

2024 Grassroots Recreation Community Discussions

Objective

This report summarizes the findings from the 2024 Grassroots Recreation Community Discussion sessions and online survey. The intent was to gain an understanding of the current grassroots recreation landscape in the region, as well as to identify ways that GPRRC can best support grassroots recreation within our local communities. By surveying these communities, we hope to engage current and new leaders and volunteers in the community to enhance recreational activities within the region.

Background

During the March 9, 2023, Administrative Working Group meeting, the challenges regarding rural sports programming were discussed. As a result of feedback from the 2020 Household Survey, further discussion concluded that a grassroots recreation focused engagement (especially within rural communities), , would be appropriate to serve all residents of the GPRRC catchment area. A suggestion was made that Town Hall style meetings in rural communities be conducted along with an online survey. The project evolved to include two City of Grande Prairie neighbourhoods, bringing the total number of meetings to eight (8). Grassroots is the most basic level of an activity or organization, where a participant receives their first introduction to a game or activity and is an important pathway for recreational activities.

At the June 21, 2023 GPRRC meeting the following motion was carried:

MOTION-GPRRC-06-21-2023-02 (made by Councillor Bosch) Proceed with recreation town halls in 6 locations, along with an online survey and final report.

The Grassroots Community Recreation Discussions addressed the following Joint Regional Master Plan 2016 recommendations:

Recommendation #14 suggests that regional recreation needs assessments occur on an ongoing basis to increase understanding of recreation and program opportunity preferences and trends. In response to this recommendation, the GPRRC has conducted Household Surveys in 2018 and 2020,



along with a Community Group Questionnaire in 2022. These Grassroots Recreation sessions are a follow up to these surveys.

Recommendation #8 suggests that local municipalities support efforts to bolster volunteerism. One of the challenges that is often identified in delivery of grassroots recreation programs, indeed, any children's recreation programs, is the lack of volunteers. By conducting these town halls, potential volunteers can give their input when it comes to recreation needs in the community, engage with GPRRC administration and learn about coaching training opportunities in the region.

Recommendation #13 suggests that removing financial, transportation and social barriers to participation be an area of future focus. In visiting rural communities directly to discuss and share their needs, as well as barriers to their participation, the committee would be able to make informed decisions based on these potential barriers.

Marketing efforts

Various types of marketing were used to ensure as many residents became aware of the project as possible.

The following were employed:

- Paid ads and posts on Facebook throughout the months of October and November.
- Facebook Events created for each meeting, all GPRRC followers were invited.
- Coordinator shared events in various community Facebook groups.
- Eventbrite Events created for each meeting, with free tickets available by reservation.
- City of Grande Prairie distributed postcards to every home in their two target neighbourhoods.
- Postcards with all event dates listed distributed throughout the region to facilities, schools etc.
- Weekly ads ran in the Town and Country newspaper for the four weeks during which the events were held.
- Reached out to Erica Fisher, a local public figure who shares community content to her 7.4K followers. She shared our event as part of her weekly "What's happening around the Peace Country" posts.



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- Personalized email invite sent out to individuals and organizations identified by AWG (Agricultural Societies, user groups, churches, schools, etc.).

Attendance

Location	No of attendees
Clairmont	3
Grande Prairie-Patterson	7
Grande Prairie-Hillside	2
Hythe	3
Elmworth	0
Wembley	9
Bezanson	2
La Glace	3
Total	29

While attendance numbers were low at each venue, those that did attend were engaged and passionate community members, and the Administrative Working Group all felt that quality conversations ensued.

Reoccurring Themes

Can I play?

- Kids (and adults) don't feel comfortable dropping in on spontaneous play in their neighbourhood. They need to feel invited to join in and someone else to be the catalyst.

Schools as Community Hubs

- The local schools were identified as an existing recreation asset, source of information and a way to connect with the community.
- After school opportunities are needed in many communities that are walking distance for the kids. Many families have two working parents and opportunities are needed for kids between after school and when the parents get home.

Where do I start?



- People do not know where to start and do not want to undertake organizing it on their own.
- It is intimidating, and many people are stretched thin for time. They don't want to take on a big responsibility but are willing to take on "bite sized" volunteer sessions.
- It's easier to volunteer once the program is already created than to start something from scratch by yourself.
- A catalyst is needed to spur action within communities.

