlement was 100 hours in the previous year and is reduced to 80 hours in the current year because more groups want to rent time, group A has to give up 20 hours. Some of those 20 hours they give up must now be in prime time. As a result, more prime time hours will become available to newer groups.

The ability to give back only non prime time slots is still an issue for the other three areas: gymnasiums, sports fields, and aquatics, where the demand is higher than supply.

LIMITED COMMUNICATION TACTICS

Informing the community of available programming is an important step towards improving equity in recreation programming. We found CRC communicates with current users through program feedback surveys, social media, the Move Learn Play website, email subscription newsletters, and digital brochures. Most of the communication is in English only, electronic, and takes place inside recreation facilities.

CRC has developed communication plans with the Department's Communications area based on its current year priorities and whether they want to promote a particular program or initiative. These communication plans include marketing strategies with a variety of communication tactics. However, the majority of the communication tactics are again in English only, electronic, and inside recreation facilities. The risk of these communication tactics is that information is not being disseminated effectively to specific segments of the community.

WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT

A plan that integrates, coordinates, and aligns activities with common values and outcomes will help CRC achieve its equitable recreation programming goals effectively. A plan will assist in demonstrating that decisions on equitable recreation programming are supported, transparent, fair, and

evidence-based. It will also help prioritize program development and resource allocation.

Without meaningful performance measures and relevant data, CRC will not be able to assess the collective impact of its programming activities on equity goals. Performance measures help CRC demonstrate and gauge its progress toward addressing recreation programming equity concerns. The Branch can then monitor if actions have the desired effects towards increasing equitability.

In addition, modifying the first right to access in the remaining areas will improve equitable distribution of inventory among rental groups.

The current communication tactics used by CRC might not be reaching all segments of the community. As a result, there is an inequitable distribution of information. This can contribute to lower participation by certain groups and inequitable outcomes.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Develop and implement an integrated plan to assist with the development and delivery of equitable recreation programming. The plan should include:

- A defined vision and goals
- Performance measures and targets
- Allocation model for rental of recreation facilities
- Communications plan to increase awareness of recreation programming

Responsible Party



Branch Manager, Community Recreation and Culture Branch



Accepted by Management

Management Response

Administration accepts the recommendation. The Community Recreation and Culture (CRC) Branch will develop an Integrated Equity Plan aligned to corporate equity objectives, and CRC's Integrated Branch Plan, that will demonstrate progress against equity objectives and identify opportunities to do more. It is important to note that currently, there are not well-defined corporate equity goals and objectives, therefore, to properly align, those will need to be established before finishing the development of the Branch's Integrated Equity Plan. The plan will include:

1. A **vision** and equitable programming **goals** that align with corporate equity goals and corporate strategic direction.
2. Equitable programming **objectives** for recreation programming.
3. **Performance measures, targets** and a corresponding data collection plan for programming.
4. A **communications plan** to increase awareness within diverse communities of City recreation programming opportunities.
5. A review of the current allocation processes and practices to identify options to enhance the **allocation model** that consider the unique needs of community members and user groups. Options will include an implementation approach that reflects anticipated community member and user group impacts as well as budget and revenue impacts. Options considered will align to the established equity

objectives for programming and consider the unique needs of over 40 recognized sports.

Development of the Community Recreation and Culture Branch Integrated Equity Plan will require additional resources, and/or the assistance of the expertise of the Service Innovation and Performance (SIP) Branch who support the delivery and improvement of City programs and services. Financial implications of new objectives will also need to be determined and understood prior to implementation.

**Implementation Date**

March 31, 2026

Enhance Equitable City Programming

KEY FINDINGS

The City is a direct provider of a wide variety of recreation programming. This includes sport, leisure, and heritage programming in a variety of community recreation facilities, parks and open spaces. The City provides registered programs, drop-in programs, and spontaneous use access to meet recreation needs of Edmontonians.

