# Approaches to Creating Inclusive Events and Outdoor Programs

Created by: Canadian Outdoor Summit Adaptive and Inclusive Working Group

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*"Diversity is a fact. Inclusion is a choice and an action".*

## Overview

For each of us we can naturally connect to the benefits of time spent in the great outdoors. Nature has been a co-facilitator for experiences in our lives. However those living with barriers or disabilities have limitations to access some wild and natural spaces and places. When we work to remove those barriers and bring people with disabilities into nature there is the opportunity to develop personal skills that improve health, aid in stress management, and gain socialization skills. "Many outdoor education programs focus on the development of personal skills, such as building self-esteem, personal fitness, and stress reduction" (Spark BC) which is why it is valuable to develop practices and approaches that broaden the notion of inclusion and access into the outdoors.

Inclusion begins in the first stages of any event, program, and opportunity. It starts through exploring the concept of "social inclusion". The aim of this booklet is to provide a useful framework that can guide the development of strategies to support and welcome participation of all people to the Canadian Outdoor Summit as well as educate leaders about concepts that can create more inclusive nature-based opportunities which can be integrated into organizational strategies, approaches and procedures.

Through collaborating on ways to create more access, we can complement each other's organizational values and skills and foster inclusion in the outdoor sector. We believe that collective impact brings people together, in a purposeful way to achieve social change and illustrates that we can do more with less if we do it together. This booklet reflects several organizations' frameworks, represents people living with diverse needs and honours peoples' experiences as unique and individualized.

Goals of the booklet:

- Introduce the concept of social inclusion as a framework to support event, program planning, and decision-making processes.
- Educate the Canadian Outdoor Summit working groups about diversity and the range of abilities that should be considered to create authentic connection and access at events and in programs.
- Illustrate that with the right group of people, an ability-centered perspective, and equipment you can create access to wild spaces and places.
- Explore an approach that identifies the people, places and practices that are unique to each community and how by uncovering the three we can discover resources and stakeholders to be involved in inclusive nature-based opportunities.

Please note:

Inclusion and Access are very broad concepts and this booklet will not cover every aspect of creating inclusion and access for all. The focus of the content is geared towards supporting people with barriers, disabilities, and diverse backgrounds.

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- Spark BC
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## Parameters To Share

One project that has studied social inclusion issues extensively has concluded that inclusion is linked to “both the feeling and the reality of belonging.” The feeling of belonging is based on working together to build “caring, cooperation, and trust” while the reality of belonging “comes through equity and fairness, social and economic justice, and cultural as well as spiritual respect.” (Ontario Prevention Clearinghouse, 2005)

The following are values that serve as a foundation for work on social inclusion:

**Social justice** – Distribution of social and economic resources of society for the benefit of all people.

**Valuing diversity** – Recognition and respect for the diversity of cultures, races, ethnicity, languages, religions, abilities, age, and sexual orientation; valuing contributions of both women and men to the social, economic, and cultural vitality of society.

**Opportunities for choice** – Respect for the right of individuals to make choices that affect their lives.

**Entitlement to rights and services** – Recognition of universal entitlement to rights and services as set out in human rights covenants, charters and legislation.

**Working together** – Building common interests and relationships as the basis for actions to achieve shared goals. (Health Canada, Atlantic Region, 2002)

Working with community agencies compliments one another’s services by building on each other’s skillsets, raises awareness of one another’s mission and collectively moves ideas forward around inclusion, stewarding our natural world and personal growth.

## Philosophy To Share

The Inclusion Framework model, developed by Play by the Rules/Australian Sports Commission, uses the ‘7 Pillars of Inclusion’ as an overarching inclusion philosophy. The ‘7 Pillars’ model provides a ‘helicopter’ view of inclusion and looks at the common elements that contribute to creating inclusive environments that reflects the diverse communities that we live in.

This model focuses on strategy, planning, and programs for inclusion based around seven keys elements that are universally applicable to all target groups. The seven pillars are:

- Access
- Attitude
- Choice
- Partnerships
- Communication
- Policy
- Opportunities

To embody the framework, you should: Ask, Listen, Learn and Plan

**Ask**

- Consult with individuals, advocates, disability organisations and start working closely with individuals to identify potential participant needs for the event and programs.
- Ask simple questions to find out if individuals have any special requirements that must be accommodated for example; “what can we do to assist you in accessing the outdoor events and activities?”
- Become aware. Examine the environment you manage and the service you provide with a view to potential obstacles and difficulties that may exist for people with disabilities.
- Develop programs and activities in collaboration with local groups who have experience in working with people with diverse needs.

**Listen**

- Recognise that people with diverse needs, family members, advocates, and organisations working closely with individuals are the experts on their accessibility requirements.
- Listen attentively to feedback.
- Listen to any suggestions made for addressing requirements.
- Regularly review progress, plan for any further requirements, and adapt as needed.

**Learn**

- Work collaboratively to plan, change and adapt. Ensure that there is clear information gathered to inform the design of any proposed changes to make the great outdoors more accessible to people with diverse needs.
- Complete any additional research, consultation and an intake process to learn about individuals’ requirements prior to carrying out any work.

**Plan**

- Develop a plan in consultation with local relevant disability organisations that will support and guide in making the services provided more accessible.
- Set out a plan to address identified issues as well as back up options.
- Set out clear protocols and guidance for engagement events, workshops, and social gatherings and what types of adaptive equipment is needed.
- Set out roles and responsibilities and create a Disability Liaison/Access position within your organisation and/or event committee.
- Invite caregivers, family members and support workers to be apart of the event as needed at no cost.