Catalyst

- A paid programmer could fill the role of catalyst to organize activities, recruit volunteers, divide volunteer tasks and scheduling.
- The model that Town of Sexsmith uses (paid municipal employees work in conjunction with volunteers to deliver programming) could be applied to various communities throughout the region.

Accessibility and Safety of Recreation Spaces

- Accessibility and safety were referenced many times in all communities and for all age groups:
 - Accessible and inclusive playgrounds for children.
 - Snow removal and ice buildup on sidewalks preventing residents from walking in their neighbourhoods.
 - Sidewalk maintenance, or lack of sidewalks and safe trails for walking.
 - Insufficient lighting in neighbourhoods making residents feel unsafe going to and from recreation spaces or allowing their children to go to and from them alone.

Transit

- Travel to and from recreation spaces was identified as an issue.
- City transit made it easy to get to events, but not to get home at a late hour. It made volunteering for events difficult for those with no vehicle.



- Transit time was a barrier to participation for the more rural communities. Many work in the City, and don't want to/or have time to go back into the City for activities. They want options that are within their community.

Volunteer Recruitment and Retention

- Volunteer recruitment and retention a major issue for all organizations and user groups that attended.
- People were unlikely to volunteer for things because they either already volunteered, or they were worried about overcommitting to something or not having enough time.

Take My Money!

- Users/Parents say they are more interested in paying a fee than they are in volunteering (in instances where there is a fee or volunteer requirement for activities) as their time is more valuable than the dollar value assigned, or it's easier to pay the fee than commit the time.

Organized Chaos

- Unstructured drop-in programming can turn into kids running up and down the halls in facilities and not doing the activity scheduled or making it difficult for those that do want to do it. A programmer available during drop-ins could facilitate the drop-in programming and keep kids involved.
- Drop-In activities can be intimidating for those new to an activity. In sport drop-ins such as basketball for example, those who are high level or high energy can often overtake the space leaving little room for those who want to simply "shoot some hoops".

Volleyball

- There is an imbalance in volleyball offerings across the region, with a greater focus on competitive programs compared to recreational offerings.
- With less opportunities for practice than urban youth, youth in rural communities struggle to remain competitive with their peers during club tryouts in the City.

What About the Adults?

- Interest in a Try-It Day for adults.



- Intergenerational opportunities are sought after, where families can recreate together instead of being split up across the region for different individual activities. Especially when it comes to more structured opportunities or programming.

Making Plans and Connections

- There is interest in a welcoming, no-cost, regularly scheduled indoor space where people can meet to chat, plan activities and events with a resource (staff member) to assist them with their goals and how to navigate planning activities.
- Volunteers need a resource to help bridge the gap between lone wolf volunteers and sport organizations.
- Parents want to know that the person running the program is safe and vetted.
- Fledgeling (and current) organizations need help with templates, waivers, policies, insurance, grant writing, fundraising.
- Agricultural Societies would be interested in a regular regional meeting for networking, sharing of ideas and best practices as is done for the Ice Managers Meetings, facilitated by GPRRC.

If at first you don't succeed, try, try and try again!

- Momentum for any kind of activity takes time. People often hear about things after the fact from their network and are disappointed when it isn't offered again. When attendance is low on a program or activity, offer it again a few times before cancelling it completely. It takes time for people to find activities and for things to build a following.

Highlights

- Town of Sexsmith was given as a model example of how paid municipal employees and volunteers can work together to create opportunities for the community.
- Town of Wembley's Play Boxes and Sled Library stood out as a great initiative to inspire spontaneous play.