We found that CRC has some objectives for different programs and programming types. However, they have not clearly defined and documented program objectives and are not subsequently tracking if these objectives are met. There are no documented objectives (financial, social, or otherwise) for drop-in and spontaneous use programs, and only some financial objectives for some registered programs. CRC uses metrics such as attendance and customer satisfaction survey results to inform recreation programming planning.

We also found that CRC does not have documented guidance for staff on how best to consider concepts of equity, inclusion, and accessibility when planning recreation programming.

LACK OF PROGRAMMING OBJECTIVES

Programming objectives establish criteria and standards against which program performance can be evaluated. Programming objectives specify the intended effect of the program (for example: increasing girls' participation in sports) or end result of a program (for example: meet 20 percent profit over program costs).

We found that CRC has some objectives for different programs and programming types. For example:

- Financial objectives for registered arts programs at the City Arts Centre (AHNE programming) and registered Learn to Swim programs (aquatics programming).
- Equity objectives for the *For Girls By Girls* drop-in sports programming (dryland programming).

However, CRC has not clearly defined and documented these objectives (financial, social, or otherwise) for all programs and programming types. In addition, there are no documented objectives for drop-in and spontaneous use programs.

CRC is also not tracking if it is meeting the financial or other program objectives it has set. It uses other metrics, such as number of registrants, attendance, and customer satisfaction to determine if a course should be canceled or continue to be offered in its current way.

Financial and social (including equity) objectives may be correlated and meeting one objective might impact the achievement of another objective. Therefore, it is important for CRC to identify key program objectives for each program. An example of the correlation between objectives is the impact the Leisure Access Program (LAP) has on recreation programming.

Leisure Access Program Impact on Programming

The LAP allows eligible Edmontonians access to the City's recreation facilities and attractions for free or at a reduced cost. It also includes drop-in child minding service, discounted transit passes, and drop-in shinny and member skating. As of December 31, 2023 there were 97,795 registered LAP members. This number has increased by 43 percent since 2019.

The number of program registrations by LAP members has also increased since 2019. It has gone from 9,643 in 2019 to 17,933 registrations in 2023, an 86 percent increase.

An increase like this could have a negative impact on the cost-recovery results of various programs. CRC may have to increase program fees or the number of fully paid participants to make up for the reduced revenue resulting from LAP registrations. However, this increase of LAP members could also have a positive impact on the equity objective of increasing access to recreation programming for low-income individuals and families.

