



Fall 2009

Engaging the Sport Community in Alberta: *A Framework for Our Sport System*

1.0 Introduction

With the attention being generated by the hosting of the Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games in Vancouver, the profile of and resources allocated to sport have never been higher both in Canada, in general, and, in particular, in Alberta. As a result of this increased profile we have a tremendous opportunity to think about the structure and leadership of sport in Alberta - to think differently and to challenge our assumptions. If we are strategic and show a willingness to adapt and change, the sector can realize significant benefits both for individual sport organizations and for the sector as a whole. If we are not willing to think strategically and to adapt and change, we can only follow what other provinces are already doing - we can only hope to be as good as they are but certainly not better. This is not good enough; Alberta can and should be Canada's sport leader.

In this context, in April 2009, Sport Alberta held a dialogue session with over twenty five (25) sport leaders in Banff, Alberta following the ASPRWF Sport Leadership Conference. Discussions centered on 'the road ahead' and what the next decade of sport should look like. At the session, there was a clear consensus on two key points:

- There needs to be more and deeper discussions on the best way forward for the sport system in Alberta, including discussions on structure, governance, leadership and the delivery of sport in the province, and
- As part of this discussion, stakeholders in the sport sector should think about how to move towards an aligned system (vertically and horizontally) with greater clarity on the mandate of sport leadership organizations, the roles and responsibilities of sport leaders and organizations and on performance measures going forward. This discussion should include a dialogue on the appropriate and best roles for government, provincial sport agencies and other support groups.

2.0 Situation Analysis

2.1 Canada

During the late summer of 2009, the Honorable Gary Lunn, Federal Minister of State (Sport), announced the creation of the 2010 and Beyond Panel to look at the future of high performance sport in Canada. The mandate of this panel is to look at the current structure and governance of high performance sport in Canada and to identify recommendations on a better way forward. It is our belief that we also need to take a broader look at the sport sector in our own province – to find our own better way - not only for high performance sport but for the sport sector as a whole. We trust that Sport Alberta's effort to look at a better way for the sector in the province will be the first of many steps to more optimally align the sport systems in Alberta and in the rest of Canada.

2.2 Alberta

Many stakeholders in the sport sector in Alberta have suggested that the sport system in the province is both fragmented and less connected than it could and probably should be. The sport system has been described as convoluted and complicated, making it difficult for people, those inside and outside the system, to fully comprehend. We recognize that by its nature, sport is competitive; however, a number of stakeholders have suggested that a broad “sector approach” should be adopted and that partners throughout the sport sector should show leadership in working together for the development and advancement of sport. There is also broad agreement that efficiencies can be realized throughout the sector by developing strategies for sharing limited resources and by eliminating the duplication of administrative functions.

2.3 The Development System

A number of stakeholders have also suggested that a clear and effective development process is critical to the enjoyment and success of athletes, coaches and officials, and to the quality of the professional and volunteer experience in the sport sector. It is also critical for the retention of these leaders over the medium and longer term. Although we can not control the end result when our athletes compete, we can and must ensure that the development and preparation processes are as effective and efficient as possible. These stakeholders have also suggested that a simplified and unified delivery system along with a new partnership approach with focused and expert leadership would result in increased public and corporate support for the sport sector as a whole and would help to ensure that the momentum from 2010 continues well into the future.

Leaders at the Banff session put forward a view that one way to implement this unified delivery system and partnership approach would be to create a lean, independent, skills-based, expert driven sport agency in Alberta that would be responsible for leading the strategic investment in sport in the province and that would be accountable to Albertans and the Alberta sport sector for providing the vision and focus that will generate meaningful results. It was suggested that a corporate governance model would be the most effective governance structure for this agency; one that includes independent directors and that ensures that the prime objectives of the agency are met. It was also suggested that it would be desirable to involve both the Government and ASRPW Foundation in this new governance model.

2.4 The Importance of Sport Policy

A final component of the situation analysis that emerged from the Banff session is the importance of strong public sport policy at the provincial level for the advancement of sport in Canada. Provincial sport policies are one of the most influential policy drivers for the development and growth of the sport sector in Canada and there is a real opportunity and need for Alberta to show leadership in this regard. It is our belief that this should be the priority for the ASRPW Foundation going forward.

