

# Community Program Planning Guide



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# Introduction

This guide is designed to help walk you through the steps of planning and delivering a program in your community. It also includes a program planning template to assist you in mapping out the steps along the way to developing your program and maximizing opportunity for success.

Community programs create opportunities for neighbours to meet, visit, have fun and work together. If you are considering running a new program in Strathcona County, here are some tips to help you create a successful program that meets the needs of your target audience. These suggestions are meant to help you get started and should be edited to meet your particular group needs.

## What are the benefits of planning programs in your community?

- Provides opportunities to get to know your neighbours
- Establishes friendships
- Creates a sense of belonging
- Promotes community pride
- Promotes safe communities through knowing who your neighbours are
- Provides support for each other
- Opportunity to learn new skills
- Share your gifts and talents
- To explore your community history
- It's fun!

# Getting started

## *Program planning checklist*

- ✓ *Define goals and organize*
- ✓ *Assess emerging trends*
- ✓ *Know your demographics*
- ✓ *Possible barriers to participation*
- ✓ *Partnerships*
- ✓ *Funding*
- ✓ *Program spaces*
- ✓ *Program date and time*
- ✓ *Budget development*
- ✓ *Fee structure*
- ✓ *Registration process*
- ✓ *Marketing and advertising*
- ✓ *Program delivery*
- ✓ *Program evaluation*

## **Define your group/organization's goals**

- What do you want to achieve with this program?
- What opportunities will this program create for your community or organization?
- What are the needs and assets in your community?

## **Create an organizing committee**

- Find individuals with talent, time, commitment and creativity in:
  - Finance
  - Marketing & communications
  - Site/facility set up
  - Volunteer and staff recruitment

## **Trends assessment**

- What is emerging in your area?
- What has been done in the past?
- Are there synergies with similar programs in your community and if so, opportunities to partner?
- Is there capacity for your program based on what is currently being offered?

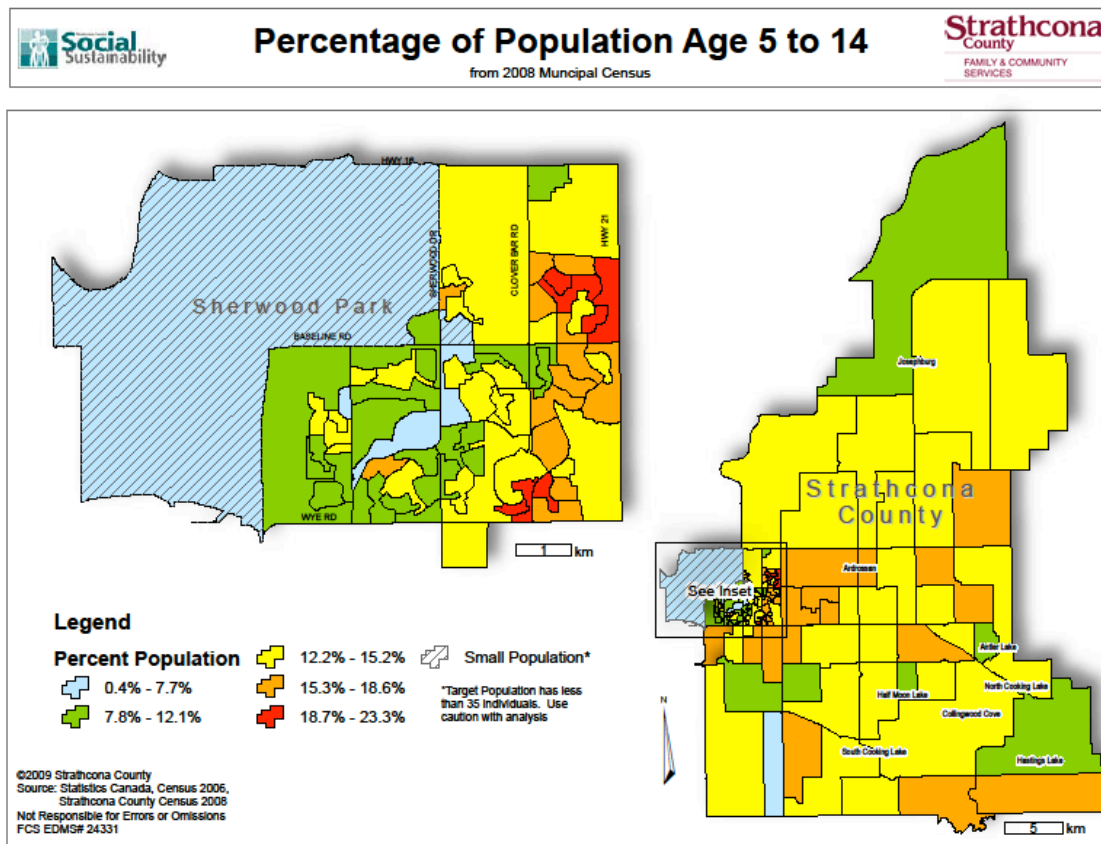
## **Demographics**

- Who is your target audience?
- What needs would your program meet in your community?

