

# Making Connections and Broadening Horizons

## The Place of Sport and Physical Activity in Canada: Exploring the Potential for a Broader Contribution

The Public Policy Forum Policy Interchange

May 23, 2007 – Ottawa

### The Goals of the Day

Guiding questions for the day were:

1. How can we leverage the impact of sport and physical activity in contributing to Canadian society and public goals?
2. How can we leverage our collective impact on achieving Canadian public policy objectives?

Policymakers from a range of departments/agencies in the federal public service and leaders in sport and physical activity and community sectors met to:

- Enhance existing relationships and build new ones;
- Build understanding of common interests and goals that link policy priorities with some of the benefits of sport and physical activity, and;
- Identify pathways and build commitment to follow-up action

### What Happened - The Outcomes

The idea was an "attractor" – many came to explore this and stayed. The day brought together an energized group from a range of different backgrounds, and the discussions were generally quite thoughtful and fruitful. Momentum was generated and a sense of possibilities for moving forward. Connections were made among ideas and people. Good energy was created around a number of different ideas. For some, momentum was generated around specific ideas and there was a willingness to follow-up and explore the potential for action. For others, the day was more about learning from other participants in the room, finding out how their work broadly connects with issues of Sport and Physical Activity, and trying to figure out how to move forward and build on the day's energy. (For more detail on specific themes explored in the day read the attached pages.)

The day helped create several possible "platforms" for continuing the conversation and moving forward. The next step in this process will be a Senior Policy Leaders session in late June that will continue the process of *Making Connections, Broadening Horizons*, and *following-up on the May 23<sup>rd</sup> conversation*. More to come following the June session

This quote sums up the sense of potential for action created in the room:

*"Don't underestimate the STRENGTHS in the room today. With a fairly well developed Federal/Provincial/Territorial process that has taken years to develop, a strategically minded NGO community, a solid research base, and a powerful and easily explained message, we have real strengths going forward."*

## Background – Sport and Physical Activity in Canadian Life

Sport and physical activity (S&PA) are essential elements in Canadian life. An overwhelming number of Canadians that are involved in sport and physical activity – as participants, parents, coaches, volunteers, or attendees – describe sport and physical activity as essential sources of fun and relaxation, as vital means to provide families with activities to share, and as important vehicles for social engagement and strengthening communities. It is also important to recognize that what goes on at the community arena is but one small part of what sport represents in Canada. The 34,000 Canadian sport and recreation organizations account for over 20% of the not for profit and voluntary sector – the largest such group in the country.

It is thus no surprise that welcoming the world to Vancouver and Whistler in 2010 represents an incredible opportunity for Canada. The Games have the potential to generate huge revenues, leave an important sport and urban infrastructure legacy, and increase Canadian pride. As important, an occasion like the 2010 also provides a timely backdrop for a larger public dialogue about the role of sport and physical activity within Canadian society. This dialogue is especially timely given that there seems to be emerging a new appreciation for the potential impacts of sport and physical activity, and the implications they can have on other realms of public policy and Canadian society.

## Building the Process – To May 23<sup>rd</sup> and Beyond

The *Broadening Horizons and Making Connections* interchange on May 23<sup>rd</sup> was the culmination of a five month collaborative process (see map) led by the Public Policy Forum and an “Early Leaders” group comprised of representatives from Sport Canada, the Public Health Agency of Canada, the Sport Matters Group and a range of contributors from across the sport and physical activity community. A follow-up session will be held on June 21<sup>st</sup> that is intended to include senior policy leaders from government in the discussion.

The focus for this first interchange was on creating open-ended, peer-level relationships between policymakers in the federal government and leaders from the sport and physical activity and non-government sectors. As the process continues, the intention is to broaden the network to bring in representatives from provincial/territorial and municipal governments, from the private sector, and from a range of other stakeholder groups.

## The May 23<sup>rd</sup> Interchange – What the day was about

The interchange brought together 70 participants from a range of federal departments and agencies, from a diverse group of organizations from the S&PA sector, as well as from the broader NGO community.



Setting aside advocacy for the day, participants were invited to explore the potential contribution of S&PA in Canada, and to discover common interests and policy priorities that can link S&PA with other social and economic issues such as health and wellness, strong and inclusive communities, Aboriginal issues and economic development.

Put simply, the desired outcomes of the *exploratory* session were to:

- Enhance existing relationships and build new ones;
- Build understanding of common interests and goals, and;
- Identify pathways and build commitment to follow-up action.

## Shaping a Long-Term Process



## Making Sense of it All - the Major Themes and Conclusions of the Day

The day was ultimately about exploring common policy interests, learning from new people, and building energy that can potentially be used to solve shared challenges. The themes the groups explored during the day took shape through consultations with participants during the week leading up to the event, and through an interactive session on the morning of the interchange on the questions/issues they wanted to explore

This section portrays the key points, conclusions and next steps reached by each of the groups on these major themes.

