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Community-Building through Sport

Final Report of the Community Perspectives Project

Prepared for
Federal-Provincial/Territorial Sport Committee as a contribution to
The Canadian Sport Policy Renewal Process

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Executive summary

In the summer of 2011, the Public Policy Forum convened a dozen roundtables across the country to explore whether or how community-building might be included in the next iteration of the Canadian sport policy. This roundtable series, which was part of the Canadian Sport Policy Renewal Process, brought together federal, provincial and municipal officials as well as sport and community leaders to determine whether a policy framework could be created that includes community-building but leaves the core business of sport unchanged.

Throughout these sessions, there was a remarkable amount of agreement on four key points:

First, roundtable participants recognized that sport is an effective, but underutilized tool for community-building and that this is not adequately recognized or encouraged under the current Canadian Sport Policy.

Second, they agreed that the new sport policy should not make the sport community responsible for achieving community goals. Participants worried that framing community-building as a fifth goal of the new policy would blur the community's accountabilities, stretch resources and scatter its focus.

Third, participants felt that, while the current *Canadian Sport Policy* categorizes "Capacity" and "Interaction" as goals, it would be more accurate to conceptualize them as strategies that contribute to two principal goals: enhancing excellence and participation.

Finally, roundtable participants agreed that the most effective way of addressing these issues is to include community-building in the new Canadian sport policy as part of the vision statement; to restructure the policy so that there are only two goals, excellence and participation, and; to frame capacity, interaction and partnerships as "drivers" or "strategies" that stakeholders can use to achieve both sport's core goals and the broader vision of the policy.

This report captures the key findings of the 12 roundtables and outlines how the new Canadian sport policy can purposely use sport to achieve healthier, more socially engaged communities.

Acknowledgements

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We also greatly appreciate the support provided by our provincial and municipal partners, who hosted and participated in the 12 roundtable sessions. These partners included the governments of Alberta, British Columbia, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Ontario, as well as the Cities of Calgary, Edmonton, Halifax, Ottawa, Saint John, Toronto and Vancouver.

Finally, we would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to all the roundtable participants who took the time to come and share their stories, reflections and insights into the difficult, if very promising, topic of community-building through sport.

1. Introduction

The Ottawa Catholic Integration Centre is a small community organization that is committed to helping New Canadians settle into their communities. As part of its program, the Centre uses a special tool that is innovative, fun and remarkably successful. Every year it organizes the Community Cup Soccer Tournament. The tournament, which is now in its 7th year, attracts many hundreds of people and is supported by over a dozen private and public sector organizations.

Local sport organizations are also involved and work in partnership with the Centre to ensure the tournament's success. They, in turn, benefit from the new members it brings into the sport, as well as getting new volunteers through the moms and dads who come out to watch their kids play.

The example has a deeper lesson to teach us about sport, namely, that it has a remarkable capacity to create win-win situations. It can and often does act like a bridge between different sectors that allows different kinds of organizations to work together to achieve complementary goals. Thus, the tournament helps promote social integration, which is a goal of the Centre, and it increases participation, which is a goal of the sport organizations. Indeed, this one could be called a win-win-win-win: the Centre wins, community sport organizations win, New Canadians win, and the community at large wins.

For the purposes of this report, using sport to achieve important goals in non-sport sectors, such as immigration, health or justice, will be referred to as *community-building*. Sport's remarkable capacity for community-building is well established. The *Canadian Sport Policy*, a document created and endorsed by all 14 federal, provincial and territorial governments in 2002, describes it this way:

Today, sport is widely accepted as a powerful contributor to social and personal development. Nevertheless, the magnitude of sport's influence surprises many Canadians. To develop a comprehensive sport policy and to design actions to make that policy effective, it must be clearly understood that sport's impact and contribution encompasses social and personal development, health and well-being, culture, education, economic development and prosperity, tourism and entertainment.

However, if in 2002 F-P/T governments acknowledged the important contribution sport makes to community-building that was about as far as they took it. Their real reasons for developing the *Canadian Sport Policy* lay elsewhere. At the time, the sport community lacked a clear sense of identity and mission. As a result, it was fragmented and unfocused. The immediate task for policy-makers was to address this by helping the sport community articulate and focus on its own set of goals—a task the management literature calls “building the core business.”

In the end, F-P/T governments settled on four key goals for the new policy, which were to enhance:

- participation
- excellence
- capacity
- interaction

The ten-year term of the *Canadian Sport Policy* will end in 2012 and in preparation all 14 federal, provincial and territorial governments are engaged in a two-year process to develop a new pan-Canadian sport policy. This time community-building is a key question. Policy-makers want to know whether the new policy should include some further recognition of, or commitment to, using sport for community-building.

Perhaps surprisingly, the sport community is divided on the question. Although sport organizations place a very high value on sport's contribution to community-building, they disagree on what, if anything, a new policy should say about it.

Some feel that, however beneficial, community-building is a by-product of sport and that a new policy should remain focused on sport's central goals. In this view, a commitment to community-building might dilute the focus of the community or burden it with new responsibilities and costs that it is not well positioned to meet.

Others reply that, on the contrary, a deeper engagement in community-building would bring new resources and participants into sport and, ultimately, make a significant contribution to its growth and development. They think the policy should take clear steps to encourage more partnerships with organizations outside sport.

