
A Look at Leisure #42: Desired Activities and Barriers to Participation

This bulletin discusses barriers and how they vary for different activities and different segments of the population. The information is based on results from the Alberta Recreation Survey, conducted in 2000 by Alberta Community Development in cooperation with the Alberta Centre for Well-Being, Alberta Environment, and the Cities of Calgary, Edmonton, Lethbridge, and Red Deer. The data from the 2000 study are contrasted with those of similar studies conducted in 1981, 1988, 1992 and 1996.

Introduction

The percentage of active Canadians increased at a rate of one percent between 1981 and 1995. This small increase has prompted an interest in what prevents Canadians from participating in leisure activities. By identifying the existing barriers to recreation activity, agencies can aim to reduce the number of Canadians who get none or not enough activity to experience benefits. (Spence, 1998)

Barriers to activity are distinctive in three ways. The greater majority of barriers are specific to the individual. For example, barriers relating to energy level, motivation, and personal injury. There are also barriers that relate to the physical environment. These barriers represent obstacles associated with facilities, transportation, and instructors. Finally, there are barriers relating to the social environment. These include lack of family/friend support and no companion to participate with. (Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute, 1996)

Research into individual, environmental, and social barriers can help identify differences within age, gender, social, and economic status. It is important to understand how barriers affect society. For example, it has been found that child and adolescent leisure involvement is important in shaping leisure participation later in life. (Scott and Willits, 1998) Therefore, understanding and overcoming childhood and adolescent barriers can help to increase adult leisure participation.

Research into barriers to leisure and recreation activities is also important in distinguishing between why an individual does not participate in an activity and why one ceases to participate in an activity. (Nadirova and Jackson, 2000) For example, barriers associated with confidence level are important in attracting people to participate in an activity, whereas barriers linked to costs or time management are considered when an individual ceases to participate in an activity. Both aspects of barrier research is important to the recreation practitioner in attracting and maintaining clientele.

The 2000 Alberta Recreation Survey explored respondents' desire to begin participating in a leisure or recreation activity. In addition, respondents were asked to identify the barriers they face which have prevented them from participating.

Highlights

Highlights from the 2000 Alberta Recreation Survey, which are discussed in this issue, include the following:

- 41.8% of those responding to the survey wanted to start participating in an activity. Aerobics/fitness/aquasize, golf and canoeing/kayaking/rowing/rafting were the most desired activities.
- The desire to start an activity was greatest for females; desire declined with age for both gender groups.
- Interest in starting an activity was related to a higher education at the post secondary level.
- The most important barriers to participation were cost, lack of time, distance, and lack of physical ability.
- Barriers to participation affect each individual. However, the degree of impact varies among males and females, age groups, and income level.

Desire to Start an Activity

The 2000 Alberta Recreation Survey asked respondents if there were any leisure or recreation activity they would like to start doing on a regular basis. 41.8% responded "yes". The remainder did not indicate any desire to start a new activity.

The desire to start a new activity varied within the population. Significant patterns are noted below:

- More females (53.2%) than males (46.8%) expressed an interest in starting a new activity.

- There was a significant decline in a desire to start an activity as age increased. About two-thirds (66.7%) of the young adult group (under 25 years) desired an activity, compared to 30.4% over the age of 55. Statistics for respondents over the age of 55 desiring a new activity is down from 34.8% in 1996.
- Interest in starting a new activity increased with education level. The lowest level of desire was found in respondents with less than a high school diploma (62.3%).
- Household income was unrelated to the desire to start a new activity (approximately 50% of respondents in each household group expressed interest in a new activity).

Many factors are involved in motivating people to be interested in starting a new activity. More than half of all respondents said they did not desire a new activity. This may be due to the idea that the words leisure activities represents 'play', and, therefore is not as important as 'work'. However, lack of desire may also be due to viewing the activity as 'work', thereby taking away from relaxation time. (Progress in Prevention, 1996)

Types of Desired Activities

Respondents were asked to name the activity they wished to start. In total, 58 different pursuits were reported. The ten activities mentioned most frequently are:

1. Aerobics/fitness/aquasize
2. Golf
3. Canoeing/kayaking/rafting/rowing
4. Bicycling
5. Swimming
6. In-line skating
7. Hiking/backpacking
8. Martial arts
9. Skiing/downhill skiing
10. Running/jogging

Desired activities were grouped into categories to facilitate analyses. The categories are identified in Table 1, along with examples of activities in each group.

Table 1 – Important Barriers to Participation

1. Exercise-Oriented Activities (44.9%)

Examples: Bicycling, ice-skating, aerobics/fitness/aquasize, in-line skating.

Main Barriers: too busy with work, cost of equipment and supplies, too busy with family.

2. Self-Propelled Outdoor Activities (14.7%)

Examples: Backpacking, canoeing, cross-country skiing.

Main Barriers: cost of equipment and supplies, too busy with work, too busy with family.

3. Golf (7.9%)

Main Barriers: admission fees and charges, cost of equipment and supplies, facilities overcrowded.

4. Team Sports (7.1%)

Examples: Baseball, basketball, ice hockey, soccer, football.