- Do needs warrant creating a new program now or would a survey, focus group or pilot program provide more information on future development?

## Community Mapping

Community mapping is an information tool used by social service organizations across Canada to plan for and develop socially sustainable programs and policies. It depicts social strengths, gaps and needs in a visual, easily understood format and can validate perceptions, build consensus and support decision-making. The process of community mapping provides a way of determining the demographics in your community based on age, income or other factors.



### Note:

If you are looking to target a specific group (e.g. children age 5 to 14, or families new to the country), community mapping allows you to identify and target your marketing and advertising to a specific user group. This tool can assist you in identifying existing barriers to participation in your programs. Strathcona County Family and Community Services have utilized this tool to target specific information for programs and services.

<http://www.strathcona.ca/departments/family-and-community-services/social-plans-social-information-and-surveys/community-mapping>

## Barriers to participation

Think about the people in your community and consider what could prevent them from participating in your program. It is important to examine all possible barriers to ensure access to your programs.

Possible barriers may include:

- Income
- Age demographic
- Accessibility
- Proximity to recreation facilities/community halls etc.
- Time and day of the program
- Transportation

## Resources

### Partnerships

Working with your community partners can help make program planning and delivery easier. Is there opportunity to share space, equipment or instructors? Examples of partnerships could include:

- County organizations:
  - County Library
  - Recreation, Parks and Culture
  - Family and Community Services
- Schools
  - School boards, home schooling groups, parent and teacher associations
- Subject matter experts
  - Working together with field experts in the type of program you want to offer can give you access to information about potential new developments and the opportunity to gain contacts and expand program knowledge/development
- Other
  - Local sports groups
  - Older adult groups/clubs
  - Youth groups
  - Parent groups
  - Local business and organizations (e.g. boy scouts, girl guides, boys and girls clubs)
  - Local health authorities

- Cultural and social organizations

## Funding

What financial resources are available to you and how do you access them? Who can you contact for more information on funding? Consider researching the following options:

- Grants
  - Government of Alberta – Alberta Culture
  - Community Initiatives Program (Project/Program Based or Operating)  
<http://culture.alberta.ca/community-and-voluntary-services/community-grants/community-initiatives-program/>
  - County Clothes-Line Foundation – Community Funding  
<http://www.countyclothes-line.com/commfunding.html>
- Local business or other organizations

## Program spaces

Consider what type of space you require for your program and what suitable options are available to you. Appropriate space for the type of program you are running is essential to its success and satisfaction on the part of the participants. Accessibility is very important and must be considered. For information on floor plans, maps and other services, see below:

### Indoor venues: (Community Halls, County Facilities)

- For amenities, floor plans, booking information and other services:  
<http://www.strathcona.ca/departments/recreation-parks-and-culture/special-events/event-planning-toolkit/indoor-event-venues/>

### Outdoor venues:

- For amenities, site plans, field and diamond inventory and outdoor booking requests:  
<http://www.strathcona.ca/departments/recreation-parks-and-culture/special-events/event-planning-toolkit/outdoor-event-venues/>

*Each County facility or hall is unique in its daily operating procedures. There may be varied expectations and policies for room set-up, take down and clean up, general housekeeping, emergency procedures etc. Contact the Facility Bookings Representative to obtain clarification on what the facility staff does and what responsibilities there may*

*be for your program organizers on site. Knowing the expectations ahead of time will help avoid any misunderstandings or misconceptions during delivery of your programs.*

*You will also find maps, community information and highlights about each facility to help you plan your program(s).*

## Program planning

### Date and time

- Will this be a one day program/workshop or will it run for several weeks?
- Who are your potential participants and what would be the best day of the week and time of day to run the program for them?
- What would be a suitable length of time for each day of the program?

### Budget

- Expenses: what are the costs to run this program?
  - Instructor
  - Specialized equipment
  - Rental fees
  - Insurance, licenses or permits
  - Advertising
  - Food
- Revenue: who is paying?
  - Participants
  - Community group or organization
  - Sponsors
  - Grants
  - A combination of the above
- Create a budget tracking system
  - Compile your list of expenses and revenues into one document
  - Include a contingency amount (e.g. 10 – 15% of your total budget) to ensure that the outcome corresponds to the financial goals for your program
  - Don't overestimate your income
  - Secure approval for your budget if required
- Manage your budget
  - Track your actual expenses and revenues for comparison with your budget targets



- Make adjustments, as necessary (for example determine if you need to make more money, reduce your expenses or spend more money to achieve approved goals)