So is community-building an opportunity we can't afford to miss or a risk we can't afford to take? That is the question to be addressed in this report. The report consolidates the findings of a series of cross-country consultations with officials and practitioners from both the sport and non-sport sectors, which was undertaken by the Public Policy Forum over the summer months.

2. The Process

The Goals

In the early stages of the Canadian Sport Policy Renewal Process, F-P/T officials heard from their municipal counterparts and representatives from some community organizations that they wanted a more engaged role in the process, especially on the issue of community-building. The Community Perspectives Project was launched in response to this request. Between June-August 2011, the Public Policy Forum convened 12 roundtables across the country in order to speak with the provinces (both sport and non-sport ministries), municipalities, sport groups and community organizations across the country about the next iteration of the *Canadian Sport Policy* and, in particular, whether or how it should deal with community-building.

This initiative was never intended to be a full-fledged, country-wide consultation. It was exploratory in nature and limited in scope. We saw it as an opportunity to begin what we expect to be an on-going conversation on these issues, rather than an effort to provide definitive answers to the questions. The main objectives were as follows:

- Identify specific examples where sport and non-sport organizations are collaborating to advance sport and community priorities;
- Assess whether local governments and community organizations want to use the new policy to make community-building more *intentional*, that is, to encourage the sport community to actively pursue it;
- Consider how officials from provincial governments view the issue; and
- Draw on the findings to produce a final report that provides insight and guidance to policymakers on the question of community-building.

The Project was carried out in two phases. The first phase brought together representatives from municipal governments, along with community organizations from both the sport and non-sport sectors. Roundtable sessions were held in six cities across the country, including Saint John, Halifax, Ottawa, Calgary, Edmonton and Vancouver.

The second phase involved officials from provincial ministries and provincial sport organizations. We held six sessions in the five provinces where the municipal sessions were held: New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia. We used these sessions to consider the findings from the community-level and how provincial governments, in turn, viewed the question of community-building. In particular, we wanted to explore with the provinces how they might facilitate intra-governmental partnerships in order to support and/or promote community-building at the local level.

Don Lenihan, Vice-President, Engagement with the Public Policy Forum, facilitated all 12 sessions and introduced key ideas and issues for discussion.

Methodology

Our approach to the roundtable discussions was straight-forward. At the beginning of each session, we introduced the topic and the issues through a 15-minute presentation. The discussion was then divided into three main parts:

Session 1: Clarifying the concept

- What is community-building and how is it linked to sport?
- Can we provide examples?

Session 2: Issues and opportunities

- What are the opportunities, costs and benefits around a possible inclusion of community-building in the new policy?

Session 3: Implementation

- How would such recognition be included in the policy?

The sessions ranged in length from two hours to a full day. The number of participants varied from seven or eight to 20 – 25. In Phase 1, a summary report was prepared after each session and circulated to the participants for comment before it was finalized. In effect, however, these reports were more like a rolling draft of a single report in that we tended to carry the findings over from earlier sessions into later ones. The idea was to have an on-going discussion as we crossed the country. That way the ideas would be constantly evolving, and we would be free to test new ones by trying them out on subsequent groups. The process worked remarkably well. By the time we reached the final sessions, we had all but worked out the contents of the final report through this on-going synthesis of the key ideas and options so that virtually all of our participants were satisfied with the approach we were proposing. The approach is set out in this report.

Lastly, we should note that the number of cities where sessions were held was relatively small. They were not intended to serve as a representative sample of local governments and community organizations from across the country, though we have a high level of confidence that what people had to say in these sessions will resonate with people from other communities. The tight timelines and limited resources available to us meant we could only make an effort to launch this discussion. We believe, however, that the seeds have been planted and that the discussion around community-building will continue whatever final decision is made about including it in the new policy. We hope this report serves as an important milestone in that journey.

3. Findings

This brings us to the question of the findings. While we will have much more to say on this in the coming pages, we should note at the outset that participants generally agreed on four key points:

1. Sport is a highly flexible tool, with a remarkable capacity to bridge sectors, mobilize people and contribute to a wide range of societal goals.
2. The sport community and the sport system have the capacity to make a much more robust contribution to community-building than is currently the case.
3. Although the *Canadian Sport Policy* has helped to facilitate partnerships within the sport community, it has done little to promote the development of cross-sectoral partnerships between sport and non-sport stakeholders. While these are happening, it has little to do with the policy.
4. The next iteration of the policy should include a more intentional commitment to community-building.

Some Examples of Community-Building

We began our roundtable discussions by asking participants to provide us with examples of community-building from their own experience. They didn't disappoint us. We heard many stories about how sport organizations work with other non-sport organizations to achieve complementary goals and leverage resources.

For example, sport organizations have expertise and organize activities that assist community groups. We heard about dances for seniors, swimming for the disabled and basketball for at-risk youth. For their part, these community organizations bring new and often under-represented demographic groups into the sport community, which, in turn, helps sport organizations achieve their goals of enhancing participation, excellence, capacity and interaction.

We also heard that these partnerships tend to be *ad hoc* and, typically, last only for short periods of time. For the most part, they are not the result of organizational planning by governments or community organizations. Indeed, officials from offices outside sport are often barely aware that sport is such an effective tool for community-building. When we asked participants from policy fields such as youth at risk, seniors, transportation and immigration whether they or their colleagues had ever considered partnering with sport organizations, many said they had not, even though they were often able to provide impressive examples of how such partnerships supported their own organizational goals.