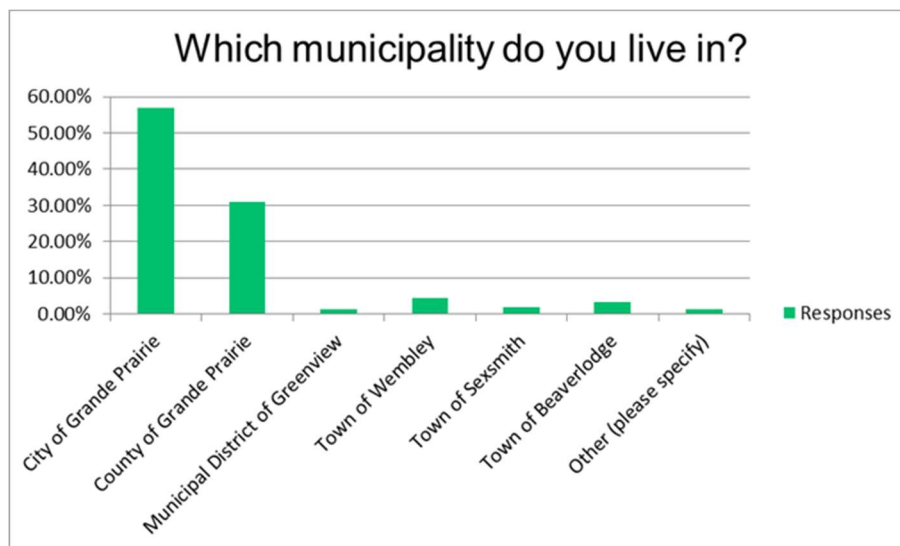
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- County of Grande Prairie FCSS Intergenerational Walk and Talk program has seniors assisting school children with tying their skates when they go skating at the County Sportsplex. This combines connection and community for both the children and seniors.
- Bezanson's covered outdoor ice rink is a frequently used recreation space. Often have people driving in from the City to use it, including Storms Hockey players.
- Debolt has a Lego Club at the Library.
- La Glace as a community has many champions and volunteers running activities. They are doing quite well, they just need financial, technical and administrative support for their volunteers and projects.
- Growing interest in E-Sports. Possible opportunities for a drop-in, or for tournaments.
- Real interest in intergenerational activities and opportunities.

Online Survey

The online survey was open from October 15th until December 6th on Survey Monkey. 156 respondents from all 6 municipalities with two respondents identifying themselves as being from Bezanson and Hythe instead of "County of Grande Prairie" when asked which municipality they lived in.

Representation by Municipality



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Municipality	Population (%)	Survey (%)	Percent Difference	Representation Ratio
City of Grande Prairie	65	56	-9	0.86
County of Grande Prairie	25	31	6	1.24
Wembley	1	4.5	3.5	4.5
Beaverlodge	2	3.2	1.2	1.6
Sexsmith	2	1.9	-0.1	0.95
MD of Greenview	3	1.2	-1.8	0.4

