



Be Your Community Compass

Community Compass tells the story of how recreation and parks can become spaces where everyone belongs. Through real experiences and lessons learned, it highlights the importance of building trust, listening to communities, and creating inclusive programs. This guide encourages organizations to apply these insights to ensure all community members have the opportunity to connect, participate, and thrive.



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Welcome

Welcome to **Be Your Community Compass**, a storybook developed by Community Compass, a program proudly led by the Alberta Recreation & Parks Association.

We are so glad you are here.



Purpose

The purpose of **Be Your Community Compass** is to support professionals, particularly those seeking to grow their careers in recreation and parks, as well as related sectors, in integrating belonging and equity into the places they work. Our resources are designed for individuals, organizations, leaders, and learners who are committed to making meaningful change.

By sharing our journey in working with equity deserving groups and promoting equitable and inclusive workplaces, we hope to demonstrate how others can make practical steps towards change.

How to Use This Storybook

Be Your Community Compass has been created to showcase the importance of not only growing meaningful careers, but helping others, protecting nature, and fostering a true sense of community.

We invite you to explore this storybook in the way that feels most relevant to you.

We Encourage you to:

Learn with intention: Engage with resources and stories openly. Consider how the insights relate to your own work and community.

Reflect with purpose: Pause to ask questions, and make notes. Think about how the lessons can be applied to your work.

Act meaningfully: Apply what you learn in ways that create an impact (ex. in how you lead, collaborate, and create belonging).

Learn About Alberta Recreation & Parks Association

Alberta Recreation & Parks Association (ARPA) is a not-for-profit organization that was established in 1950. We work in collaboration with members across Alberta to provide educational and professional development opportunities, host key sector events, deliver a variety of programs, and share sector-based research, information, and tools to support the growth of the recreation and parks sector.

Learn more:



arpaonline.ca

About Community Compass

Community Compass is the Alberta Recreation and Parks Association's workforce initiative. The program is committed to raising awareness about career opportunities in the recreation and parks sector, showing pathways to employment to job seekers, and supporting the recreation and parks sector to foster a more equitable, diverse, and inclusive workplace.

Learn more:



arpaonline.ca/program/community-compass/



Creation of Community Compass

How the Idea Began

Community Compass began with a labour-market study that researched employment trends in the recreation and parks sector. Just as the research was released, COVID-19 reshaped the sector. When a labour-market partnership grant became available, the opportunity and timing aligned for the creation of Community Compass.

The Creation of Community Compass

A significant amount of work went into the grant application, such as defining the case for the program, outlining deliverables, and aligning with work already underway. Because the grant included pre-prescribed partners and parameters, we weren't starting from a blank slate. At the same time, we began shaping the program identity.

With help from marketing teams, we explored names, colours, and ideas. "Community" and "Compass" emerged as central metaphors, influencing the name and look of Community Compass.

Building the Program

Meaningful partnerships take time to develop trust, ongoing dialogue, and alignment with program and community goals. Alongside this work, we focused on shaping a program identity by defining its purpose, values, and approach to including equity deserving groups. Careful attention has been given to language, expectations, and how the program would show up in community spaces.



Creation of Community Compass

Early Barriers

Early on, we saw challenges in connecting job seekers with employers, especially those from equity deserving groups. Partner capacity varied, and scaling the program required extensive time and energy: hiring staff, establishing partnerships, and evolving the brand. As interest grew, so did our network with employers.

Proud Moments

There have been sparks of pride along the way. People have recognized Community Compass at conferences. The Indigenous Employment Toolkit has become a teaching resource at the University of Alberta. The Post-Secondary Guide earned praise from professors and deans. Social media ads have reached people we may not have reached on our own.

This progress shows us that Community Compass isn't just a program, but a growing movement, shaped by community and already making a meaningful impact across Alberta and beyond.



Working with Equity-Deserving Groups

What are Equity Deserving Groups?

These are communities of people that experience barriers in participating in society and accessing resources and opportunities. Some barriers can be historical, social, and environmental due to disadvantages and discrimination (Glossary of Human Rights Terms, 2017).

Equity deserving groups can include, but are not limited to, Indigenous peoples, racialized communities, persons living with disabilities, newcomers, refugees, asylum seekers, and members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community.



Why is Working With Equity Deserving Groups Important?

Historically, equity deserving groups have experienced discrimination, exclusion, and marginalization, especially in spaces meant to foster well-being and connection, such as recreation and parks. By working with equity deserving groups, rather than for them, we recognize the importance of lived experience, building trust, and co-creating spaces that reflect inclusivity and belonging.

This storybook shares what we have learnt in our efforts to advance equity, and we hope that it supports you in doing the same in ways that are rooted with intention, respect, and relationship.

Community Compass & Equity Deserving Groups

What Work has Community Compass Done to Work With Equity Deserving Groups?

Community Compass is grounded in relationship-building, respect, and continuous learning. Our work has been guided by the following actions:

1 Build relationships first

We prioritize creating meaningful connections with organizations that work alongside equity deserving groups. Our approach is community centered, focusing on engagement with equity deserving groups to ensure trust, collaboration, and authenticity.