These participants sometimes seemed surprised—even flummoxed—by the realization that their own examples of community-building were the product of happenstance or, more likely, some creative and enterprising individual acting alone. In one session, a group of deputy ministers told us that the issue of using sport to promote goals like social cohesion or crime reduction had never even been raised at the deputies' table.

As they learned more about the benefits sport could bring to these policy areas, however, these participants quickly agreed that the absence of such discussion at most planning tables was unfortunate—a missed opportunity. Many felt that much more could and should be done to promote such partnerships. There are over 36,000 sport organizations across Canada, ranging in size from large national sport organizations to small neighbourhood leagues. Participants agreed that this loose “network-of-networks” (one participant described the organizational structure of the sport community as more like a cloud) was a largely untapped resource. When we suggested that the new sport policy might be a timely opportunity to raise awareness of the possibilities and to promote discussion about the strategic value of sport, most of the roundtable participants were enthusiastic.

Before concluding this section, we think it would be useful to illustrate some key examples we heard of how sport and community organizations are *already* working together to achieve complementary goals. Further examples can be found in the appendix at the end of this report.

- Charitable foundations like the Canadian Tire Foundation and community organizations such as the YMCA share the view that engaging all youth in sport is an excellent way to help them prepare them for the future and become productive and successful members of the community. In Surrey, British Columbia, both stakeholders are working with local school boards, community sport organizations, private sector companies, provincial sport organizations and the BC Government to run the *Canadian Tire Jump Start Academy*, a program that makes sport and recreation programs more accessible to students who otherwise do not have the financial

means to participate. This program offers after-school, multi-sport leadership programs that teach “positive life skills, including how to lead healthy, active lifestyles, how to motivate and affect others and your community, and the fundamental skills necessary to achieve success beyond the playing field, in the community, and at work.”¹ The program also allows secondary school students participating in a youth leadership program to connect with and positively impact their peers. By 2011, the *Canadian Tire Jump Start Academy* will have 1,000 participants enrolled, as well 40 secondary school youth leaders.

- Across Canada, sport and non-sport organizations have initiated partnerships to increase sport participation and to integrate New Canadians into society. As we have already seen, the Ottawa Catholic Integration Centre has been a leader in using sport as a tool to engage and integrate Canadians through its annual Community Cup soccer tournament.
- In 2010, the BC Lions football team approached the Government of British Columbia to create flag football teams within at-risk communities. This partnership, which became known as the *Community Action Assessment Network*, brought together additional interested parties such as the RCMP, community workers and local schools, and used sport as a tool to reduce youth involvement in gangs. These programs have successfully helped to engage at-risk youth by giving them the confidence and personal skills they need to succeed in sport and the wider community.

We also heard how all three levels of government are using intergovernmental programs, bilateral agreements, and partnerships with community leaders to leverage the benefits of sport to advance both sport and a variety of other departments’ goals:

- The Alberta Ambassador’s Network intentionally creates cross-sectoral partnerships by collaborating with both traditional and non-traditional partners including health, education and early childhood education. Together, these organizations convene sessions to share information, build partnerships and look strategically at how resources might be shared across groups and sectors to advance complimentary goals. In one example, this Network is using these partnerships to advance the Canadian Sport for Life initiative in order to help private sector organizations and recreation centres share resources, instructors, and best practices. Another benefit of these partnerships is that they reduce resource overlap and coordinate activities in order to use resources more efficiently.
- The Government of Nova Scotia is also investing in bilateral programming with the federal government to develop and expand programs that use sport to achieve community priorities. Nova Scotia’s *Girls Only* programs introduce inactive youth to new activities that use sport to help them improve their health and develop important personal skills. These initiatives are funded and supported by the Public Health Agency of Canada, the Nova Scotia Department of Health and Wellness and the Dairy Farmers of Canada, who provide nutritional information and food to participants. Sharing the costs of these programs and developing unique agreements with the federal government has allowed Nova Scotia to create more programs that meet its citizens’ needs.

¹ Please click on the following link for more information on the *Canadian Tire Jumpstart Academy*:
<http://www.sd36.bc.ca/general/news/2011/jumpstart.pdf>

- Over the last year, Sport Nova Scotia has led a program that employs a coordinator or “broker” to act as a bridge between the province and local sport and non-sport community organizations. This two year federal bilateral initiative is currently employing 4 brokers with the responsibility to engage, communicate and facilitate partnerships between provincial, municipal, sport and community leaders. This project, which is the first of its kind in the province, is already yielding positive results for the government and affected communities. In one example, citizens reached out to the coordinator to inquire about the prospect of creating a new speed skating program in their area. This broker was able to use their connections in government and within the sport community to facilitate meetings between PSOs and local arenas, which ultimately led to the creation of a new speed skating league. Accordingly, participants noted that this pilot project might serve as a model for other governments who are looking for ways to leverage the benefits of sport within their governments.

Incorporating community-building within the new policy would allow F-P/T governments to both promote and recognize many of the partnerships that are already being carried out by sport and community leaders.