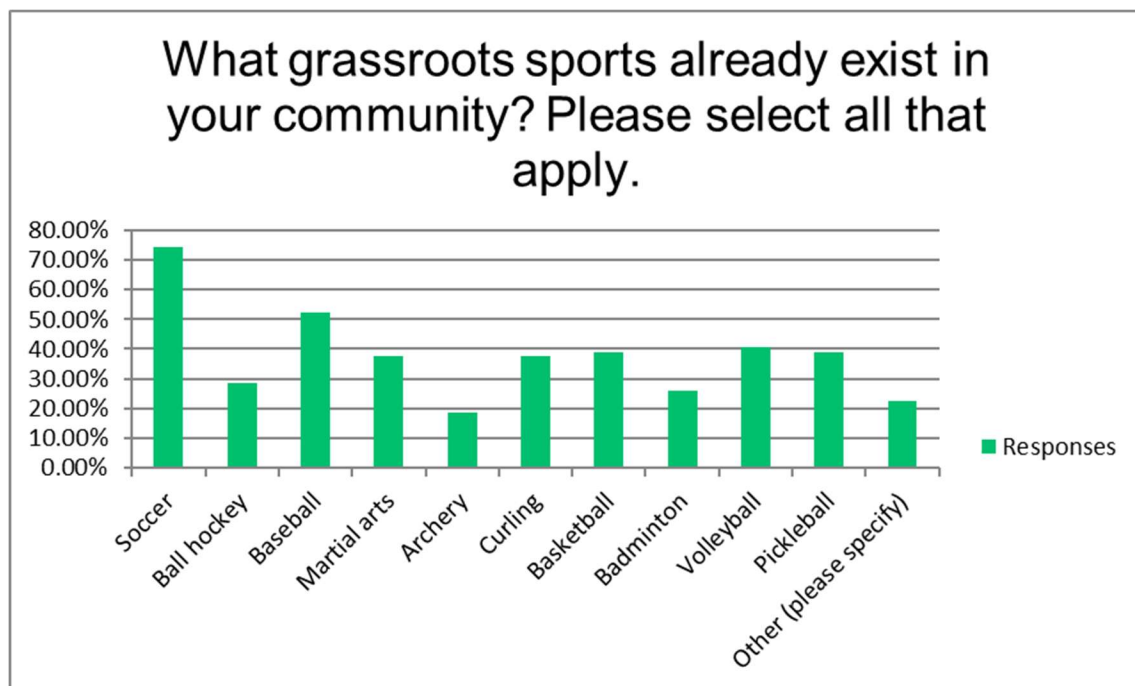
Top Survey Results

	#1	#2	#3
What grassroots sports already exist in your community?	Soccer	Baseball	Volleyball
Which activities would you like to access / participate in the Grande Prairie Region?	Archery	Swimming	Cross Country Skiing
Which grassroots sports would you like to see in your community?	Soccer	Archery	Volleyball and Cross Country Skiing.
What non-sport recreation opportunities exist in your community?	Guides and/or Scouts	Paint/art (club or classes)	Book Club
What non-sports recreation opportunities would you like to see in your community?	Art and Cooking	Pottery	Gardening
What are the barriers that keep you from participating in or in leading activities in your community?	Fees	Inconvenient times	Equipment costs
Is there a space where you can see this taking place in? i.e. building or outdoor space.	Community Hall or Centre	School	No/Unsure (#3) followed by Library (#4)
How can we help support you in these endeavors?	Affordable/Free	Variety or time offerings	Promotion of activities