Main Barriers: too busy with work, too busy with family, cost of equipment and supplies.

5. Creative, Cultural, Social and Passive Activities (7.0%)

Examples: Hobbies, attending courses, dancing, tai chi, video and computer games.

Main Barriers: too busy with work, cost of equipment and supplies, too busy with family.

6. Outdoor Experience (6.4%)

Examples: Hunting/shooting, camping, bird watching, nature walks, hiking.

Main Barriers: too busy with work, cost of equipment and supplies, facilities overcrowded.

7. Resource-Based Outdoor Activities (5.9%)

Examples: Snowmobiling, boating, fishing, horseback riding.

Main Barriers: cost of equipment and supplies, admission charges, too busy with work, not near home.

8. Downhill Skiing/Snowboarding (3.8%)

Main Barriers: admission fees and charges, cost of equipment and supplies, facilities overcrowded.

The percentages of respondents who desire each category of activity are shown in Table 1. Exercise-oriented activities were the most frequently desired. Self-propelled outdoor activities came next in

importance, followed by golf. Golf increased in importance from fifth place in 1996 to third in 2000. Team sports interest increased noticeably from tenth place for importance in 1996 to fourth in 2000.

The types of desired activities varied for males and females and within age groups.

- Males more frequently wanted to participate in team sports, outdoor experiences, and downhill skiing/snowboarding. Females were more likely to be interested in exercise-oriented activities, and creative/cultural/social and passive activities.
- Younger respondents were more likely to desire team sports. Older adults were least attracted to strenuous activity. Frequent mention was made of creative/cultural/social/passive activities and outdoor experiences for those aged 65 and over. Activities involving the outdoors (resource based outdoor activities, self-propelled outdoor activities, downhill skiing/snowboarding) were desired most by respondents aged 25-45. Differences in recreation behaviour within each age group are outlined in Table 2.

Current Recreation Activities

The 2000 Alberta Recreation Survey also looked at respondents' current recreation activities. This is important in seeing how the desire to start an activity was linked to current recreation behaviour.

About three quarters of respondents indicated they had participated in six to thirty activities in the previous year. The most popular number of activities participated in was between 11 and 16.

The desire to start an activity was linked to respondents' current participation in recreation activities, and was greatest for those participating in a wide range of leisure pursuits. Those respondents with fewer current recreation activities were less interested in starting a new activity. Over half of all respondents participating in 26 or more current activities wish to begin another activity. This compares with 22% of respondents reporting five or fewer current activities.

Those respondents currently participating in 26 activities or more, were most interested in starting downhill skiing/snowboarding, self-propelled outdoor activities, team sports, outdoor experiences and/or exercise-oriented activities.

This type of information is important for determining programming and marketing strategies for recreation. In addition, activities of an exercise or outdoor nature are most likely to attract current recreation participants to a new activity.

Importance of Barriers

Cost of equipment/supplies is the most mentioned barrier to participation. This was followed by too busy with work, admission fees/charges, too busy with family, and facilities overcrowded.

Table 2 – Percent Wishing To Start Activity Types By Age Group for 2000

Age Group*	1	2	3	4	5
Activity Type					
No New Activity Desired	28	42	52	59	76
Exercise-Oriented	44	48	46	44	44
Team Sports	17	9	7	4	4
Creative/Cultural/Social/Passive Activities	4	3	6	9	15
Resource-Based Outdoor	4	7	7	6	4
Self-Propelled Outdoor	18	16	15	14	6
Outdoor Experience	3	7	6	6	6
Golf	5	4	7	11	15
Downhill Skiing/Snowboarding	3	4	5	3	2

* Age Groups: 1 18-25 years 4 46-65 years
 2 26-35 years 5 66 years and over
 3 36-45 years

Barriers are grouped into six categories. These are:

- Awareness
- Accessibility
- Personal reasons
- Costs
- Time commitments
- Facilities

Overall, costs and personal reasons were the most important barriers. This included admission fees and equipment costs, as well as being physically unable to participate, and lack of physical ability. Concerns with facilities were rated next in importance. This included overcrowded and poorly maintained facilities.

Problems associated with costs were rated highly by those who would like to take part in exercise-oriented activities, self-propelled outdoor activities, skiing/snowboarding, and golf. Barriers relating to facilities were most evident for those interested in golf, skiing/snowboarding, and self-propelled outdoor activities. Personal reasons barriers were highly rated for creative/cultural/social/passive activities. Concerns due to lack of physical ability were highly rated for team sports.

Recent studies by the Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute found lack of information on available local activities and inconvenient scheduled times for activities as significant barriers to adult participation. In addition the study found that reduced costs, more information on available activities, a wider variety of activities, and increased social support, would encourage Canadians to participate in more leisure and recreation activities. (Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute, 1999)

Who is Affected By Barriers?

The survey showed that barriers are perceived differently for different individuals. Differences occur most frequently with age, gender, and income.

Barriers relating to physical capabilities increased with age. However, cost of equipment/supplies, admission fees, and transportation costs decreased with age.

Males and females both named time and cost as barriers. However, females were more likely to be too busy with family, more likely to be not at ease

socially, and more restricted by a lack of transportation.