4. Concerns Over Community-Building

Throughout our sessions, not a single person denied that sport is being used, often very successfully, for community-building purposes. Nor did we find anyone who thought this was wrong or a bad thing. On the contrary, participants from inside and outside the sport community were virtually unanimous in their support for such initiatives and in their admiration for the individuals and organizations who were putting sport to work so creatively in the service of other societal goals, such as social cohesion and wellness. Finally, we can add that nearly all of our roundtable participants also agreed that, as a tool for community-building, sport and the sport system are significantly underused and could be successfully leveraged in new ways.

It may seem strange therefore when we report that, the moment we moved to the question of some kind of further recognition of, or commitment to, community-building in the new policy, rifts began to open among our participants. Why would people who agreed on all the things mentioned above nevertheless disagree on this issue?

The answer lies in how most of them viewed the task of policy-making. To bring this out, let’s start by sketching what we call the conventional approach to policy-making. It has four basic steps:

1. Set clear goals for the policy
2. Use discussion and debate to narrow down the options for achieving the goals
3. Choose the best option
4. Use the policy to prescribe that option (or key parts of it)

As this outline shows, in the conventional approach, policy-making is usually about trying to solve a problem or achieve a goal by changing people’s behaviour to make it align with some option. The general assumption our participants made was in keeping with this. They thought that an effort to

recognize community-building would probably mean including it as a new, fifth goal of the policy, which the sport community would then be encouraged to promote. So, in this view, the new policy would include the following list of goals:

1. participation
2. excellence
3. capacity
4. interaction
5. community-building

Officials would be expected to take appropriate action to promote the new fifth goal.

In fact, a discussion paper produced and circulated by the Public Policy Forum last year proposed this very option.² The reaction we got at the time was mixed. Some applauded the idea, arguing that the sport community should recognize and commit to a more robust effort at community-building. They liked the idea of making it a goal because they felt it highlighted the role of sport as a tool for social action and explicitly committed the sport community to asking how it should change its behaviour in order to realize this goal. Others disagreed with making community-building a goal for several reasons, all of which resurfaced early in our process.

Participants who opposed or at least worried about making it a goal—let’s refer to them as the “sceptics”—were concerned that doing so could undermine the progress made over the last ten years through the existing policy. Their arguments revolved around three main points. Making community-building a goal of the policy could:

- Scatter the sport community’s energies and weaken its focus on core goals, such as enhancing participation and excellence;
- Put sport organizations in competition with non-sport organizations for the already-scarce resources available to support sport; and
- Blur the responsibilities of sport, thereby making sport organizations accountable for realizing societal goals that are outside of sport’s core business.

Let’s look at each concern in turn to help us see more clearly what is at issue here.

First, participants tended to see the four goals of the existing policy as helping to define the core business of sport. They rightly recognized that community-building would be a very different kind of goal. It is really a catch-all phrase for almost any societal goal to which sport might make a contribution. However, as we have seen, because sport connects with almost everything, it can make a contribution to just about any policy area. This flexibility is precisely what makes it remarkable from a policy perspective.

² The paper was titled “The Canadian Sport Policy: Toward a More Comprehensive Vision.”

The sceptics wondered how officials would pursue such a commitment. Would they see the policy as instructing them to focus on potentially any community goal? If so, say the sceptics, this would be like having no policy at all. By definition, a policy focuses attention on key tasks that need to be accomplished. That is why the first step in the conventional approach requires setting clear goals. But if community-building were adopted as a goal, continues the argument, we would be in danger of making the policy so inclusive that it would no longer be possible to say what it actually aims to achieve. The probable result would be a critical loss of focus and mission, two important elements the original policy was designed to promote. Along with this would come a scattering of the community's energies. So, if the point of having a policy is to bring some focus and cohesiveness to the sport community, this would be a step backward, rather than forward.

Second, inserting community-building into the policy would seem to commit sport groups to using their already limited resources to achieve goals that are not central to the core business of sport. After all, if community-building is a goal, does that not mean that planning how to use the funds and resources available for sport should now take into account how these resources can be used to promote, say, social cohesion, crime reduction, healthy populations, and so on? Should non-sport groups who pursue such goals also be eligible for support? If so, such a policy would lead to a serious depletion of the resources available to sport and fierce competition for the resources that exist. But, as the sceptics noted, sport is already underfunded. How will this impact on the community in the years to come?

Third, and following on the first two concerns, would this kind of commitment to community-building mean that officials responsible for sport are now accountable for a whole list of goals for which they have no resources, interest or expertise, such as integrating New Canadians, or reducing crime levels? The sceptics felt that making sport officials accountable for these, and other, community goals would likely also require them to report on their progress, which, in turn, would lead to confusion and uncertainty about the priorities and needs of *sport*.

Unsurprisingly, most of our participants took these concerns very seriously and a significant number even suggested that, if they could not be answered, this might lead them to conclude that community-building should not be included in the new policy. In several sessions, the question was raised whether the whole discussion around putting community-building in the policy might be simply misplaced. After all, if by everyone's admission it is already happening, why not just leave things as they are? As one participant put it, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it."

If, as we have seen, sport and the sport system is an underused resource; and if officials from outside sport are missing an important opportunity to improve the performance of their programs because they are unaware of the opportunities sport offers, then putting community-building in the policy might be an excellent way of raising awareness. It might help spark a discussion of the strategic value of sport to the policy community. In addition, the policy might be used to help remove other obstacles that limit the use of sport, such as organizational or administrative barriers to partnerships.