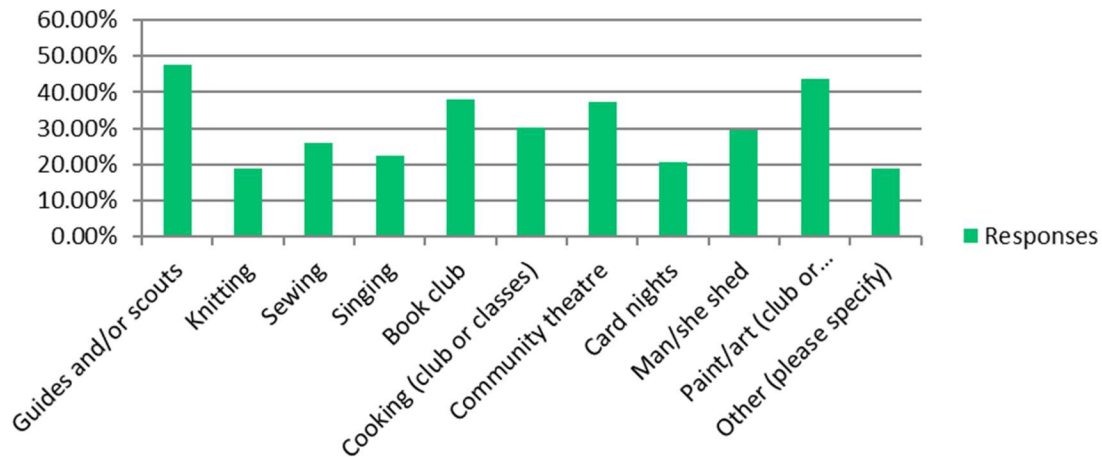


Highlights

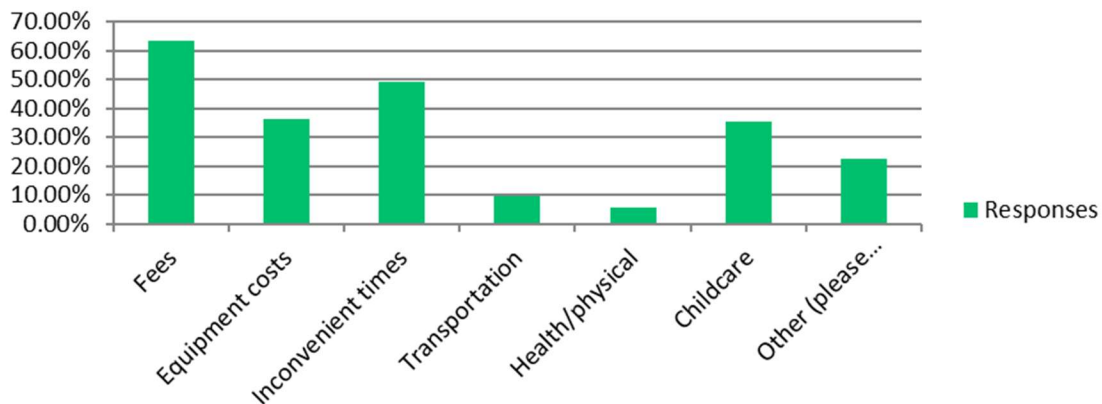
- Respondents identified Soccer, Baseball and Volleyball as the top three grassroots sports that already exist in their community. However, Soccer and Volleyball were also listed as #1 and #3 top grassroots sports respondents would like to see in their community. This could be a disconnect between what's available and what people know about, or simply that there needs to be more options for these sports as we know that soccer and volleyball are limited in the number of participants that can register. Further investigation is recommended for this.
- Lack of available spaces was the #1 barrier that kept people from participating in or leading an activity in the community in the "Other" category, followed by "Didn't know they exist", "Unaffordable" and "Lack of Volunteers/Coaches" with 4 responses each.
- When asked whether they would be interested in volunteering to help get an activity started in their community, or know someone who would be interested in volunteering, respondents were split 49.32% YES and 50.68% NO.



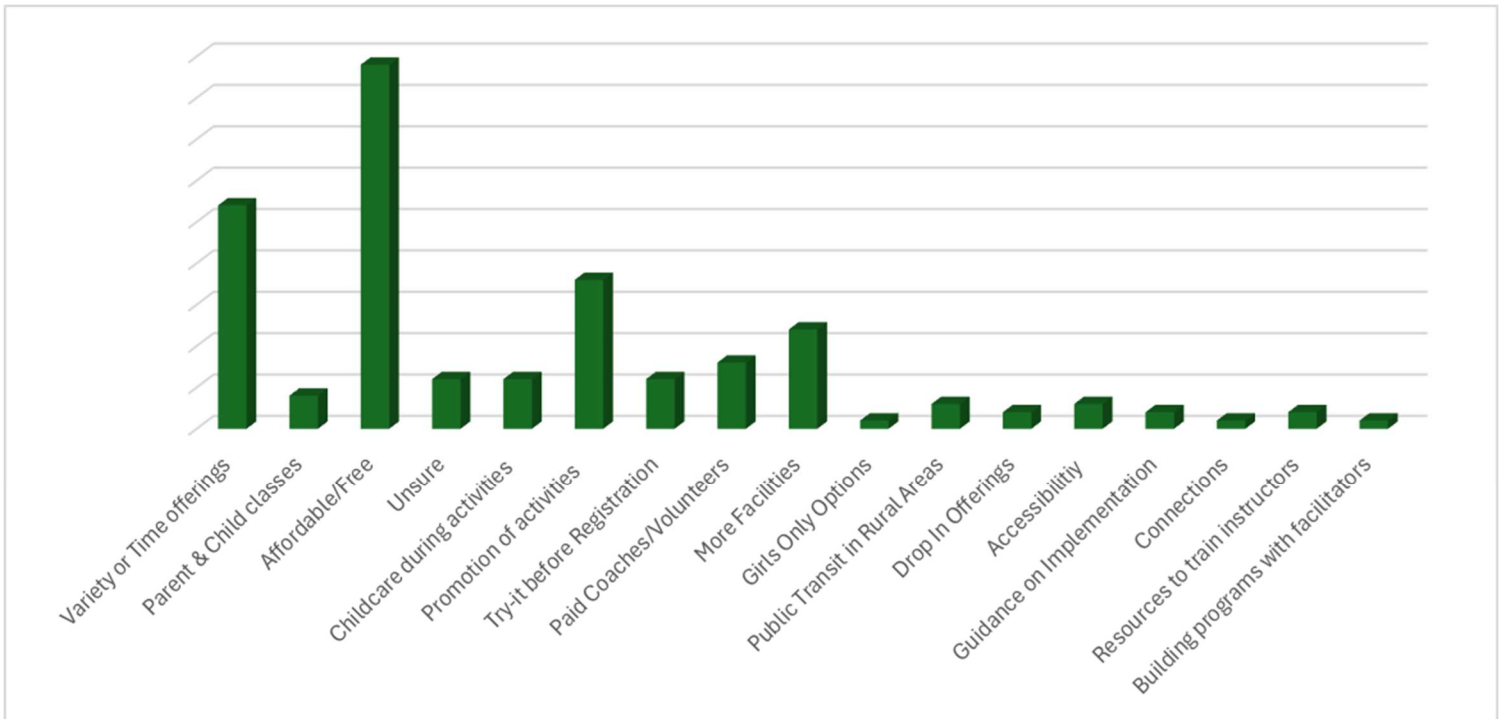
What non-sport recreation opportunities exist in your community? Please select all that apply.



