

---

# Look at Leisure #40:

## Desired Activities and Barriers to Participation

---

Many people would like to take part in recreation activities but they encounter barriers which limit their participation. This bulletin discusses barriers and how they vary for different activities and different segments of the population. The information is based on results of the *General Recreation Survey*, conducted in 1996 by the Alberta Government. The data of the 1996 study are contrasted with those of similar studies conducted in 1981, 1984, 1988 and 1992

### Introduction

The study of non-participation in recreation is an important research topic in the 90's. Information about non-participants is valuable for recreation agencies since only a small proportion of community members use municipal recreation services (Howard and Crompton, 1984). This type of research is helping to define who is not participating and some of the reasons why they are not.

It is important to recognize that there are several types of non-participants. Some people may have no interest in participating. Others may have recently ceased participating in an activity. Some non-participants may wish to start an activity, but encounter various obstacles to participation (Jackson and Dunn, 1992).

There are many types of barriers which may influence the use of leisure time. These include external or environmental, internal or personal, and social barriers (Goodale and Witt, 1989). Some barriers may have a temporary effect, while others may be more permanent. Research is helping to identify barriers that agencies may be able to address and those which are likely beyond their control (e.g., Godbey, 1985).

The 1996 *Alberta Recreation Survey* asked respondents about their desire to start participating in a recreation activity. Respondents were also asked about the reasons or barriers preventing their participation. The barriers discussed in this bulletin are therefore those which may interfere between the desire for an activity and the ability to participate.

### Highlights

Highlights from the 1996 *Alberta Recreation Survey*, which are discussed in this issue, include the following:

- ⊙ Over 40 percent of those answering the survey wanted to start participating in an activity. Physical fitness activities, swimming and golf were the most desired activities.
- ⊙ The desire to start an activity was greatest for females and young adults, and declined with age.
- ⊙ Interest in starting an activity was greatest for those with a post-secondary level of education.
- ⊙ The most important barriers to participation were cost and lack of time.
- ⊙ The relative importance of most of the barriers, and the types of people experiencing these barriers, has remained quite stable since 1981. Cost barriers have become increasingly important over the period of the studies.

### Desire to Start an Activity

The 1996 *Alberta Recreation Survey* asked respondents if there were any leisure or recreation activities they would like to start doing regularly. Two-fifths of the survey respondents (40.6%) answered "yes". The remainder indicated no desire to begin a new activity.

The desire to start an activity differed for various segments of the population. Some of the important patterns were as follows:

- ⊙ More females (54.8%) than males (42.8%) expressed a desire to begin an activity.
- ⊙ There was a marked decline in the desire to begin an activity as age increased, for both males and females. About two-thirds (65.8%) of the young adult group (under 25 years) desired an activity, compared to 34.8% of those 65 years of age or older. The latter figure was up from 23.9% in the 1992 survey.

- ⊙ The desire to begin an activity increased with level of education. Lack of desire was particularly associated with those having less than a high school education.
- ⊙ Low-income respondents (reporting household incomes under \$10,000/year) were much less likely than those with higher incomes to show an interest in starting an activity.

There are many reasons why people may not wish to start an activity. They may simply not be interested or are content with their current range of activities. On the other hand, there may be personal and lifestyle barriers which prevent them from even forming the desire to participate in a leisure activity. The study of these latter types of barriers may be an important research direction for the future (Crawford and Godbey, 1987; Jackson, 1989).

### **Types of Desired Activities**

Respondents were asked to name the activity they wished to start. In total, more than 70 different pursuits were reported. The ten activities mentioned

most frequently are:

1. Physical fitness/aerobics
2. Swimming
3. Golf
4. Bicycling
5. Canoeing, rowing or kayaking
6. Backpacking, mountain climbing
7. Body building
8. Cross-country skiing
9. Tennis
10. Camping

The activities were grouped into categories to facilitate analyses. The categories are identified in Table 1, along with examples of activities in each group.