Notwithstanding the issues raised by the sceptics, many of the participants clearly continued to believe that including community-building in the new policy was important. The question then became how best to do it. Could the sceptics' objections be answered?

5. Rethinking the Role of the Policy

Our exchanges around the question ‘Do we need a policy at all?’ raised a second, related question. Is the conventional approach the right way to think about the policy-making task we are considering? A participant pointed out that the *Canadian Sport Policy* has no legal authority to compel any of the 14 participating governments to do anything. Unlike conventional policies, the CSP is not prescriptive. In fact, the CSP is more accurately described as a “framework,” which is a set of goals and principles that provide direction and guidance to policy-makers. The working assumption behind such a framework is that those who sign on do so because they believe it is in their interest to do so. They *want* to work together to align their activities and the policy/framework is a tool for helping them do so. Compliance with the CSP is therefore voluntary and so far has been quite effective.

Our participants agreed that if the new policy was to include community-building it would have to be conceived on the same model. Rather than prescriptive, they thought the policy should be *enabling*, a term they used to mean that the policy should make it easier for governments and other organizations inside and outside the sport community to work together to take advantage of the many benefits sport has to offer. In particular, the new policy should help facilitate cross-sectoral partnerships so that governments and community organizations can leverage resources and get more effective programming. Participants also pointed out how important it is that municipalities and community organizations also endorse the policy, as that is where so much of sport programming is delivered and where many of the successful partnerships that drive community-building are formed. For this to happen, however, the policy must be flexible enough to allow the right players to align the policy with their own priorities. A policy that is too narrow or prescriptive will fail this test.

This new view of the policy as an enabler allowed us to take a big step toward addressing some of the concerns raised by the sceptics. For one thing, presenting community-building more as an option than a requirement would leave officials free to decide when and where community-building is desirable. This, in turn, would take some of the urgency out of concerns over whether officials will be confused about which goals the policy is promoting.

But if this gave us a new vantage point from which to look at the questions posed by the sceptics, it didn’t fully answer them. Unease over the possible loss of focus and blurring of responsibilities remained. The clue on how to deal with these issues came when someone pointed out that community-building does not have to be seen as a *goal* of the new policy. It is, she said, more of a *strategy*. This opened a whole new window on our discussion.

6. Recap of the Discussion

Before moving forward, we should pause to briefly review what has been said so far.

The *Canadian Sport Policy* was formed to help bring cohesion and direction to the sport community. From a policy perspective, its four goals can be seen as a way of articulating the core business of sport.

It has long be recognized that sport has a remarkable capacity to bridge sectors in a way that allows sport organizations to work with non-sport organizations to achieve complementary goals. Such

arrangements are win-win situations that leverage resources and opportunities for both sides. We can call this community-building.

Although there are many examples of community-building, it is not a goal of the CSP. Many people think the new policy should be more intentional about community-building, possibly by making it a fifth goal of the policy. Others reply that this might obligate sport organizations to devote attention and resources to achieving goals beyond their mandates or expertise. This, in turn, could blur responsibilities, deplete resources and scatter the energies of the community, thereby undermining the gains made by the policy over the last decade.

Reflection on these issues led our participants to question whether they were somehow linked to a particular view of policy-making, namely, one in which goal-setting implies a commitment that requires action. Some policies, such as the CSP, do not work that way. They aim at aligning activities by providing a “framework” of goals and principles that allow adherents to make choices about how to align their actions and priorities with the policy. Compliance is voluntary.

Having reached this point in the discussion, our participants moved on to take a closer look at the components of such a policy/framework and to ask whether this approach might help them answer the sceptics’ concerns. In our discussions, we found that a policy/framework like the CSP should have at least three separate levels: Vision, Goals and Best Practices, each of which would be designed to address a different question:

- Vision: What is the policy for and why do we need it?
- Goals: Where does it ask us to focus our energies?
- Best Practices: How should we pursue the goals it sets for us?

The next section summarizes the results of our discussions with participants about whether a change in our approach to the task of policy-making would allow us to frame the idea of community-building in a more acceptable way. We found that it did.

7. Framing Community-Building in the New Policy

The Vision: Articulating the “What” and the “Why” of the Policy

According to our participants, a major policy framework such as the *Canadian Sport Policy* should begin with a vision. A vision not only defines what the policy aspires to achieve, but tells us why people believe the subject is important. The current CSP vision is to create “a dynamic and leading-edge sport environment that enables all Canadians to experience and enjoy involvement of sport to the extent of their abilities and interests and, for increasing numbers, to perform consistently and successfully at the highest competitive levels.”³

³ Additional information on the Canadian Sport Policy can be accessed by clicking on the following link:
<http://www.pch.gc.ca/pgm/sc/pol/pcs-csp/2003/polsport-eng.pdf>

According to this vision, sport is a major source of fulfillment in our lives and one of the most rewarding aspects lies in how it challenges us to be our best. Ideally, everyone should have the opportunity to participate in and enjoy sport in their own way and at their own level.

Now, while none of our participants opposed this vision, most felt it was not adequate for the next iteration of the policy—not so much for what it says as for what it doesn't say. The current version gives no hint of the remarkable ability sport has to reach out and connect people from different sectors and walks of life in ways and to allow them to work together to achieve complementary goals. Nor does it capture the high aspirations so many of our participants expressed about capitalizing on sport as a vital resource for building stronger, more sustainable communities at all levels of Canadian society.