What are the barriers that keep you from participating in or in leading activities in your community? Please select all that apply.



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Reoccurring themes

- Mobility limitations. A desire expressed for low impact activities to accommodate limited mobility.
- Limited spaces in many registered recreational sports are a frustration.
- Options where equipment is provided or available for rental to reduce cost of buying equipment if they just want to try an activity first.
- Looking for more recreational than competitive leagues, drop-in sport opportunities including volleyball, soccer, hockey, tennis,
- Cross Country Skiing opportunities:
 - Cross country trails in Muskoseepi Park
 - Cross country options requested near Beaverlodge and Hythe area.
 - Opportunities requested including Cross Country Skiing in the north end of the County of GP.
 - Nordic trails are too far, suggested golf greens in the off season.
- More recreational hiking opportunities, child friendly, and maintained outdoor trails restricted to pedestrians and cyclists, no ATV access.



- Archery was mentioned multiple times as a desired activity but offerings in the region are few and far between.

Next Steps & Takeaways

City of Grande Prairie

- The Programming team has been exploring opportunities for both teen and adult “Try-It” activities.
- City offered Seniors outdoor Walk and Talk programs in the fall, set to resume in spring, as well as senior’s activities at the Eastlink Centre year-round.
- Programmers are supporting drop-in activities at the Activity and Reception Centre during youth drop-in time to facilitate play and conversation.
- Learn to Play volleyball (and other sports) programs are operating and programming is exploring an intramural type program to accommodate those who do not want to play in club programs.
- The Community Connections team will continue supporting community groups and neighbourhood associations to provide grassroots initiatives and where appropriate, connect them with the programming team to partner on opportunities to provide grassroots programming.

County of Grande Prairie

- The Recreation and Culture department acknowledges in theory that there is significant potential to introduce and implement grassroots recreation opportunities to rural communities and hamlets, but does not have the personnel resources to action this.
- It was noted that there are no organized after school grassroots recreation opportunities in the Hamlet of Clairmont despite having access to County greenspace and a reasonable youth population density. Must be within the “old” hamlet and walkable for children after school who’s parents work the City.
- There is a wide range of recreational opportunities across County communities – some rural communities (Elmworth and Bezanson) are quite active and have options, while others Hythe (has facilities and population but no coordinated programming) and old Clairmont (as above).



Town of Beaverlodge

- The recreation team is considering staffing options that would allow us to offer our 'Drop-In Kids Camps' that we normally run over summer holidays throughout the year.
- Increasing advertising for our free seniors indoor walking program.
- Interest in programs available immediately following school dismissals has been noted and will be considered for future programming.

Town of Sexsmith

- After school drop in programming for youth will be considered for future planning.
- Looking into offering more drop-in sport opportunities for youth like ball hockey.
- Interest in family-friendly activities are noted and will be considered.

Town of Wembley

- Will be looking at options to facilitate drop in programming and sport options.
- Working at developing greens spaces and completing the Town centre sports fields.
- Offering assistance to outside people, organizations for sport or recreation development.
- Additions to the play boxes.
- Working with outside recreation to develop programs to offer to the community. For example, JR. Golf program through local golf course. Bringing Northern sport to the community. Sport day and more.

