



Anti-Racism Charter in Recreation

Spring Check-In Summary Report

Introduction

Racism exists in Nova Scotia, and the recreation sector is no exception. Racist incidents have serious impacts on the health and well-being of those affected, and the lack of support available makes them worse. Recreation Nova Scotia (RNS) has created the Anti-Racism in Recreation Charter to support individuals and communities who face racism by providing guidelines to address, combat, and prevent systemic racism. RNS collaborated with the social enterprise and consulting firm Wisdom2Action to create the Anti-Racism Charter in Recreation throughout 2021-2022.

By Spring 2024, 33 organizations had signed the Charter. Among the signatories are 11 municipalities, four provincial recreation organizations, three sport organizations, ten non-profit groups, and one post-secondary institution.

An Anti-Racism in Recreation Online Training Module has been developed to complement the Charter. The two-hour training provides information on the people who make up Nova Scotia's diverse communities and the history of racism and discrimination in the province. Participants learn what racism and discrimination are and how to work towards overcoming biases.

Executive Summary

RNS is committed to the continued support of Charter signatories. RNS staff conduct periodic check-ins with organizations. The most recent check-ins occurred throughout the spring of 2024, with 15 of the 33 signatories. Each organization answered eight questions regarding their work on anti-racism and the Charter. The data gathered from these check-ins helps RNS understand how organizations use the Charter, determine what resources or support is needed from RNS, support RNS' advocacy efforts, and support information sharing amongst current and potential signatories.

Methods

RNS Program Manager Graham Mounsey completed the spring check-in meetings between April and June 2024. All 33 signatories were contacted to schedule a meeting held remotely and in person. Of the 33 signatories, 15 meetings were scheduled with organizations that vary in size and structure. The meetings were held by RNS staff and 1-3 representatives from the signatory organization. Representatives varied in roles depending on the signatory's organizational structure.

What We Heard

Adopting the Charter

Each organization has taken an individual approach to adopting and implementing the Charter. Most organizations found the process of signing the Charter smooth and simple. The volunteers or staff who brought the Charter forward to decision-makers felt that leaders decided to sign it rather quickly. One of the non-profit signatories felt the Charter helped to remove a lot of the early work for volunteers, "If the process (to adopt) was too labour intensive, it would [have] caused problems dealing with volunteers who have limited time."

Organizations learned about the Charter in various ways, such as through the annual RNS conference, prior relationships with RNS, or by participating in the process of developing the Charter. One organization noted that the Charter is helping them to address a very real concern, "Racism is alive and present and gets dismissed. Our organization wants to be an advocate." Another organization feels that the Charter is helping them learn more about equity-seeking communities, "[The] Charter helps to reach out into communities that the organization wasn't aware of or have been under-represented."

The signing of the Charter is typically done at the highest level of leadership within an organization, e.g., the Mayor and Council or the Board of Directors. This is important to support subsequent decision-making within the organization, but it can still present challenges with the time and work needed to present it to leadership.

Action Planning

The signatories of the Anti-Racism Charter commit to creating an Anti-Racism Action Plan. The 15 signatories use similar action-planning methods. Most are working on developing an action plan related to the Charter, but methods vary. Multiple organizations are incorporating anti-racism-related initiatives into their overall strategic plans. Some organizations noted that they are struggling with action planning due to issues such as a lack of funding, a lack of volunteers, and not having a relationship with equity-seeking communities.

Hike Nova Scotia has taken the extra step of working with a consulting firm to support its anti-racism work. This was an extension of the organization's equity, diversity, inclusion and accessibility planning.

The consultant firm led a discussion for board members, staff and instructors about what the organization could do about racism and determined some learning opportunities for them to undertake. This effort resulted in Hike Nova Scotia being able to be more intentional and authentic when working with equity-seeking groups. Hike Nova Scotia Executive Director Janet Barlow said they can now respond confidently when a group reaches out directly, “When they reach out, you need to say yes, how can we work with you?” One example of this work is Hike Nova Scotia, which was invited to participate in the Ulnooweg Summer Solstice Run/Walk in Millbrook, organized by the Ulnooweg Development Group.



Hike Nova Scotia Executive Director Janet Barlow at the Ulnooweg Summer Solstice Run/Walk in Millbrook. Photo credit: Hike Nova Scotia

Hike Nova Scotia has identified subsidized spots in its training and events for people from equity-seeking groups. Barlow says that the Charter has also impacted her own position: “[The Charter] influenced how I think about my work. How am I looking at this through the lens of equity and inclusion? The Charter started all of this. It made it more real. It made it something more written and therefore makes us more accountable.”