Having said this, our participants felt the absence of this community-building perspective in the CSP vision was quite understandable. When the policy was created a decade ago, the rationale and expectations for the policy were quite different. The original vision was supposed to inspire and guide the sport community—a group of individuals for whom sport is, first and foremost, an activity justified as a merit good unto itself. The vision therefore strives to capture what this activity means to them. Appropriately, then, the original vision provides an “internal” perspective on sport because it reflects how sport is seen from within the sport community.

Our participants found nothing wrong with this internal perspective; in fact, they largely agreed that without it the sport community would be unable to define sport's core business or plan its future. However, the clear lesson we drew from our discussions on community-building was that sport can also be seen from another perspective. When it is, things look quite different. From this viewpoint, sport is a tool for building new kinds of relationships. We can call this the “external” view of sport because it reflects how sport is seen from the perspective of the community as a whole. We might also call it the community-building view of sport.

Our participants felt that the vision for the new policy should capture both perspectives. On one hand, it should include the version from the CSP (or some revised form of it), which speaks to the vision of sport as a physical activity. On the other hand, it should include new clauses that say something about why community-building is important to Canadians and their communities, and what they want this tool to be used for. Including this external vision would thus expand the scope of the vision as a whole so that it would:

- Speak more directly to the whole of Canadian society and the communities within it, not just to the people and organizations normally associated with sport;
- Raise awareness within the policy community of the contribution sport can make to community-building; and
- Encourage sport organizations and non-sport organizations to collaborate in ways that allow both sectors to leverage resources and opportunities more effectively.

The Goals: The “Where” of the Policy

If the vision provides a sweeping perspective of what sport could be and of why we want to strive to make it such, the goals of the policy are more pragmatic. Their job is to tell us *where* we must concentrate our energies to realize the vision. The goals define sport’s core business. So what is this business?

We have seen that the *Canadian Sport Policy* has four goals. Early on in our roundtable process, however, some of our participants argued that this is a mistake. In fact, they argued, only two of them—enhancing participation and excellence—should really be described as goals. Increasing the quantity and quality of athletes, they said, is critical to the core business of sport. It is in the pursuit of these goals that the sport community will progress toward the vision.

However, these participants went on to argue that enhancing capacity and interaction should not be included as goals. To see why, we need to distinguish more clearly between the *means* and *ends* of sport. Goals are ends. They are the things we hope to achieve through our programs and activities, which are means to these ends. While participation and excellence are ends, building capacity and enhancing interaction are not. In this view, they are part of the means to those ends. Or, as one participant put it, they are *strategies* for enhancing participation and excellence.

We explored this line of reasoning in most of our sessions. On first hearing, participants usually tended to agree with the argument, but also wanted to hear more about what it means to describe capacity and interaction as strategies and, of course, what all this means for community-building. We can summarize the results of these discussions as follows.

Best Practices: Identifying the “How” of the Policy

Best practices are usually understood as telling us something about the “how” of a policy, that is, they help us see how we should be doing things to achieve the goals—where lies the most effective means to the end.

Roundtable participants agreed that the new policy should contain a shortlist of best practices or strategies that officials could use to help them achieve the goals of enhancing participation and excellence. A variety of names were proposed for these best practices, including “strategies,” “drivers,” and “enablers.” Although we use the term “strategies” here, these terms should be seen as more or less interchangeable.

Capacity

Capacity refers to the organizational, or sport system’s, strength to perform a particular task, such as delivering a program. Depending on the task, capacity-building may require new skills, resources, tools, infrastructure, and so on. Exactly what kind of capacity is needed will depend on the task at hand. Suffice it to say that capacity-building is not a goal because we do not build capacity for its own sake. Capacity is only useful or desirable if it allows us to perform some task, such as delivering a program, which, in turn, helps us to achieve our goals. In short, capacity is a means to an end. If we call it a

strategy here, this is because a strategy is usually a plan for how to achieve a goal. Although building capacity won't achieve the goal on its own, it will be an essential part of any plan or strategy to do so.

Interaction

Within the existing policy, the goal of enhancing interaction within the sport community has allowed stakeholders to align goals, improve collaboration, and strengthen communication, all of which are essential steps toward expanding and improving sport programs. Roundtable participants recognized that, as with capacity, improving interaction within the sport community is a key element in many strategies for enhancing participation and excellence, and that the new policy should continue to encourage leaders within the sport community to collaborate, initiate joint-programs and leverage resources.

This is also where the issue of community-building re-emerges. A participant noted that, just as the vision statement for the new policy would have an internal and an external aspect, so should interaction. On one hand, interaction could apply only to members of the sport community. And, indeed, this is more or less how it is understood in the CSP. However, a broader or external view of interaction would extend this to the community at large. In this way, the goal of interaction could be seen as encompassing partnerships with non-sport organizations—in effect, what we have been calling community-building. But if interaction is a strategy rather than a goal, so are the external partnerships which drive community-building.

This argument fundamentally changed the way we had been thinking about community-building. Shifting it from a goal to a strategy focused our attention on the partnerships that drive community-building, rather than the long list of societal goals these partnerships can produce. This, in turn, resolved the conflicts we had been struggling with. We realized that they arose from having positioned it as a goal. Our thinking on this is as follows.