The percentages of respondents who desired each category of activity are shown in Table 1. Exercise-oriented activities were most frequently desired. Almost one-quarter of those interested in starting an activity desired this type of pursuit. Self-propelled outdoor activities and swimming were next in importance, followed by creative, cultural, social and passive activities. Golf came next, down from first in our last survey. Fewer respondents were interested in taking up each of the other activity types outlined above.

**Table 2: Percent Wishing To Start Activity Types By Age Group for 1988 and 1996\***

Activity Type	Age Group									
	1		2		3		4		5	
No New Act Desired	88	96	88	96	88	96	88	96	88	96
Exercise	36	41	42	44	50	54	63	66	76	73
Self - Propelled	8	14	7	14	6	10	4	7	3	5
Martial Arts	3	8	7	6	5	4	3	4	2	2
Team Sports	4	6	2	5	1	2	1	1	1	1
Swimming	5	5	4	4	2	2	1	1	1	1
Racquet Sports	12	4	8	5	6	4	5	3	3	3
Creative-Cultural	8	4	6	4	7	3	2	1	1	1
Other	2	4	1	4	2	2	3	4	3	3
Golf	4	4	5	4	4	2	4	3	3	4
Resource-Based	3	3	4	2	4	4	6	2	3	2
Downhill Skiing	4	3	5	3	4	4	3	2	1	1
Outdoor Experience	6	3	5	2	5	2	1	1	1	1
Curling, Bowling	3	3	4	3	3	3	2	2	2	1
	2	1	2	1	3	2	2	1	3	1

\* Age Groups: 1 18-25 years, 2 26-34 years, 3 35-44 years, 4 45-64 years, 5 65 years and over

**Table 1: Important Barriers to Participation**

- 
- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <p>1. <b>Exercise-Oriented Activities (24.0%)</b><br/> <i>Examples:</i> Bicycling, ice skating, physical fitness, rollerblading.<br/> <i>Main Barriers:</i> physically unable to, not at ease socially, family commitments.</p> <p>2. <b>Self-Propelled Outdoor Activities (10.8%)</b><br/> <i>Examples:</i> Backpacking, canoeing, cross-country skiing.<br/> <i>Main Barriers:</i> don't know where to learn, cost of equipment/supplies, no opportunity to do it, transportation costs, difficult to find others, lack of transportation, facility not physically convenient, don't know where to go.</p> <p>3. <b>Swimming (10.4%)</b><br/> <i>Main Barriers:</i> facilities overcrowded, lack of transportation, lack physical ability, admission fees/charges, cost of equipment/supplies, facilities poorly maintained, physically unable to.</p> <p>4. <b>Creative, Cultural, Social and Passive Activities (8.7%)</b><br/> <i>Examples:</i> Hobbies, attending courses, dancing, tai chi, video and computer games.<br/> <i>Main Barriers:</i> don't know where to go, don't know where to learn, no opportunity to do it.</p> <p>5. <b>Golf (7.4%)</b><br/> <i>Main Barriers:</i> admission fees/charges, cost of equipment/supplies, facilities overcrowded, not at ease socially, work commitments, facilities poorly maintained, family commitments.</p> <p>6. <b>Resource-Based Outdoor Activities (6.7%)</b><br/> <i>Examples:</i> Snowmobiling, boating, fishing, horseback riding.<br/> <i>Main Barriers:</i> transportation cost, cost of equipment/supplies, lack of transportation, facility not physically convenient, don't know where to go, admission fees/charges, don't know where to learn, no opportunity to do it, facilities overcrowded.</p> <p>7. <b>Racquet Sports (6.5%)</b><br/> <i>Examples:</i> Tennis, squash, badminton.<br/> <i>Main Barriers:</i> difficult to find others, facilities poorly maintained, don't know where to learn, facilities overcrowded, family commitments, physically unable to, work commitments, facility not physically convenient, admission fees/charges, lack physical ability, no opportunity to do it</p> | <p>8. <b>Outdoor Experience (6.3%)</b><br/> <i>Examples:</i> hunting/shooting, camping, bird watching, nature walks, hiking.<br/> <i>Main Barriers:</i> cost of equipment/supplies, facility not physically convenient, don't know where to go, no opportunity to do it, facilities poorly maintained, lack physical ability, physically unable to, lack of transportation.</p> <p>9. <b>Martial Arts (6.3%)</b><br/> <i>Examples:</i> body building, kick boxing, martial arts.<br/> <i>Main Barriers:</i> admission fees/charges, not at ease socially, facilities overcrowded, don't know where to go, cost of equipment/supplies, facilities poorly maintained, don't know where to learn, facility not physically convenient, work commitments.</p> <p>10. <b>Team Sports (5.3%)</b><br/> <i>Examples:</i> Baseball, basketball, ice hockey, soccer, football.<br/> <i>Main Barriers:</i> don't know where to go, difficult to find others, don't know where to learn, family commitments, facilities overcrowded.</p> <p>11. <b>Downhill Skiing (4.3%)</b><br/> <i>Main Barriers:</i> transportation cost, cost of equipment/supplies, lack of transportation, admission fees/charges, facilities overcrowded, no opportunity to do it.</p> <p>12. <b>Curling, Bowling, Horseshoes (3.3%)</b><br/> <i>Main Barriers:</i> not at ease socially.</p> |
|--|--|
-