3.0 Elements of “The Ideal Sport System” in Alberta

The following five elements were identified at the Banff session as being the most critical elements of an ideal sport system; one that is both aspirational and inspirational. These elements are outlined at a very broad or “macro” level and are meant only as a starting place for further dialogue and deliberation.

3.1 Governance

Structure: It has been suggested that the sport sector in Alberta could benefit from a more efficient and effective leadership structure; one that better enables the delivery of sport services in the province and that has accountability both for the allocation of financial resources and the advancement of the sport system in the province.

Planning: In terms of policy, it would be very useful to have a comprehensive Strategic Plan for Sport; one that includes both broad high level objectives along with specific and tangible measures and benchmarks. In the absence of such a strategy, the sport system, as a whole, is not accountable to either the public or to the participants it serves.

3.2 Resources

People: Sport requires exceptional leaders to develop, administer, coach, officiate, promote and engage the public and participants. Significant improvements will need to be made in the training and development of these leaders in the years ahead in order to develop a sustainable and accountable sport system in Alberta. Some examples of the kinds of improvements that will be important include:

- Developing a better working relationship between ASRPWF, Edmonton and Calgary Sport Councils, ASDC's and educational institutions, and
- The creation of a professional designation/association for sport administrators with standards and codes of conduct.

Financial: There is room for significant investments to support the development of the sport sector in Alberta. Significant areas for potential investment would include capital investment in facilities and funding for existing and emerging operational and programming needs. Ad hoc grant-based funding to support sector organizations is a basic requirement for the continued success of the sector and there is also significant room for improvement in this regard. These investments will not occur unless there is a much more accountable and professionally managed system in place. Further, while the government is a critical investor in the sector, it should not be the only one – there is also room for increased support through corporate and individual contributions.

3.3 Program Delivery

Structure: Alberta is large geographically and requires significant resources to operate and deliver sport in a professional and equitable manner while at the same time being fiscally responsible. Provincial level sport needs to be regionalized in its operations and delivery to support the vast number of communities and programs available. Program delivery and development support needs to be closer to users. Provincial level sport organizations need to focus on emerging regional athletes and filter towards national level programs and structures. Alignment is essential.

Process: Cooperation and efficiency need to be the mantra of sport in Alberta. Duplication in administrative services are unnecessary and while we are not naïve to the political and historical reasons for this duplication, an independent leadership group would be better able to consolidate services in order to ensure that as much of the available resources as possible are used to support our athletes and coaches.

3.4 Facilities

How is the development of athletic facilities, which occurs mostly at municipal level, tied to the overall plan for sport development in Alberta? There seems to be a significant disconnect between sport development and delivery and the operation of facilities in the province that are largely owned and operated by municipalities or educational institutions. There is also a need to better utilize the

facilities that do exist to maximize access and availability, and to ensure efficient use of public dollars. The growth of sport in the province is directly tied to the availability of and access to facilities and a stronger link needs to be made between the provincial sport policy, delivery organizations and the operators and developers of these facilities in Alberta.

3.5 Opportunity

Athletes and the communities in which they reside should be at the core of the sport system in Alberta. Over the past several years there have been significant developments in the sport sector that have helped to ensure that an athlete centred approach is taken by sport leaders in the development of programs and opportunities for participants. There is still much work to be done, however, and there needs to be a significant investment in the education, governance and operation of sport that evolves towards a complete athlete centred system for sport in Alberta.

4.0 Conclusion

Sport, by its nature, is competitive; however, there is broad support for the idea that a broad “sector-wide approach” should be taken moving forward whereby partners show leadership in working together. We have a tremendous opportunity to help create a better way for sport in Alberta, one that includes a simplified delivery system and a new partnership approach with focused and expert leadership. We believe that this better way will result in increased public and corporate support for sport and significant benefits to all Albertans.

5.0 Taking Action – From Vision to Reality

To make this vision of a better way a reality, Sport Alberta would like to hear from you, the sport leaders in our province. Your voice and your views are critically important. Over the next few months we will be engaging the sector to think through the following questions:

1. What should be the key areas of focus for creating a better way for sport in Alberta?
2. What leadership and governance models might support this better way?
3. Have we identified the right elements in working towards this better way? Are there other elements that need to be explored?

Finally, and most importantly - would you be willing to help us further this discussion? If so, please send an email to Sport Alberta srobinson@sportalberta.ca with ‘count me in’ as the subject line.