### Fee structure

- Determine expectations: make money, break even or subsidize the program
- Determine the program cost based on expectations
- Do a market comparison of similar programs in other communities

### Registration process

- Determine the best method for registration (phone, on-line, mail in, in person)
- Determine who will collect registration information and how
- Collect participant information including any medical considerations, behavior issues and information on who can pick the participant up if this is a program for children or youth under the age of 18
- Create a cancellation policy: collect contact information and ensure adequate notice is given to cancel a program

## Program promotion

### Marketing and advertising

Determine the best way to reach your potential participants (e.g., Facebook & Twitter, printed materials, e-newsletters, website, changeable copy signs, schools, flyer drop offs etc.) Consider the demographics of your target audience when developing your marketing strategy. For example, if your program is for young families with children or youth, social media may be the preferred method of communication to get your information out to them. Remember to build in enough time for the promotion of the program and try to find several ways to reach out to the people that you want to attract.

Promotional information should include:

- Program details (e.g., title and description of the program, date, time, location, fees, age of participants, any equipment requirements)
- Contact information
- Registration information
- Cancellation policy

Promotional tools available through Strathcona County include:

- Community road signs

- Recreation guide
- Strathcona County website <http://www.strathcona.ca>
- media release - fax/email a release to local and/or regional print/broadcast media
- [Strathcona County Community Calendar](#)

*Learn more*

**Please send any requests to advertise your recreation related programs to [recreation@strathcona.ca](mailto:recreation@strathcona.ca) for consideration.**

Other alternatives:

- Strathcona Volunteer and Information Centre
- Radio, local television networks, print media

## Program delivery

### Program staff

- Confirm your instructor is qualified to deliver the programs and meets any required certifications and industry standards
- Obtain a completed Police Service Information check if the instructor will be working with children and youth under 18
- If you are contracting an instructors' services, a written contract is recommended including proof of adequate liability insurance
  - Contact the Worker's Compensation Board, Canada Customs and Revenue Agency, and your insurance provider to determine how to best deal with each scenario

### Orientation and program set-up

- Staff/volunteers
  - Check qualifications, specialized training or certifications to ensure they are current
  - All contracts and agreements for instructors and rental space are signed prior to program start
  - Orientation and safety training
    - Emergency procedures, first aid etc.
    - Duties/roles and expectations for program delivery
    - Set-up and take-down procedure for the program venue
- Program equipment and supplies
  - Adequate equipment and supplies are in place and in good working order
- Program registration

- Ensure the instructor has attendance forms or class lists with names of everyone registered in the program
- Track attendees to ensure everyone present has registered and paid

### Program follow-up

- Ensure all outstanding invoices have been paid
- Store (if applicable) or remove equipment and supplies from the program venue

## Program evaluation

Program evaluation is the systematic gathering, analysis and reporting of data about a program to assist in decision making. Evaluation should be an integral part of program management and should occur during all phases of a program.

Your program evaluation is an important step in determining what went well, what could improve and what you learned from this experience. Survey your program participants, staff and volunteers to gain important feedback on:

- Prime days/times/locations for the program
- What improvements/changes could or should be made
- Assess needs of target audience
- Improving program materials and equipment
- To assess the efficiency of a program (cost-benefit analysis)
- What new program opportunities would be beneficial to your community group

To be successful, you need to make ongoing decisions about the programs you deliver. Questions should be specific and clear and answer key questions that support your organization's goals. Program evaluations directly reflect a program's process and/or outcome objectives. Some methods you can use to gather information and feedback are:

- Focus groups
- On-line surveys
- Questionnaires
- Social media

# Program Planning Template

Name of program: \_\_\_\_\_

**1. Rationale:**

a. What is the purpose of this program and how will it meet your community needs

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

b. Are there synergies or overlap with other groups/organizations (e.g. Community groups/partners, Schools)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**2. Research:**

a. Identified need for this program and the capacity for it in your community (emerging trends, population demographics)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

b. Budget Assessment - Cost to run (instructors, equipment, supplies) vs. fee = potential revenue

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**3. Benefits:**

a. Potential benefits of the program and impacts (meeting community needs)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**4. Risks:**

a. Potential risks in program delivery and plan for risk reduction

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**5. Program details:**

- a. Who is qualified to deliver your program (will you need instructors/coaches with specific skills or certifications?)

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- b. Facilities and space options for program delivery (appropriate space, location, availability)

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- c. Scheduling (best day/time to run, drop-in or registered)

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**6. Communication strategies:**

- a. With whom do you need to communicate the program information? (Schools, local businesses, churches, parent groups etc.)

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- b. How will program information be delivered? (e.g. on-line, social media, newspaper)

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**7. Program Evaluation:**

- a. What performance indicators will you use to measure success of this program (program pilot, focus groups, surveys)

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