As might be expected, the types of desired activities varied for males and females and for people of different ages.

- ⊙ Males more frequently wanted to participate in resource-based outdoor activities. Females were more likely to be interested in exercise-oriented activities, swimming, golf, racquet sports, downhill skiing and creative, cultural, social and passive activities.
- ⊙ The desire to participate in more active leisure pursuits, such as exercise-oriented activities, racquet sports, skiing, and team sports was most evident for younger respondents. Older adults were generally attracted to less strenuous forms of recreation. The desire for self-propelled and resource-based outdoor activities was similar across all age-groups. The study did show, however, that there are important differences in recreation behaviour within each age group (see Table 2).

### **Current Recreation Activities**

The 1996 *Alberta Recreation Survey* also allowed us to look at respondents' current recreation activities. It was therefore possible to see how the desire to start an activity was linked to current recreation behaviour. About six-tenths of respondents indicated that they had participated in six to twenty activities in the previous year. The average number of activities per person was 13.

The survey data showed an interesting pattern. The desire to start an activity was greatest for those currently enjoying a wide range of leisure pursuits. Those with fewer current activities showed less of a desire to start another activity. Over two-thirds of the respondents participating in 26 or more current activities wished to begin an activity. This compares with less than 45% of the respondents reporting five or fewer current activities.

There are important differences in recreation behaviour both within and between each age group. Analysis shows that the number of activities respondents engage in increases slightly (but significantly) with age, while the desire to start new activities decreases with age. At the same time, there are older respondents who have a high level of participation and a high level of interest in starting an activity. In contrast, there are young adults who have both low levels of participation and low levels of interest in starting an activity.

This type of information is very important for refining our understanding of recreation market

segments. We know that age is an important influence on recreation behaviour. However, it is also important to look at the different types of people within each age group, since some may be very active and some may be quite inactive. Different programming and marketing strategies may be needed for these various segments.

### **Importance of Barriers**

What types of barriers can interfere between the desire to start an activity and actual participation?

Cost of equipment and supplies emerged as the most widely felt barrier to participation (for 50.1% of respondents). This was followed by admission fees and charges (45.9%), work commitments (44.3%), family commitments (36.9%) and facility overcrowding (36.4%).

It was possible to group the barriers into six categories or dimensions. These were:

- ⊙ Awareness
- ⊙ Accessibility
- ⊙ Personal reasons
- ⊙ Costs
- ⊙ Time commitments
- ⊙ Facilities

Overall, the cost dimension was the most important. This included both equipment and admission costs. This was followed by time commitments and facility reasons such as overcrowding and poor maintenance.

Some barriers may be experienced intensely by relatively few people, while others may be more widespread in their effects. Examples of barriers that are both intensely and widely felt are equipment costs, work commitments, fees and charges, and over-crowded facilities. Being physically unable is an example of a barrier that is intensely felt, but by a small proportion of the population.