## Inclusion and Belonging Charter

The Canadian Outdoor Summit's Accessibility and Inclusion Working Group represents agencies and industries that support people of all ages and abilities to access the outdoors and take part in inclusive nature-based opportunities. We collectively believe that everyone should have time in nature. Our people approach is to always see people as people and focus on people's abilities first. It is through this perspective that we can form authentic connection, be creative, adapt and create an optimal experience.

Although full accessibility includes more than physical access, accessible design is fundamental to an inclusive community. The goals of accessible design go well beyond access to facilities and must include:

- **Freedom of movement:** To go where you want when you want is a central liberty of our society, one that most community members take for granted. Accessible buildings and public spaces and readily available, accessible transportation and equipment are the foundation of access.

- **Sense of inclusion:** To support the independence, comfort, and self-esteem of citizens with diverse needs communities must make an effort to include everyone at all levels of decision making and in all public happenings.

- **Equal participation:** As full citizens, people with disabilities must have equal access to opportunities so that they may lead healthy, happy lives. Communities should strive to include, as equals, people with diverse needs in all activities and at all levels of society.

- **Signage:** Clear, readable signs; visual feedback for interactive equipment.

- **Communications:** Telephones with, amplification; TTD stations; live captioning; live sign language translations at public events.

- **Safety measures:** Visual alarm signals; procedures for alerting deaf persons; visual equivalent to emergency instructions; staff training.

### Questions to consider:

- Who are the current users of your facility or service?
- Who may benefit from your facility or service that is not currently involved?
- What are the barriers that may prevent some users from accessing your facility or service?
- Is there proper signage, access, information available in a variety of formats and languages,
- Are the programs costs and details accessible for people or a barrier?
- What types of adaptive equipment is needed and who has the experience to facilitate the use of specialized equipment

### Inclusion activities to consider:

**Where in the world were you born?** Post a map of the world in a public space. Ask participants to use a pin to indicate where they were born. Summarize and share the results.

**Accessibility tour.** Invite a person who uses a wheelchair to guide you through your facility indicating common trouble-areas (if found). Do the tour with people from other disability groups (vision, hearing, cognitive impairment and other diverse needs). Report to event planners and program, developers.

**Speakers' Series –** Invite representatives from community organizations to give a talk on issues of importance to the community.

**Directory of Services (or referral services) –** Ensure that staff and volunteers have current information about the range of agencies and organizations within the community.

**Partnership Programs –** Collaborate with local partners who have experience working with people with diverse needs, supporting complex needs, knowledge around emotional and physical adaptations and modifications, adaptive equipment, and mental health considerations. Ie. an Inclusive Hike that offers the use of a TrailRider for a rider that may require it.

**Brainstorm possible community partners** and develop strategies for building relationships to enhance knowledge around places to explore, people to work with, and the practice and skills needed to create safe and enjoyable outdoor adventures.

## Checklist

This checklist is a framework of ideas for organizations and program developers to ensure inclusion is an aspect of planning and program design. The checklist is divided into three components that “when completed should form a healthy foundation for inclusion in your organization. The checklist leaves room to add items appropriate to your organization’s unique circumstances”. (Spark BC)

**Considerations to explore**

- Collect demographic information in a respectful fashion
- Use mapping and evaluation tools to understand your facility and natural spaces
- Consult with groups, organizations and individuals with diverse needs and backgrounds

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**Build integration and commitment of inclusion at a leadership level**

- Confirm a vision for change and include in statements of purpose, mission and vision
- Get buy-in and support from decision makers
- Educate staff and other stakeholders about inclusion
- Build relationships with funders and other supporters
- Establish engagement processes to ensure there is ongoing involvement with local community services
- Establish a committee who collaborates with other working groups to share ideas around inclusion and access
- Review of policies and procedures (e.g. Participant Protection Policy) and develop recommendations for change

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**Develop an action plan that includes achievable results**

- Ongoing training and support for staff, volunteers and members
- Review of volunteer, staff, and facilitator recruitment, orientation and training program
- Engagement with people with lived experiences, and community partners
- Ongoing assessment, monitoring and evaluating

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## Glossary of Terms

**Social Isolation:** to create and sustain inclusive communities for the mutual benefit of all people, and to ensure that community voices of diversity are recognized

**Universal Design:** The principles of universal design is to make products and environments usable to all people to the greatest extent possible without the need for adaptation or specialized design. The application of universal design benefits all members of a community.

**Diversity:** Diversity is about the individual. It is about the variety of unique dimensions, qualities, and characteristics we all possess.

**Inclusion**: Inclusion is about the collective. It is about creating a culture that strives for equity and embraces, respects, accepts and values difference.

**Mobility impairments:** People whose disability affects their mobility may use wheelchairs, scooters, walkers, crutches, or canes. Others have hidden mobility impairments that impede their ability to move quickly, climb stairs, or walk more than a short distance.

**Visual impairments:** People with visual impairments are either blind or have limited vision and require special design considerations.

**Hearing impairments:** Citizens with hearing impairments require visual cues and specialized communications equipment.

**Cognitive impairments:** These are invisible impairments like learning or developmental disabilities and impediments created by mental health issues that need to be considered in accessibility policies.