"The question we need to ask ourselves is, '*Do we want good public policy?*'"

It's good public policy that makes sport and physical activity horizontal. They just keep coming up in areas like health, public safety, social inclusion, education..."

### *Blazing the Horizontal Trail*

What are the opportunities for integration across the federal government, between levels of government, and with S&PA organizations and NGOs? And how can we make these connections work? What are the mechanisms or tools?



*The conclusions reached by the group:*

- *"Find the leaders..."* Identify who is motivated, capable and willing to lead horizontal initiatives;
- *"Don't reinvent the wheel..."* Recognize mechanisms that are already being used, and learn from them or use them where possible;
- *"Connect with the broader agenda..."* Align sport and physical activity with the broader social and political agenda, linking into themes like safe environments, accessibility, social cohesion and healthy communities that are already receiving attention;
- *"Pick low-hanging fruit to build momentum..."* Begin by focusing on easy wins to generate early success and build commitment.

"Sport and physical activity is intensely local. This represents a challenge for federal policymakers as they have fewer levers at the community level.

When thinking about the federal role, it might not necessarily be to keep gyms or arenas open, but to create an environment in which the community can have the capability to do it itself."

*Next Steps:* Look to immediate opportunities and tap into pre-existing networks

- **June 21<sup>st</sup> meeting** with senior leaders from government and the sport and physical activity community
- The federal **Friends of Social Policy network**
- 2010 Secretariat's **Federal Network Legacy**
- What are other examples of successful horizontal work that we can learn from?

Take an issue and learn from it by working horizontally

- Is **Youth Obesity** the type of simple, understandable and unifying crisis around which an integrative policy response can be developed?
- What about **Community Readiness** post-2010? (see below)

## *Turning Knowledge into Action – Research on the Impacts of S&PA*

What research exists, where are the gaps, and how can our knowledge be better utilized?

*The conclusions reached by the group:*

- *“What do Canadians and their communities want...?”* Plenty of informative research has been done, but make sure we’re asking the right questions of the right people;
- *“Wither the gaps...”* Identify the information gaps that exist and develop strategies to fill them;
- *“Look beyond our borders...”* What are other countries doing, and how are they doing it?
- *“Transforming facts and figures into a compelling case...”* Translating research evidence to support sound public policy incorporating sport and physical activity;
- *“Communicating the evidence...”* Packaging and using the right language to communicate effectively across language gaps with potential partners.

**Key take-aways: Think in terms of ‘Knowledge Mobilization’:** “Audience-aware” communication of good public policy ideas rooted in a solid research base in order to create the case for action.

## *Community Development through Sport and Physical Activity*

How can we leverage sport and physical activity as a community development tool? What can we learn from our international experiences? “What can sport and physical activity do for you?”

*The conclusions reached by the group:*

*“Tell a common story...”* Find a common language that can speak to your audience’s needs and identify a unifying agenda that is simple and workable, and that can bind sectors, stakeholders and jurisdictions;

*The guiding principles defined by the group:*

- *Cumulative benefit* – Projects need to produce a range of winners;
- *Systematic approaches* – Work in communities, but keep an eye on the big picture;
- *Use what already works* – Leverage existing expertise, resources and programs;
- *Think long-term, focus on sustainability* – Good public policy provides continuity and stands the test of time.

*Next Steps and Innovative Ideas:*

- **Reshape and reenergize the storyline**
  - Find a common language
  - Share experiences
  - Communicate opportunities
  - Engage citizens and stakeholders
- **Staying in the loop and sharing what we’re working on** - Create mechanisms for sustained policy awareness between departments and with non-governmental organizations.
- Explore the creation of a **Long-Term Community Development model** using the Long Term Athlete Development (LTAD) model as a good starting point on which to build within the community context.

## *Infrastructure and the Places of Sport and Physical Activity in Canada*

The infrastructure theme was at a different level of readiness than other themes given the existing Federal infrastructure funds. Infrastructure Canada invited a discussion with other policy and sport and physical activity leaders about determining specific criteria for allocating funding and measuring outcomes around funding.

### *Guiding questions and Conclusions::*

- *“Determining criteria for federal support...”* What type of criteria can Infrastructure Canada use that will maintain flexibility at the provincial/territorial levels and correspond with what the 13 provincial/territorial Ministers of Sport are already using?
- *“Measuring Outcomes...”* Assessing use of facilities is a valuable marker, but how can we better understand more important indicators like impacts on health, public safety or impacts on communities?
- *“The lay-of-the-land at Infrastructure Canada...”* What programs exist, what work is being done and is there a standard definition for what constitutes infrastructure?
- *“Different communities, different infrastructure needs...”* All communities are unique, so how to account for the different contexts in which needs assessments and funding decisions must be made (particularly between large urban centres and smaller rural communities)?
- *“A national sport and physical activity infrastructure policy...?”* Do we need a national framework to help guide – not dictate – policy in communities around sport and physical activity infrastructure?

