

Transformational Inclusion of the “How”

Hi, my name is Rhonda Rosenberg, executive director of the Multicultural Council of Saskatchewan. I'm filming this from Treaty 4 Territory, traditional lands of the Nehiyawak/Cree, Anishinaabek/Saulteaux, Dakota, Lakota, and Nakoda, and the Western Region 3 of the Métis Nation.

We have partnered with the Saskatchewan High School Athletics Association to discuss changes they're making in an effort to work toward Transformational Inclusion.

In this second video, we will address the changes SHSAA is making and how they and the districts will implement them.

Through bylaw changes passed at the 2022 AGM, the SHSAA is striving to create athletic environments that engage, accommodate, protect, respect, and include all students, especially students who are Indigenous, oppressed by racism, 2SLGBTQ+, new to Canada, female, neurodiverse, from a lower socioeconomic background, with disabilities, part of various faith communities, and all students who historically were and currently are under-represented in high school athletics.

Membership changes at the district level will reflect this to include three at large individuals, with a minimum of two who self-identify as belonging to one or more of those equity-seeking communities.

In 2023, the Equity Director on the SHSAA board will self-identify as Indigenous, oppressed by racism, 2SLGBTQ+, new to Canada, female, with disabilities, neurodiverse, from non-dominant faith communities, or any people who historically were and currently are under-represented in Saskatchewan high school athletics, and an additional Equity Director will be elected in 2024.

In order to put these policies into practice, SHSAA Districts and Board will work on both the functional and social inclusion axes of this matrix. This will enable the people and processes of high school sport governance to shift towards "transformational inclusion". The research this model is based on comes from the work of Patricia Bradshaw and Christopher Fredette.

Four main approaches to increase diversity and move higher on the functional inclusion axis include:

1. Board policies addressing inclusion, such as the policy changes passed at the 2022 SHSAA AGM, as well as recruitment and retention.
2. Practices to enhance inclusion - reflect and consider demographic diversity in the board's work, strategic plans, and self-assessments, and make the 'student-focussed case for diversity and communicate it effectively to build support for change.
3. Recruitment practices to attract diversity - invite leaders from ethno-specific sports organizations, and individuals from equity-seeking groups who are involved with high school athletics to join district committees.
4. Board structure - The SHSAA board is committed to learning and making changes that will make the board more reflective of Saskatchewan's diversity. Districts are an essential place of engagement and preparation for members of marginalized communities who may join the board.

Working through functional inclusion approaches provides a purposeful, goal-oriented strategy for the increased inclusion of members of diverse or traditionally marginalized communities.

Social inclusion is about meaningful relationships. It is characterized by the participation of members of diverse groups in the interpersonal dynamics and cultural fabric of the board. Reflected in this view of relational acceptance is the need for members of traditionally oppressed communities to be authentically engaged as whole members of the board, avoiding marginalization, tokenization, and alienation.

Some ways to enhance social inclusion are by building social interactions into meetings. This can include icebreakers at the beginning, so members get to know each other (for example ask what your favourite food is and why); occasional meals; and optional sport-oriented fun activities since this is a common interest. Structure some of the following into board and committee plans:

- Mentorship and coaching - have a buddy system with experienced and new members (all new members, not just those from equity-seeking identities). This allows trust to be built, questions asked, and ideas shared in a less intimidating way.
- Orientation, retreats - Opportunities to set common understandings, and goals, learn together and create bonds during informal breaks, meals, etc.
- Workshops - Opportunities to learn together, and share knowledge and perspectives.
- Meeting times and locations - When approaching prospective new members, check if the usual times the group meets work for them. Is it possible to try a new time or location? I share the example of an ESL class for students who wanted something after 9:00 p.m. when their kids were in bed and their partners were home.
- Accommodations (ability, language, diets) - make it normal to check what dietary, mobility, or other needs all members may have. Be prepared to make it work for them. Some human connection magic happens over food - especially if all needs and tastes are considered.
- Awareness of conversation - normalize introductions that include pronouns, be aware of topics that may exclude members, such as access to cabins or vacations, intentionally ask questions to draw everyone in, and initiate conversations with individuals.

The ongoing commitment to respectful, appropriate opportunities in high school athletics, and the governing bodies will require time and change and will make it possible for more people to contribute as athletes and decision-makers.

So, the SHSAA and the Districts can increase diversity, inclusion, and equity by taking functional and social inclusion steps, learning, choosing and implementing the next steps, learning more, and working toward Transformational Inclusion.