Four Action/Commitment Areas & Work Underway

There are four action or commitment areas in the Charter:

1. Acknowledge & Address Racism — Commit to zero tolerance of all forms of racism and develop practical processes to address racist acts and behaviours. Acknowledge and update discriminatory policies that encourage or perpetuate the exclusion of racialized populations.
2. Provide Ongoing Training and Educational Opportunities — Deliver continued learning opportunities that provide practical skills to combat racism in recreation at all levels of an organization. Promote, participate in, and support external opportunities with the same objectives while always considering the safety of all participants.
3. Build Racially Representative Communities — Meaningfully encourage participation and opportunities for racially diverse community members within your area of recreation. Critically examine participation within the organization at all levels while employing communication and engagement practices that proactively include first-voice representation.
4. Design Equitable and Inclusive Opportunities — Create opportunities for racialized people to take on leadership and decision-making roles at all levels of an organization, paying special attention to mentorship, business, and skill development opportunities. Mindfulness of emotional, psychological, and physical safety of racialized persons will be required, particularly in historically white and underrepresented organizations.

Many signatories are working towards building racially representative communities by creating and implementing programs specifically for equity-seeking groups. Several organizations recognized the need to strengthen connections with equity-seeking communities and individuals. They are forming partnerships and collaborating with external organizations to achieve these connections while refining their external communications strategy.

The Electric Wheels Roller Derby League held a BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Colour) Day in the winter of 2024, soon after signing the Charter. The organization reported that the event was fantastic and well-received, leading to new partnerships with other community groups. The event offered a roller derby introduction for BIPOC folks ages 8-17, followed by a free open skate for all. To build off this event, the team plans to purchase sport helmets that accommodate hijabs and patkas. Organizers feel that this effort will speak directly to newcomers and equity-seeking groups because it tells them they are considering their needs and reduces barriers to participation.

Many organizations use the Charter to influence and assist in writing or updating policies, such as human resource policies and onboarding procedures.

Organizations have shared that they display the Charter in their public facilities to demonstrate their commitment to acknowledging and addressing racism.

Multiple organizations have written a land acknowledgement, which is read at gatherings. A land acknowledgement recognizes a place's traditional First Nations, Métis, and/or Inuit territories. This practice predates contact with Europeans and would take place when Indigenous people visit nearby communities.

Five organizations said they had utilized the RNS Anti-Racism in Recreation Training Module or offered related training to staff or volunteers. Organizations that had not yet undertaken any related training did identify their intentions to do so in the future. One of the signatories highlighted using the training to integrate the content into educational offerings. Another organization identified the goal of having coaches and participants take the training first, followed by members of their board.

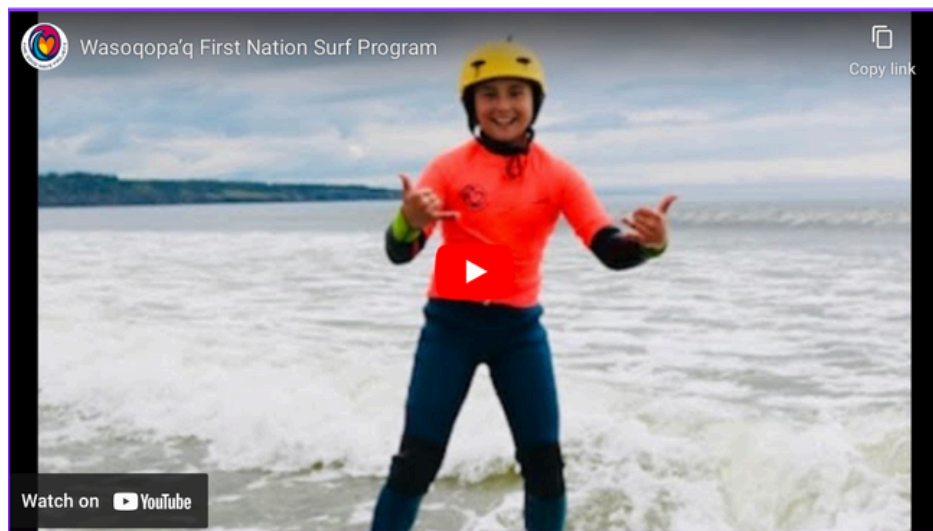
To design equitable and inclusive opportunities, signatories are updating and improving hiring practices, reviewing policies, gathering data to better understand the reach of their programs, and reserving positions on committees for members of equity-seeking communities. One signatory has created a pilot project to recruit staff from African Nova Scotian communities throughout the Halifax region.





2024 Wasoqopa'q Surf Program. Photo credit: Good Wave Project

The Good Wave Project is helping to build representative communities by increasing the number of First Nations and Indigenous instructors who lead their programs. At the spring meeting, four First Nations and one Metis individual were completing their certified instructor course. The Good Wave Project organizes the Wasoqopa'q Surf Program, which is for Indigenous and African Nova Scotian youth ages 10 to 18.