## *Readiness of Communities to use 2010 as a Lever for Sport and Physical Activity in Canada*

*Question: Finding the 2010 tipping point* – everybody gets the big idea that a greater societal and governmental focus on sport and physical activity can have a significant impact on quality of life in Canadian communities, but what is the collective problem that will unite citizens, community groups, stakeholders and policymakers around the need to take action?

*After 2010* – the 2010 Games will generate an enormous amount of enthusiasm in Canada around sport and physical activity, at both the competitive national and the grassroots level across the country. Far beyond the physical legacy that will be left behind, the spike in demand for sport and physical activity amongst Canadians that will follow 2010 could represent the most important legacy of the games.

The question is, do Canadian communities have the requisite political and community leadership, administrative preparedness, infrastructure, or even coaching/volunteering capacity to respond to this increased demand? If not, the post-Olympic boom in demand will turn into a major post-Olympic bust in citizen engagement, and an unprecedented opportunity will be lost.

*Responding to the demand* – In order to address this shared challenge, policymakers, non-government stakeholders and citizens alike will need to collaborate to create an environment that will allow communities in Canada to maximize the benefits of this demand.



### *“Developing an ethos of Policy Philanthropy”*

- ❖ Identify policy areas where the sport and physical activity community can pitch in with expertise and support to further broader social and governmental objectives.

*The four key challenges moving towards 2010:*

- **Where and how to begin?** – with the 2010 Games only two years away, pushing for a national framework would be impractical; instead, governments and stakeholders should focus on what communities need and try to leverage support from non-traditional sectors;
- **How can we collaborate towards common goals?** – creating linkages between jurisdictions, communities, regions and citizens around common objectives within a fragmented system;
- **Helping Canadians find where and how to participate?** – linking Canadians with the right sports or physical activities and with the right opportunities (Play? Coach? Volunteer?);
- **Where to play?** - addressing the physical gap by renewing and expanding the infrastructure of sport and physical activity, and by creating the administrative structures to support increased participation.

*Social Cohesion and Social Integration*

Undoubtedly the broadest theme, the social cohesion and integration group touched on a number of areas such as accessibility and inclusion, Aboriginal communities, youth at risk, disabilities, newcomers and crime prevention.

The challenge the group had to grapple with was how to connect and link this broad range of policy issues and mandates. What bound all of these issues together was the importance of protecting and supporting *vulnerable populations*, and the impact S&PA can have in improving social outcomes.

*The guiding principles outlined by the group:*

- *Think strategically* – Identify the problems policy can solve, and don't forget about the opportunities policy can allow you to create;
- *Bottom-up approach* – Look for community priorities and buy-in across sectors;
- *One size does not fit all* – Different communities have different needs;
- *Ongoing communication* – Continually share information, insights, and ideas that work, and focus on engaging new partners who can add value to the initiative;
- *You can't please everybody* – Don't hesitate to target resources where necessary.

## Continuing the Process...

The May 23<sup>rd</sup> session saw many begin to build relationships and gain a better understanding of common interests and goals. It saw participants begin to build commitment around the importance of linking sport and physical activity into broader policy objectives. And it produced a willingness amongst participants to find ways to continue the process.

While some left with clear objectives and an understanding of where they'll be following-up, other enthusiastic participants need to explore the question, 'Now what?'

The next formal step in the process is a Senior Policy Leaders session in late June that will continue the May 23<sup>rd</sup> conversation. At the same time, the ideas and connections made in the room provide you with the possibility of following up with your colleagues. We encourage you, who see the potential benefits S&PA can offer to Canadian society, *to lead, to connect and to tell the story*. Let's see how we can collectively leverage the potential contribution. Go for it!!!

*"Don't underestimate the strength in the room today.*

With a fairly well developed F/P/T process that has taken years to develop, a strategically minded NGO community, a solid research base, and a powerful and easily explained message, we have real strengths going forward."

## About the Authors

This report was prepared by André Côté, Research Associate and Jan Elliott, Senior Associate, with support from Matt Leblanc.

The views expressed in this report are those of the authors alone, though they are intended to be an accurate reflection of the discussion that took place at the Public Policy Forum Sport and Physical Activity Policy Interchange in Ottawa on May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2007.

## *The Public Policy Forum*

The Public Policy Forum is an independent, not-for-profit organization aimed at improving the quality of government in Canada through better dialogue between the public, private and voluntary sectors. The Forum's members, drawn from business, federal and provincial governments, the voluntary sector and organized labour, share a belief that an efficient and effective public service is important in ensuring Canada's competitiveness abroad and quality of life at home.

Established in 1987, the Forum has earned a reputation as a trusted, neutral facilitator, capable of bringing together a wide range of stakeholders in productive dialogue. Its research program provides a neutral base to inform collective decision making. By promoting more information sharing and greater links between governments and other sectors, the Forum helps ensure public policy in this country is dynamic, coordinated and responsive to future challenges and opportunities.

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