External partnerships

To propose that the new policy should include “external partnerships” as a strategy is really only to say that the policy would *recommend* partnerships as a best practice for achieving the goals of participation and excellence, in the same way that it would recommend the strategies of enhancing capacity and interaction. To see how this might work, consider the following example.

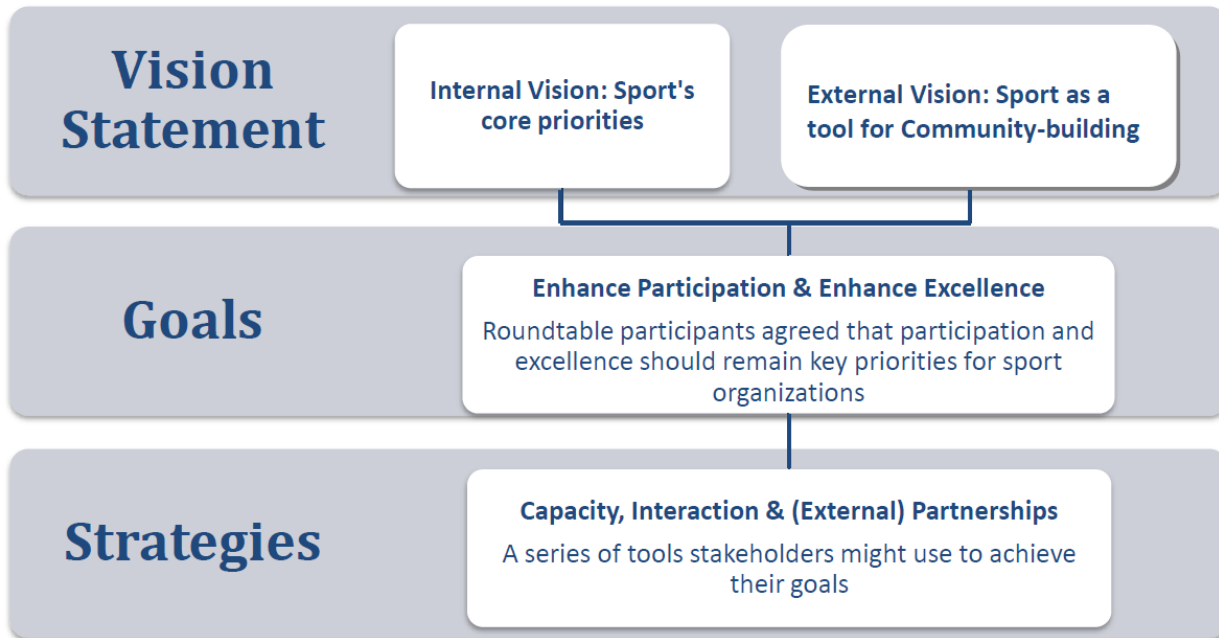
Suppose that officials responsible for sport decide to sit down with officials from the local immigrant settlement office to discuss a possible partnership. When they do, it should be clear that the new policy would not be suggesting that they do so in order to find ways to promote social cohesion. In this approach, social cohesion is NOT a goal of the sport policy because community-building is NOT a goal of the policy. The concern over whether community-building imports new responsibilities for social cohesion thus disappears. Rather, the sports officials should be looking at the partnership as a possible opportunity to bring New Canadians into the local sport leagues, thereby enhancing their goals of participation and, possibly, excellence.

How does this contribute to community-building? If the officials from the sport office should be thinking about how to promote participation or excellence, the officials from the immigrant settlement office should be thinking about how such a partnership would enhance social cohesion, because that IS a goal for their organization. Happily, the goals of the two parties are often complementary and therefore can be pursued together through a partnership, which, in turn, leverages their resources and increases their effectiveness. The “synergy” between the two sides thus allows them to create a win-win situation. The overall outcome from this effort is *community-building* or a leveraging of sport to achieve complementary goals.

Describing community-building in terms of these partnerships thus raises no awkward questions around accountability, dispersal of energies, competition for resources or blurring of roles and goals. Each side has its own internal goals, based on its core business, but they are able to use sport as a platform for pursuing them together.

One further consequence of this proposed new focus on external partnerships should be mentioned. If the new Canadian sport policy recognized partnerships as a key strategy for promoting its goals, this would be a powerful signal to community organizations and government departments from outside sport that the sport community now recognizes the critical role they could play in the future of sport; and that, as a consequence, these organizations and departments also have a place and a stake in the policy and, indeed, in the sport community. This would provide strong support to community groups who are interested in pursuing such partnerships, and encourage non-sport related ministries and community groups to seek out sport organizations for discussions. In short, it would expand the boundaries of the sport community and the sport system in a whole new direction.

Figure 1: Framing the new Canadian sport policy



8. Conclusion

Before bringing this report to a close, it may be useful to revisit some of the key questions that have been raised along the way, thus retracing the critical steps in the argument.

What is community-building?

Community-building is a leveraging of sport and the infrastructure and relationships of the sport community to achieve societal goals that lie outside the core business of sport.

How does it work?

