



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Announcing the 2017 Grassroutes Community Sport Innovation Challenge:
\$250,000 in 2017/18 to fund *innovative* community sport initiatives that enhance access,
active participation and more positive sport experiences**

We all know the high price of being inactive and disengaged. We also know the central role community sport can play in building character, connectedness and health. Yet far too many Albertans drop out of community sports at an early age and others are unable to participate due to various constraints and barriers. The 2017 Grassroutes Community Sport Innovation Challenge (Challenge) is offering grants of up to \$50,000 to deserving organizations/municipalities/others with fresh ideas for getting more people involved in sport more often, all life long. Here's a chance to test your best ideas and help take community sport delivery to new levels of engagement.

The Challenge is a major initiative of Makadiff Sports (a not-for-profit organization) and was created to spur innovation and improvement in community sport. "We see a compelling need to enhance community sport development," says Doug Mitchell, Makadiff Sports chair, noting that only one in five Alberta children and youth get enough physical activity every day. "It's our hope in this, the third year of the Challenge funding being made available, that even more diverse and creative community sport innovation grant applications will be submitted. We truly need to shift our mindsets about the manner in which we offer our community sport engagements and, more importantly, be more earnest in understanding the outcomes we are striving to achieve."

Last year we received 38 applicants, out of which 6 initiatives were funded. Makadiff Sports is again providing the Challenge with \$200,000 to be shared among winning entries in 2017. The Challenge is open to Alberta's incorporated sport bodies, municipalities, First Nations, Métis settlements and agricultural societies. For this 2017 edition, the window for grant submissions opens May 1 and closes June 2, 2017 at 5 p.m. MST. Winning entrants have until September 28, 2018 to test their ideas and report on what they've accomplished. Based on videos submitted as part of those final reports, the 'big idea' that is judged to show the greatest potential for long-term impact and portability will receive a further PRIZE BONUS of up to \$50,000 to extend and expand its reach.

The Challenge is a golden opportunity not to be missed—and the time to apply is coming up fast. please broadcast this "grant funding" news through your networks and urge Alberta's changemakers to put their best ideas to the test. Their big ideas could be chosen for the kickstart needed to make a big impact in their community—and beyond.

More information and submission guidelines are available at www.makadiffsports.org



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BACKGROUNDER

What's behind the Challenge?

Only one in five Alberta children and youth get enough physical activity every day. Many join community sport teams, but that's not the answer for everyone. In fact, drop-out rates are rising due to inflexible schedules, high costs, cultural barriers and excessive focus on win-at-all-cost competition rather than collaboration and fun. Increasingly, people are looking for flexible, social, less structured ways to get involved in sport. Meanwhile the impacts of physical inactivity continue to escalate, diminishing quality of life and overburdening our healthcare system.

In light of those realities, there is growing concern that we need to be more intentional about ensuring that community sport reflects our best values and gives everyone opportunities to participate. An informal needs assessment of community sport development and delivery undertaken by the not-for-profit Makadiff Sports organization begins to identify what needs to happen if community sport is to meet its potential to promote positive values, build character, enhance health and contribute to community building. Key concerns that merit attention are outlined below.

From top-down to grassroots development

- Sport participation is shrinking despite significant investment, whether the goal is to win gold medals or to stem the tide of childhood obesity. Meanwhile, international research is united in calling for community sport development (CSD). That is, a movement away from "top down," elite-focused models toward "bottom up" community-led sport development that equips everyone to be active all life long.
- Local sport clubs, which are ideally situated to promote community-wide participation in physical activity, too often tend to focus on the elite athlete to the detriment of everyone else.
- Sport development research strongly supports the growth of grassroots sport programs that use community development approaches to both benefit the community and increase sport participation.
- Highly localized networks are needed to ensure clear pathways into sport participation by coordinating activities across key sport, recreation, education, health and transportation agencies and authorities.

Involving our youngest

- Today's overriding focus on competitive sports is at odds with the motivations driving many of our inactive young people—and at odds with international evidence. Investment in "sport for all" (in contrast with traditional "elite sport") is linked not only with greater overall participation, but, also, with success in high performance sport.
- Sport development needs to engage youth in creating youth-focused public sport policy and community-based youth sport strategies and activities - rather than simply providing "for" young people.
- We must engage youth at critical transition points, when participation drop-off rates are highest—including the vital transition from primary to secondary school.
- To truly create a "sporting habit for life" and ensure that our youth can confidently choose a variety of ways to be active through sport, our focus needs to embrace younger ages emphasizing physical literacy and offering diverse multi-sport experiences while de-emphasizing early sport specialization.
- More resources and effort must be dedicated to "quality assurance" initiatives that refocus community sport offerings (especially for ages 4 to 12) so as to meet healthy child development objectives. Community sport needs to be fun and safe!

Building sector capacity

- The emergence of new sports, coupled with the rapid growth of our diverse immigrant population, increases the demand for alternative approaches to sport at the community and provincial levels.



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- Few Alberta communities have integrated community sport development strategies/plans. It's time to make sure every community has a clear roadmap that reflects local needs, conditions and aspirations.
- More marketing of sport in a non-threatening, fun and non-traditional manner.
- Given that volunteers remain the primary sport development providers in Alberta communities, efforts must be directed at growing the sector's volunteer base in both size and capacity.
- Sport governance and delivery tend to be inflexible and increasingly fragmented. More flexible, collaborative and integrated sport delivery models should be examined.
- "Canadian Sport for Life" deserves serious consideration as a model that holds promise to increase and sustain more integrated and seamless grassroots community sports participation and delivery.
- Special attention needs to be paid to our remote, isolated and indigenous communities, to ensure that local sport participation needs are being met.
- Community sport facilities and related infrastructure merit renewal, particularly to remove specific barriers that limit access to sport participation.

Sport Spaces and Infrastructure

While capital spending for sport facilities and infrastructure is eligible for Challenge funding, Makadiff Sports is not set up to replace existing grant programs for capital construction. Challenge judging will lean towards projects that:

- Adapt the size of sport spaces and equipment to invite greater use by children and youth and enhance their experiences; and/or
- Remove specific access barriers to sport participation.

New Thinking ... local innovation

All of the above factors, and more, challenge Alberta to consider new community sport investment opportunities and programming options. **How can grassroots community sport transform itself in more dynamic and innovative ways to ensure that our citizens, and particularly children and youth, become physically literate and skilled in multiple sports?** How can we enable local groups to expand access to active sport participation and engagement, so that people of all ages, cultures and abilities, rural and urban, experience positive and sustained health outcomes while learning life-enhancing values and behaviours?

The 2017 Grassroutes Community Sport Innovation Challenge offers an opportunity for organizations/municipalities/others engaged in grassroots community sport across Alberta to invest in innovative ideas for getting more people more active in sport from early childhood to their most senior years. Makadiff Sports intends to showcase the many routes to community sport participation while propelling innovations that offer new and/or enhanced local sport delivery options and sport participation opportunities.

We challenge creative minds all across this province to put their best ideas forward. It's a golden opportunity for changemakers to make a difference through sports, kickstarting tangible improvements in how sport is delivered in their communities—and beyond.



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