Video credit: Good Wave Project

The program has been planned in collaboration with the Wasoqopa'q First Nation and the Tri-County Regional Centre of Education, with Indigenous youth volunteers central to decision-making. Staff said they had the chance to get to know the youth through working with them. They learned more about their culture from the youth, who were very proud and strong advocates for their community.

Communication, Reporting, and Accountability

Signatories report on their efforts around the Charter in many ways. Many utilize social media and regular newsletters to update their members or community on anti-racism work. A smaller number use their website or annual reports. Many organizations use internal reporting through committees, councils, or staff meetings. Northwood has a Manager of Diversity who provides monthly updates to leaders within the organization regarding anti-racism and diversity efforts while also planning cultural events. Northwood evaluates its overall efforts through annual staff surveys with specific questions about racism within its facilities and programs.

Signatories utilize RNS check-ins to determine their progress. Most signatories felt that the spring check-in meeting helped them review their efforts and better understand their progress since signing the Charter. One organization evaluates efforts through the number of youth returning to their programs and direct feedback received from parents. Municipal signatories utilize their respective committees and council meetings while including the Charter in their agenda packages and providing regular updates.

Effectiveness of the Anti-Racism Charter

Overall, signatories participating in the spring check-in felt that the Anti-Racism Charter had supported their organizations' anti-racism efforts and kept them accountable. One organization shared that the Charter is an effective tool and resource that has guided their efforts but not dictated them, "We know our community, know where we want to see things go, the reference guides work but are not prescriptive." It was mentioned multiple times that the Charter has helped to open discussions about racism and identify that it is still prevalent within communities. Another signatory shared that their progress since signing has been minimal but still effective, "Work has been slow, but would have been slower if there wasn't action and example of commitments." From a municipal perspective, the resource alleviated the pressure of anti-racism work from one staff member and shared the responsibility throughout the organization. One municipality said that the Charter gave staff rationale to bring to council and will help them continue the work, "[The Charter] gives accountability [and shows] what we have to do and not get pushed aside."

Resources & Future Support

Most signatories who participated in spring check-in meetings feel the support of RNS is important as they move forward with their anti-racism efforts and that check-ins help them continue to make progress. Having a consistent staff person at RNS to contact with questions or for support is paramount. Many see value in learning what other signatories are doing as a part of their Charter work, sharing resources such as action plans, policies, promotional tools, case studies and research, articles, and tool kits. Partnerships were also included as a top need as signatories proceeded with action planning. Organizations believe they need to create meaningful partnerships that will help them develop and [carry out their action plans.

Signatory Spotlights

Most signatories also requested continued training, with one suggesting that a training resource that includes first-person experiences would be powerful for staff and program participants. Additional requests include funding and opportunities to share successes.

In 2023, The Surfing Association of Nova Scotia received a grant through the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association for an Intercultural Equity Surf Program. Through this grant, SANS collaborated with Mi'kmaq Physical Activity Leaders, the Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia (ISANS) and other community partners to host a series of events to increase participation in their programs from equity-seeking groups. With the remaining funding from this project, SANS hopes to purchase inclusive swimwear for participants, such as neoprene hijabs, which will be available for participants to use at surf programs.



Surf Association of Nova Scotia event hosted in Halifax in partnership with ISANS and Veith House. Photo credit: SANS Facebook page

The Town of Truro has developed an African Nova Scotian Community Strategic Committee which may be the only of its kind in the province.

The committee includes councillors and African Nova Scotian (ANS) community representatives and has recently developed a strategic plan to guide their work. In the past, a summer student was hired with a focus on efforts through the ANS committee. In addition to the committee, the town has created a budget for related programming and has hosted a series of Elder luncheons and African Heritage Month events. It also plans to organize additional cultural celebrations in the future.



Town of Truro African Nova Scotian Community Strategy Committee and students from Truro Middle School pictured at naming ceremony for the Underground Railroad. Photo credit: Town of Truro Facebook page.

Conclusion

Organizations need more funding to make significant progress on some of their efforts. Many organizations mentioned funding when asked what resources they needed moving forward. The Charter continues to support organizations across Nova Scotia to address and prevent racism and racist incidents in recreation settings. It has been identified by many of the signatories that the Charter goes beyond supporting efforts in recreation. It provides a commitment to anti-racism throughout the organization and influences many different aspects of operations. Signatories have identified the important role that RNS has in supporting anti-racism efforts and made it clear that the Charter is an excellent tool that provides high-level guidance in these efforts. Participants agree that the Charter sends a strong message to participants, volunteers, staff, and the community that they are committed to eliminating racism in recreation and creating safe and welcoming environments for all.