2 Respect lived experience

We honour the knowledge and insights that individuals carry. We remain open to learning about the challenges people face and the perspectives offered towards meaningful solutions.

3 Use inclusive language

We use language that reflects how people identify themselves and work to translate information into different languages to support understanding and inclusion.

4 Prioritize accessibility

We recognize that accessibility is essential in both physical and virtual spaces and actively consider ways to reduce barriers to participation

5 Co-create with communities

We aim to work alongside communities, not for them. By centering community voice, we support approaches that are responsive, respectful, and rooted in lived experience.

6 Stay curious and keep learning

We understand that equity work is an ongoing journey. We continue to listen, learn, reflect, and remain open to feedback.

Job Shadow Events

The Vision

At ARPA, we believe that community parks and facilities are more than just spaces for play and leisure - they are places of learning, growth, and opportunity. We recognized a need to make employment opportunities more visible and accessible to equity-deserving groups. Out of this commitment, our job shadow opportunities were created.

Making it Happen

To make our vision a reality, we collaborated with the organization Action for Healthy Communities, which connects job seekers from diverse backgrounds with meaningful career pathways. We partnered with the YMCA Jamie Platz to host job shadow opportunities. Our first job shadow event was on August 28, 2025. Participants were able to learn about different career pathways at the YMCA, such as aquatics, fitness, and customer service. They were also able to attend a guided walkthrough of the facility!



Why This Matters

The job shadow events were more than a learning opportunity, they were an act of inclusion. By creating space for racialized groups and newcomers to explore recreation and parks careers, we're helping to build a workforce that reflects the diversity of the communities we serve.

Pathways to Equitable Hiring

Why Equity in Hiring Matters

At ARPA, we understand that an inclusive community begins with equitable access to opportunities. Our commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion extends beyond our own organization.

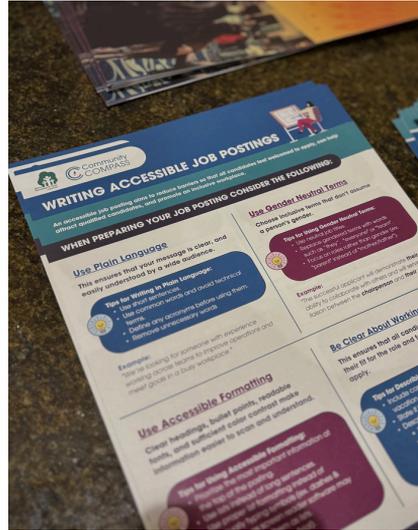
Our Role in Advancing Equitable Hiring

Recognizing that inclusive hiring is the foundation of a diverse and representative workforce in recreation and parks, ARPA has partnered with organizations across Alberta to support learning and capacity building around equitable hiring practices.

Through collaboration, education, and shared resources, we help organizations examine their hiring processes, identify barriers, and explore more inclusive approaches.

Pathways Forward

ARPA remains committed to advancing equitable hiring by continuing to learn, partner, and share best practices. We believe that meaningful change happens when organizations are supported to move from intention to action, creating pathways to employment that are fair, inclusive, and reflective of Alberta's diverse communities.



Program Challenges & Resolutions

Capacity Across Facilities, Parks, & Organizations

Facilities, parks, and member organizations often manage limited staff time, space, and resources. This has highlighted the importance of flexibility and adaptability. Community Compass continues respect differing capacities and allow communities to engage at their own pace.

Reaching Diverse Communities

Some communities are harder to reach due to geography, access, language, or past experiences with systems. This has encouraged Community Compass to continue listening, learning, and adapting approaches to better reflect the needs and realities of different communities.

Building Trust Takes Time

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Measuring Impact Beyond Numbers

When connecting with job seekers, it is not always possible to know whether someone secures employment after using Community Compass resources. This has encouraged a broader view of impact. Our approach to measuring impact focuses on giving people the tools and support they need, helping them feel more confident, connected, and prepared, even if the final outcomes take time to appear.



Pathways to Equitable Hiring

Early Engagement Matters

Real change requires internal champions, as policies alone are not enough.

Preparing Alberta job seekers for meaningful employment should remain a priority, alongside supporting equity deserving groups.

Don't be Afraid to Invest in Social Media

Investing in social media support, including paid promotions was vital for the Community Compass program. They helped us reach audiences that we may not have accessed otherwise.



Build Evergreen Resources & Career Awareness Tools

These can live on beyond project funding. The sector needs consistent outreach, such as community events, maintaining youth and adult engagement, and job seeker awareness.

Be Ready to Seize Opportunities Quickly

Grants can be limited and competition is higher. A strong application takes time, however, don't shy away from that investment.

Continue Your Learning

Equity, Diversity, & Inclusion Peer Learning Network



Inclusive Workplaces Webinars



ARPA's Walking With Indigenous Communities: Action Map



Walking With Indigenous Communities Program



Equity, Diversity, & Inclusion in Recreation Settings eCourse



Recreation & Parks Essentials eCourse



Tools For Accountability

Indigenous Employment Toolkit



Writing Accessible Job Postings Guide



Facilitating Accessible Job Interviews Guide



Reducing Bias in the Hiring Process



Indigenous Awareness & Engagement Toolkit



Healthy Communities Framework

