

On Track for Change: The Upsides and Downsides of BIPOC-focused Recreation Programming

By Equity and Anti-Racism Coordinator Fawn Logan-Young

In a world where diversity and inclusion are increasingly recognized as pillars of a healthy society, the issue of racial marginalization within recreation has come to the forefront. The concept of creating BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) specific programs within the realm of recreation to address different forms of discrimination has sparked a significant debate; the idea hinges on whether such initiatives serve as a leap forward in the fight against racism or if they inadvertently segregate and reinforce tokenism. The following article will delve into the nuanced pros and cons of these initiatives, exploring their effectiveness in promoting anti-racism within the recreation sector while giving insight into BIPOC-specific programming using our recent collaborations with one of our Signatories of our Anti-Racism Charter in Recreation.

To foster a collaborative environment, it is crucial for the recreation sector to adopt and reinforce values of diversity and inclusion before we can even begin tackling anti-racism. Addressing the lack of diversity and inclusion in certain recreation spaces requires a multifaceted approach, including acknowledging historical contexts, promoting diversity in leadership, and ensuring that the narratives of all communities are represented and honoured in collaboration.

In a best-case scenario, you have *folxs who reach out to your organization seeking support with a specific incentive or activity; however, without creating genuine signs of being an anti-racist institution, communities of colour will not likely approach your organization in these ways. Oftentimes, outreach is necessary and can be beneficial when conducted in an informed manner, especially when attempting to build or support communities and diverse-centric events.

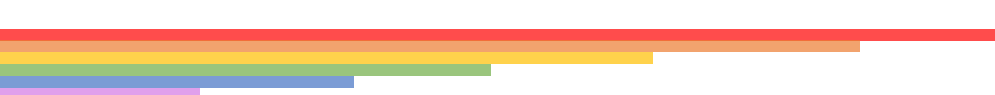
** Some have adopted the spelling folx as an explicitly inclusive term intended to include groups that are typically marginalized*

On one hand, BIPOC-specific programs in recreation aim to address historical and systemic barriers, offering spaces where individuals from racially marginalized communities can feel seen, heard, and valued. These programs can be tailored solutions that recognize and cater to the unique experiences and challenges faced by BIPOC individuals. On the other hand, concerns arise around the potential for these programs to reinforce problematic assumptions and perpetrate tokenism instead of broadening understanding and aiding in addressing the historical exclusion of these members of society.

Anti-racism represents a proactive and deliberate effort to dismantle and confront racism in all its manifestations. It's about acknowledging and tackling both systemic and institutionalized racism alongside individual prejudices and biases. For recreation professionals, incorporating anti-racism into recreation programming means challenging how we create and think about programming and ensuring equitable access to recreation opportunities for all community members. This approach is not only about fairness and empathy but also about enriching the recreational experience for everyone through thoughtful consideration and ensuring the right amount of time and resources are allocated to your work.



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Considering the motivation for recreation among diverse communities and promoting increased minority participation through community-driven approaches can lead to more equitable and inclusive recreation spaces. However, professionals should focus on several key strategies when creating targeted recreation programming without such leadership.

- Firstly, outreach, outreach, outreach. Without relationship building, like any area in our lives, the relationship will not exist with those you are trying to serve.
- Secondly, education, providing accurate information about the historical and ongoing impacts of racism is essential. This knowledge is the foundation for empathy and understanding to make the right programming and collaboration decisions.
- Thirdly, empowering collaboratives to speak out against racism creates a community of allies and advocates and, in turn, hopes to create a culture that goes from indifferent to racism to intolerant to racism and racist behaviours.
- Fourthly, support leadership and innovation from BIPOC members who show interest in recreation and collaboration.
- Finally, declare an ongoing organizational commitment to fostering inclusive environments that promote anti-racism and the support of diversity through continual events, outreach, and communications.

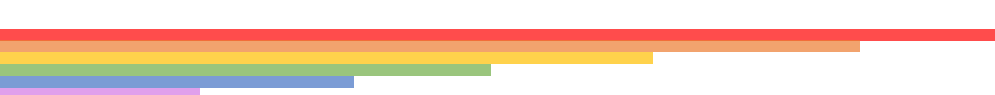
Recreation Nova Scotia's (RNS) development of the Anti-Racism Charter in Recreation in response to escalating racist behaviour within the sector is a foundational example of organizational commitment. This charter underscores the importance of intentional strategies aimed at dismantling systemic barriers. These strategies include engaging stakeholders, gathering and analyzing data to understand who benefits or is burdened by current practices, and developing opportunities to diminish harm, as we aimed to do with our collaboration with the Electric Wheels Jr. Roller Derby Team.

During the school March Break of 2024, we collaborated with the Electric Wheels Jr. Roller Derby Team to promote the Anti-Racism Charter in Recreation and to give youth of colour - ages 7-18 in this case – the opportunity to try out Roller Derby. The morning session was specifically for the youth, whereas the afternoon was a free skate open to all. We had approximately 15 youths participate, with a total of around 55+, in the afternoon free skate session, providing equipment and snacks. The event was a success on paper, but it is hard to know the true impact without seeking feedback from the participants, as we hope to gain soon through further outreach.

We know it took time, outreach, genuine collaboration, and community involvement from the roller derby and RNS partnerships to bring this event to life. Before this event, RNS took the opportunity to visit the team, parents, and coaches to discuss racism and the act of being anti-racist to prepare for March Break's event. Although dismantling racism cannot be done in one chat, it prepared those who planned on helping at the event to be aware of why promoting the Anti-Racism Charter in Recreation is important and how being anti-racist plays into our day-to-day lives beyond this one-time event. Additionally, with our Charter



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Signatory, Electric Wheels, being pre-established in the Roller Derby community, they were able to use resources like social media, community centers and their internal networks to bring together likeminded volunteers and youth to support the facilitation of the event and create a space where participants felt safe to learn and play.

Implementing these approaches requires a shift in perspective and practice. Recreation professionals must actively seek to understand the diverse experiences of their community members and reflect this understanding in their programming. By focusing on education, empowerment, and empathy, professionals can create spaces that welcome diversity and actively combat racism. This commitment to anti-racism in recreation programming is crucial to a more equitable and inclusive society. Each step may seem small, but with good intentions and continual learning, once you take a minute to look back on the path, you'll realize you've walked miles and may have helped someone along the way.

As we move forward, it is crucial for recreation professionals to reflect upon the approaches discussed and to strive to incorporate them into all facets of their work, always with an eye towards inclusivity and the well-being of all community members. Take the precautions canvassed in this article seriously. Well-intentioned yet ill-informed programming can do more harm than good to the BIPOC community. This dedication to anti-racist practices in recreation programming is not just about equity but about enriching our shared social fabric with the diverse threads that compose our communities. Together, we can build a future of recreation that is truly inclusive, offering every individual the opportunity to enjoy and benefit from our collective natural and community resources in Nova Scotia.



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