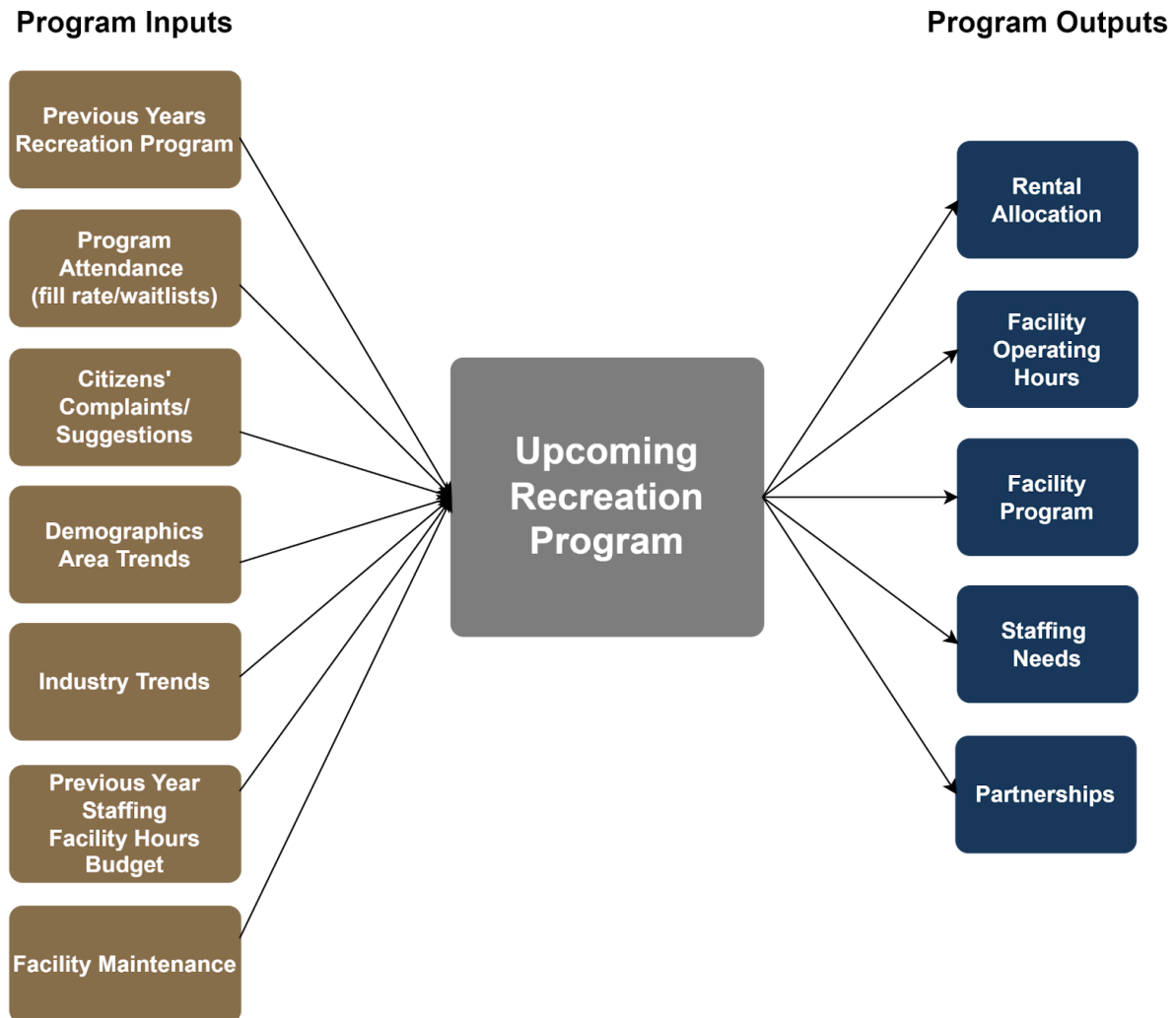
Financial objectives and equity objectives are connected. As

CRC is not actually tracking financial and social objectives by program, we are unable to determine if impacts like the ones described for the LAP have materialized.

LACK OF GUIDING DOCUMENTS ON EQUITY, INCLUSION, AND ACCESSIBILITY

Documenting processes and procedures enables teams to work together more efficiently, identifies areas of risk, and ensures everyone is aligned.

CRC has an organic, fluid, and historic approach to recreation programming planning. Each of the three specialized areas of aquatics, dryland, and AHNE have their own approach and timelines for planning recreation programming. Exhibit 2 provides a high-level illustration of factors that go into creating recreation programming, and once the programming is determined, what additional outputs are established based on that programming. Generally, planning starts with the previous year or season's recreation program. Then staff look at various factors and make adjustments. Once the upcoming recreation programming has been established, other outputs such as facility operating hours, staffing needs, and time left for rental accommodation are determined.

Exhibit 2: High-level illustration of recreation programming planning process

We found CRC does not have documented guidance for staff on how best to consider concepts of equity, inclusion, and accessibility when planning recreation programming. Some examples of concepts to consider are:

- Acknowledging assumptions and biases.
- Identifying social inequities (for example: communication barriers) and identity factors (for example: age, race, ability, education, ethnicity, geography, health, language, class, sex, and gender).

- Exploring equity measures (to remove inequalities or barriers) that can be taken.

This type of guidance would assist staff to connect their day to day work to the City's Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+) Framework as laid out in the City's Art of Inclusion. The Art of Inclusion is the City's diversity and inclusion framework. It is based on four pillars (diversity, equity, skill, and growth) that provide further rationale for staff to work towards equity. The GBA+ framework is a process that examines how policies, programs, and services impact individuals and groups. GBA+ aims to increase inclusion and inclusive practices, reduce discrimination, and ensure equality of outcomes for employees and those the City serves.³

WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT

Setting and tracking of objectives for individual programs would help CRC make informed decisions about whether or not to continue with a program offering. This could help identify opportunities for reducing, eliminating, or outsourcing those programs that are not meeting their objectives and free up resources to try other programs.