Adults are not the only ones affected by time constraints, adolescents are also affected. While adults are restricted by family and work commitments, adolescents are restricted by too much involvement in other recreation activities, and a commitment to friends. Adolescents were also likely to experience barriers to the activity itself. These include boredom, sweating a lot, too hard, and a general dislike for sport. (Hultsman, 1996)

Cost concerns decreased with income, whereas, commitments to work and family affected the higher income groups the most.

Barriers and Activities

The importance of each barrier varied with the type of activity desired. The main obstacles preventing participation in each type of activity are listed in Table 1. The percentages for each desired activity type and barrier are presented in Table 3 on page 5.

Trends

Findings from the 2000 Alberta Recreation Survey were compared with those of the 1996 Alberta Recreation Survey to identify trends. Highlights from this comparison include the following:

- Lack of physical ability and distance were added to cost and lack of time as the most important barriers to activity.
- Physical fitness, golf and swimming were rated the most desired activities of 1996. Physical fitness and golf maintained popularity in 2000 with canoeing/kayaking/rowing/rafting.
- A much higher percentage of respondents indicated a desire to start an exercise-oriented activity (44.9% in 2000 compared to 24% in 1996). However, it must be noted this could be partly due to the fact some of the individual activities in 1996 is included in the exercise-oriented category in 2000.
- Age and gender were important indicators of the type of activity desired.
- Concerns with costs (such as admission fees and equipment/supplies) have increased since 1996.

Table 3: Percentage Stating That Each Barrier Was Important Or Very Important By Activity Type Desired

	EX	TS	CC	RB	SP	OE	GO	DS	OT
CHARGES	43	7	5	9	11	7	12	6	3
COST	38	6	6	10	16	6	10	6	3
FACCROWD	43	6	5	6	14	7	10	6	3
FAMCOM	45	7	6	6	15	6	9	4	3
NOEASE	54	8	11	4	4	7	7	5	-
NOKNOW	39	10	12	8	18	7	3	1	2
NOOPP	43	6	9	8	17	7	3	4	4
NOPHYABI	58	7	5	3	12	2	6	4	2
NOTRAN	42	8	5	12	14	6	6	2	7
PHYSCONV	52	5	5	7	14	8	2	3	3
POORFAC	44	7	6	6	14	10	6	5	3
TRANCOST	34	5	6	11	17	10	5	7	5
UNABLE	58	12	5	4	8	1	2	5	6
WORKCOM	45	7	8	5	15	6	8	4	3
Totals	638	101	94	99	189	90	89	62	47

Legend

Activities

- CC Creative-Cultural
- DS Downhill Skiing/Snowboarding
- EX Exercise
- GO Golf
- OT Other
- OE Outdoor Experience
- RB Resource-Based
- SP Self-Propelled
- TS Team Sports

Barriers

- CHARGES Admission Fees and Charges
- COST Cost of Equipment and Supplies
- FACCROWD Facilities Overcrowded
- FAMCOM Family Commitments
- NOEASE Not At Ease Socially
- NOKNOW Don't Know Where to Go
- NOOPP No Opportunity to do it near home
- NOPHYABI Lack Physical Ability
- NOTRAN Lack of Transportation
- PHYSCONV Facilities Not Physically Convenient
- POORFAC Facilities Poorly Maintained
- TRANCOST Transportation Cost
- UNABLE Physically Unable to Take Part
- WORKCOM Work Commitments

Implications

The 2000 Alberta Recreation Survey provides recreation practitioners with important information on users and non-users. This information will help in understanding what attracts people to participate, and what keeps people from participating in leisure activities.

The 2000 survey has shown that Alberta respondents are most interested in physical fitness, golf and canoeing/kayaking/rowing/rafting. It is important for leisure agents to recognize the interests of Albertans' in order to increase

participation. Is your organization meeting the interests of Albertans'?

In addition to recognizing the most desired activities, it is equally important to recognize what keeps potential participants from an activity. The 2000 Alberta Recreation Survey identifies some of the barriers that practitioners can look to. These barriers include, cost, lack of time, distance of facilities, and lack of physical ability and confidence. How do you see these barriers affecting your organization? The type of barriers will depend on the type of clientele and activity. Do you cater to

younger or older participants, male or female, singles or families? What is the average education and socio-economic level of your clientele? All of these factors will affect the type of barriers you may come across. It is important to address these barriers in order to increase participation.

Attracting Canadians to participate in leisure and recreation activities is an important focus for the recreation practitioner. However, equally important is to develop resources to allow current participants to become more active. For example, adjusting program times or providing program variety will help to prevent current participants from meeting barriers such as, time and lack of interest. It is important to minimize barriers to current participants as they will be less likely to stop an activity and more likely to join in more.

The objective of studying barriers to participation is to allow recreation practitioners to identify any obstacles. As a result, recreation practitioners will be better equipped to deal with community concerns. For example, practitioners will be able to alter current programs, create new programs, and recognize important information that will reduce the effect of barriers to participation. The goal is to ensure that all community members are able to participate in leisure and recreation activities.

References

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