Problems associated with facilities were rated highly by those who would like to take part in swimming, racquet sports, and resource-based activities. Cost barriers were most evident for those interested in skiing, golf and resource-based outdoor activities. Would-be team sport participants were more likely to have awareness problems (such as where to participate).

Overall, people who would like to participate in resource-based activities and skiing were the most severely affected by barriers to participation. Those interested in swimming, golf, and team sports perceived fewer barriers to their involvement.

## Who Is Affected By Barriers?

The study showed that different types of respondents perceive barriers differently. Age and income are the two socio-economic variables most likely to account for differences in the perception of barriers.

Several patterns are related to age. Physical barriers increased in importance, while cost factors decrease. Lack of transportation impacted the young and the old. Work and family commitments were

important for adults between 25 and 44. Adults under 25 and those 65 or over encountered barriers of not knowing where to participate or learn the activity, and had difficulty finding others with whom to participate. Inability to participate was a problem for the older age group.

The costs of admission, equipment and transportation were most strongly felt in the lower income categories, while time commitments increased in importance as income increased.

**Table 3: Percentage Stating That Each Barrier Was Important Or Very Important By Activity Type Desired**

Barriers	Activities												
	CC	CB	DS	EX	GO	MA	OT	OE	RQ	RB	SP	SW	TS
CHARGES	8	3	6	16	11	8	8	4	6	6	8	10	4
COST	6	2	5	20	9	6	8	5	4	9	12	6	4
FACCROWD	5	1	6	20	8	8	7	6	7	4	7	12	5
FAMCOM	8	3	5	21	9	5	7	6	8	4	8	8	5
NOEASE	2	0	2	21	11	8	14	3	2	2	10	11	7
NOKNOW	10	2	1	17	2	7	10	8	6	7	8	6	10
NOLEARN	11	2	1	15	6	8	11	6	8	5	12	6	5
NOOPP	10	2	4	14	4	5	9	7	7	7	13	11	3
NOOTH	8	3	2	18	4	4	6	7	10	5	14	9	7
NOPHYABI	5	3	5	22	5	5	7	10	4	5	8	13	2
NOTRAN	7	1	6	15	5	7	10	7	2	8	10	11	2
PHYSCONV	7	2	3	17	4	8	10	7	8	5	11	11	2
POORFAC	7	2	4	21	7	7	8	8	5	5	6	10	4
TRANCOST	7	2	9	12	4	4	11	6	2	10	11	10	3
UNABLE	5	5	5	26	10	1	7	9	6	5	5	12	2
WORKCOM	8	3	4	21	8	6	6	6	6	5	9	9	5
Totals	114	36	68	296	107	97	139	105	91	92	152	155	70

### Legend

#### Activities

CC Creative-Cultural  
 CB Curling, Bowling  
 DS Downhill Skiing  
 EX Exercise  
 GO Golf  
 MA Martial Arts  
 OT Other  
 OE Outdoor Experience  
 RQ Racquet Sports  
 RB Resource-Based  
 SP Self-Propelled  
 SW Swimming  
 TS Team Sports

#### Barriers

CHARGES Admission Fees and Charges  
 COST Cost Of Equipment and Supplies  
 FACCROWD Facilities Overcrowded  
 FAMCOM Family Commitments  
 NOEASE Not At Ease Socially  
 NOKNOW Don't Know Where To Go  
 NOLEARN Don't Know Where To Learn  
 NOOPP No Opportunity To Do It  
 NOOTH Difficult To Find Others  
 NOPHYABI Lack Physical Ability  
 NOTRAN Lack Of Transportation  
 PHYSCONV Facilities Not Physically Convenient  
 POORFAC Facilities Poorly Maintained  
 TRANCOST Transportation Cost  
 UNABLE Physically Unable To Participate  
 WORKCOM Work Commitments

## Barriers and Activities

The importance of the barriers varied with the type of activity desired. The main obstacles preventing participation in each type of activity are indicated in Table 1, while the percentages for each in Table 3