Identifying and tracking the achievement of programming objectives (financial, social, or otherwise), would enable CRC to assess if programs are meeting specific objectives.

Documented guidance for staff on how best to consider concepts of equity, inclusion, and accessibility will assist staff when planning recreation programming to advance equity objectives and explicitly remove barriers that perpetuate inequality in Edmonton.

³ GBA+, City of Edmonton website, https://onecity.edmonton.ca/culture_workplace/gba-plus

RECOMMENDATION 3

Identify and track minimum objectives for each programming type (registered program, spontaneous use, drop-in) and individual program to assess if they are meeting their objectives.

**Responsible Party**

Branch Manager, Community Recreation and Culture Branch



Accepted by Management

Management Response

Administration accepts the recommendation. As part of Administration's development of an Integrated Equity Plan (noted in recommendation 2), the Branch will develop equity **objectives** for each major programming area, including allocation models, to assess the performance of the programming.

**Implementation Date**

June 30, 2026

RECOMMENDATION 4

Develop documented guidance for how to consider concepts of equity, inclusion, and accessibility when planning recreation programming.

**Responsible Party**

Branch Manager, Community Recreation and Culture Branch



Accepted by Management

Management Response

Administration accepts the recommendation. After the development of the Integrated Equity Plan, Administration will develop documented **guidance** (i.e., a tool) for staff to build a shared understanding of the Branch vision and goals established to support equitable programming. Guidance will support staff across the Branch to align program delivery with established objectives, measures and targets and ensure concepts of equity, inclusion, and accessibility are included when planning new and existing recreation programming.



Implementation Date

September 30, 2026

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We would like to thank the staff and management of the Community Recreation and Culture Branch for their cooperation during the audit.

Appendix 1 - Recreation Programming for Equity Groups

This list serves to illustrate that CRC developed numerous programs directed at increasing equity in recreation programming for various groups. This is not a comprehensive list.

Program Name	Equity Group It Serves
Accessible communication services program	Deaf/hard of hearing community
Adapted Programs, including SwimAbilities Adapted swimming lessons	Persons with Disabilities (PWD) registered and drop-in programs
Dream Night at the Zoo	Chronically ill children and their families
Zoo partnership with Edmonton Catholic Schools 100 Voices preschool immersion	Children with learning delays
Primary Care Network partnership	Community based exercise programs for those who have been referred to a primary care physician for health/wellness exercise
Alberta Health Services partnerships	For individuals who have been ill and under a physician's care to exercise and need the support to attend a facility
Partnership with KulturCity to provide sensory kits at the Zoo, Muttart, and John Janzen Nature Centre	Visitors with sensory stimulation sensitivities
Adaptive sledge hockey Special Olympics Wheelchair sports in City gyms Water works aquatic exercise program Aquafitness classes	People who require mobility accommodations
Leisure Access Program	Low income families
Women on Weights For Girls by Girls StrongHER Women and girls public swim	Women, girls and transgender
Youth in Action	Youth aged 12-15 years old

After School Youth Pass Youth after School Program	Youth aged 8-17 years old
Green Shacks and Play Rangers (free, drop in)	Children, low income families
Newcomer Customized Cooking classes	For newcomers
Nikaniw Youth Leadership Program	Indigenous youth
Jumpstart Bus to Swim Partnership	New Canadians, low income
French Learn to Swim	French speaking people
Adapted Swim	Sensory friendly for people with disabilities and their families and/or caregivers
Water Safety Ambassador Program	New Canadians, low income, Persons with Disabilities (PWD), non English speaking customers, non swimmers
Virtual fitness, arts, and attractions programs	People who lack transportation to facilities for various reasons.