The key to community-building lays in “external partnerships,” that is, partnerships between sport and non-sport organizations. Sporting activities have a remarkable capacity to support such partnerships because they can often achieve multiple goals through a single event or activity. For example, the Ottawa Catholic Integration Centre’s Community Cup Soccer Tournament brings new recruits into the local soccer leagues, thus enhancing participation, at the same time that it helps New Canadians become more integrated into their new community, thus promoting social cohesion. Sport has a remarkable capacity for creating these kinds of win-win situations.

Why put community-building in the policy?

The current sport policy takes no steps to encourage sport and non-sport organizations to work together to achieve complementary goals. By including a new vision of community-building, and recognition of the role partnerships can play in driving community-building, the new policy would help raise awareness around the opportunities that sport offers to non-sport organizations to leverage their resources and help them achieve their own goals. Participants felt it was time to launch a wider discussion of community-building, one that involves the public policy community as a whole, ranging from deputy ministers to program managers in community organizations. The new policy would provide an ideal place from which to launch such a discussion.

What is the impact on accountability, resources, focus and capacity?

Recognizing external partnerships as the drivers behind community-building allows us to reposition community-building as a “strategy” to help the sport community enhance participation and excellence. Looking at community-building this way removes any conflict with the overarching goals of the policy and leaves the core business of sport unchanged. As a result, partnerships can be used to increase resources and capacity, without compromising accountability or focus.

Who is the policy for?

The original policy was drafted to guide and mobilize government officials and the core sport sector to align their activities and programs around common goals. The new policy should be for all Canadians and their communities. Moreover, it should be written so as to recognize the different interests and roles that different groups have in sport. For example, the internal vision of sport continues to reflect what sport means to those within the sport community. The external vision speaks to organizations and people who may not see themselves this way, but who care about how sport contributes to the quality of life within their communities. Such people range from parents who enrol their children in sports

leagues to social policy advocates who may see sport as a new and effective way to advance goals such as social cohesion or community health.

9. Appendix – Additional Case Studies

- During the June 7th roundtable in Saint John, a representative from *the John Howard Society of New Brunswick* provided a key example that showed how an organization can expand its focus beyond its core interests to create new opportunities for partnerships and funding. Although this is not a sport example, it provides an important lesson for how sport and community groups can work together to create new opportunities and achieve their goals.

Over the last 3 years, the *John Howard Society of New Brunswick* expanded its mandate beyond rehabilitating “offenders” and began addressing underlying concerns in the community as a whole, specifically in the area of mental health. Where twenty years ago the organization spent 95% of its time rehabilitating offenders, now the organization divides its time equally between rehabilitation and mental health awareness. By partnering with hospitals and provincial health authorities to deliver services, this organization is able to take a more “holistic” approach to achieve its mandate. Furthermore, by working with new partners, the John Howard Society is now eligible for funding in the mental health sector, an advantage that has allowed it to diversify its budget and influence, including its focus on prevention.

- Big Brothers Big Sisters has partnered with local sports organizations to deliver the “Hockey Heroes Program.” Through this program BBBS supplies equipment to children and works with sport organizations to introduce, coach and provide venues to youth engaged in sport. This partnership allows community organizations to achieve their goals of youth development and mentorship, while at the same time helping sports organizations achieve their goals (higher participation).
- Partnerships have also been developed between sport and non-sport organizations to deliver soccer programs. The “Soccer Super Start” initiative was launched by BBBS, local schools and sport organizations in an effort to quell growing antagonism between two community groups. By bringing these groups together through sport, this soccer program has introduced and taught them to cooperate, thereby mitigating the conflict that was beginning to cause fractures in the community. BBBS is also partnering with sport and ethnic organizations to engage Edmonton’s growing immigrant community. Together, these partnerships have allowed Big Brothers Big Sisters to mobilize 3,000 volunteers and enroll thousands of children in sport activities over the last year.
- The Active Alberta policy was developed through the collaboration of 10 Government of Alberta ministries. This cross-ministry initiative is the first of its kind in Canada and commits the government to use a “whole-of-government” approach to addressing issues around sport. In other words, Active Alberta is a commitment by the ministries to use their resources towards recreation, sport and active living in order to promote and advance a health community. Roundtable participants suggested that the new policy should encourage government to create more of these initiatives in order to systematically leverage the benefits of sport.

- The Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) has also been active in partnering with athletic organizations in order to use sport in a way that benefits the wider community. The HRM’s Youth Advocate Program focuses on engaging troubled kids between the ages of 9-12 by introducing them to free sport programs. Since this program’s implementation, roundtable participants noted that children have been less prone to join or associate with gangs and the local community centre – where many of the sport activities take place – has become a major “hub” of activity and relationship-building. To some extent, the success of this initiative can be attributed to the close partnership developed between sport groups, community organizations and the surrounding municipalities.
- The HRM has also developed their “Introduction to Sledge” hockey program by partnering with Easter Seals and the Nova Scotia Health and Wellness department. This non-competitive league has provided numerous benefits for sport and the community, including increasing participation for sport and giving disabled children a new opportunity to participate in sport, create new relationships and develop personal skills – three benefits that advance the interests of both sport and the community.
- With the support of Nova Scotia’s Department of Community Services and the Department of Labour and Advanced Education, Sport Nova Scotia has been able to develop new initiatives aimed at youth. For example, the *Youth Leadership Program*, which supports at-risk youth and is now in its sixth year, has become a model for providing training and developing key skills required for future academic and employment opportunities.