## Trends

The findings from the 1996 *Alberta Recreation Survey* were compared with those of the 1981 *Public Opinion Survey on Recreation* to provide information about trends. Highlights from this comparison include the following:

- ⊙ There was a decline in the proportion of respondents indicating a desire for starting an activity, from 1981 (51.1%) to 1996 (40.6%).
- ⊙ Both age and gender were important influences on the type of activity desired.
- ⊙ Exercise-oriented activities ranked highest in both surveys in terms of desired activities. There was a decline in interest for racquet sports and team sports in 1996.
- ⊙ Overall, the perception of barriers was quite similar in both surveys.
- ⊙ The economic constraints of equipment costs and admission fees and charges appear to have increased since 1981.
- ⊙ Problems of overcrowding of facilities and difficulty in finding partners have probably declined somewhat since 1981.
- ⊙ The types of people most affected by barriers were quite similar in both 1981 and 1996.

## Implications

The 1996 *Alberta Recreation Survey* provides information about several aspects of non-participation in recreation. The study of non-participants is important since agencies should have a good understanding of both the users and non-users of their services.

In order to meet the recreation needs of the community, it is necessary to identify the types of activities that people desire. The study has shown that swimming and golf are two activities which have a great deal of interest at the present time. Do you see an increasing demand for these activities in your community?

To attract people to facilities and programs, it is important to know why people are not using these services at present (Howard and Crompton, 1984). The *Alberta Recreation Survey* has identified some of the barriers to participation that agencies may be able to address. Some of these are equipment costs,

overcrowding of facilities, and the cost of admission fees and charges. Are these important barriers in your community?

Which recreation activities are most affected by these barriers? Can you develop any innovative approaches to dealing with these types of barriers?

The study has identified that low-income households and single parent families experience the strongest barriers to recreation participation. Has your agency tried to reduce the effects of barriers for these groups? Lack of awareness of program offerings is a significant problem in many communities, particularly among low-income groups (Godbey, 1985). How effective are your promotional and marketing programs in contacting all segments of your community? Do you need to try different approaches for contacting lower income groups?

Studies of non-participation in recreation help agencies to understand the factors which may limit participation in their programs. These types of studies also help to identify groups in the community that encounter obstacles to participation. With such information, agencies providing recreation services may be able to modify their programs and information distribution to reduce the effects of barriers, and ensure that recreation opportunities are available for all segments of the community.

## References

- Crawford, D. W. and G. Godbey. (1987). Reconceptualizing Barriers to Family Leisure. *Leisure Sciences*, 9, pp. 119-128.
- Godbey, G. (1985). Non-Use of Public Leisure Services: A Model. *Journal of Parks and Recreation Administration*, 3(2), pp. 1-12.
- Goodale, T.L. and P.A. Witt. (1989). Recreation Non-Participation and Barriers to Leisure. In E.L. Jackson and T.L. Burton (Eds.), *Understanding Leisure and Recreation: Mapping the Past, Charting the Future*. State College PA: Venture Publishing, Inc.
- Howard, D.R. and J.L. Crompton. (1984). Who are the Consumers of Public Park and Recreation Services? An Analysis of the Users and Non-Users of Three Municipal Leisure Service Organizations. *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration*, 2(3). pp.33-48.
- Jackson, E. L. (1989). *Barriers to Recreation Participation: Analysis of Data from the 1992 Alberta Recreation Survey*. Prepared for Alberta Recreation and Parks, Corporate Planning Services Branch.

Jackson, E.L. and E. Dunn. (1992). Integrating Ceasing Participation with Other Aspects of Leisure Behavior. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 20(1), pp. 31-45.

McGuire, F.A., D. Dottavio, and J.T. O'Leary. (1986). Constraints to Participation in Outdoor Recreation Across the Life Span: A Nationwide Study of Limitors and Prohibitors. *The Gerontologist*, 26, pp. 538-544.

### ***Further Information***

Recreation Section  
Alberta Community Development  
905 Standard Life Centre  
10405 Jasper Avenue  
Edmonton, AB T5J 4R7  
Phone (780) 427-6549