

SPORT MATTERS GROUP - A Backgrounder

In the short history of the SMG a lot has been accomplished, and we expect to accomplish a lot more in the future.

History - How did we get here?

SMG is some 15 years old (and even could include previous organizations like the Senior Leaders Forum). Previous organizations that tried to accomplish some or all of what Sport Matters does today include but is not limited to such groups as the Executive and Technical Director Councils and the Sports Federation of Canada. Different incarnations of the Sports Federation of Canada existed through the 80's and 90's but, for various reasons, were not sustainable. This will provide a very brief summary of our history, broken down into five phases¹:

In the Beginning (late 1990s)

A group of thought leaders in Canadian Sport (Mark Lowry, Lane McAdam, Scott Logan, Guy Bradbury, Judy Kent, Karen O'Neill, Sue Hylland, Joan Duncan, Marg McGregor, Victor Lachance, Dina Bell Laroche) were concerned with:

- Diminishing education system, government and public understanding of and support for the benefits of sport and physical activity
- Lack of Canadian Sport Collective/Voice
- Overly bureaucratic Sport Canada which did not enable innovation, emerging sports, podium performances

The in kind, hosting contribution model upon which SMG works today began with the a rotating meeting chair who found a free facility, struck and circulated the agenda brought the snacks and circulated the meeting notes. Discussions focused on why sport was important to Canadians and what changes were needed to bring about change. The meetings also became a valued forum for sharing challenges, incubating innovative ideas and identifying opportunities for collaboration.

As the word spread and the group grew it became necessary to be more intentional about articulating and reinforcing the norms of behaviour for the group, i.e. leave the organisational and personal agendas at the door; respect for and encouragement of out of box thinking and approaches; "we" not "I, you, SMG

¹ For a more full and well explained history, read Paul Jurbala's report on the SMG:

<http://www.mcconnellfoundation.ca/en/resources/report/the-sport-matters-group-un-organizing-the-future-of-canada-s-not>

With announcement of the 1999 election the group launched its first formal advocacy effort “The Hockey Puck Campaign”. Then became the “Sports Makes a Difference” coalition during the election campaign.

2001 initiatives focused on capacity building around the National Sport Policy.

Victor Lachance was hired in May 2000 after Denis Coderre became Minister of Sport. A need for administrative and operational base was recognized, including a bank account which is where CAPHER (now PHE Canada) came in. They acted as SMG’s fiduciary until 2013 when True Sport Foundation volunteered to take on that responsibility.

By 2001 SMG had settled by consensus on its current structure: a “senior leader” instead of a CEO or executive director, and collaborative support from its community in lieu of formal structure and membership fees. Grant funding was found from a few sources, including good-faith contributions from a limited number of leadership oriented sport organizations and a timely, one-time capacity-building investment through the Voluntary Sector Initiative (SIDPID) in 2002, which was managed on behalf of SMG by one of its incorporated contributor organizations

Phase One – Formation

During the Federal Government’s “Program Review” and related funding cuts (1994-1999), a number of sport leaders regularly met to discuss the future of sport in Canada (otherwise known as the Pizza Group. At the beginning, we realized that in light of little policy work coming from the federal government, funding cuts and a changing sport environment, sport needed a way to better understand and contribute to public policy issues that affected sport. With the funding support of the Voluntary Sector Initiative (1999-2001) we established a mechanism that could be a voice for sport in Canada. Remembering past organizations we erred on the side of informality and an attitude of just getting things done. This original attitude led to the *Sport and Physical Activity Plan* – otherwise known as the “Big Honking Document (BHD)” that outlined our collective vision for Canadian sport that included: a one stop shop for public policy on sport, a mechanism for planning and leadership; a unified sport system; and increased funding for sport (among other things).

Phase Two - Finding Our Feet

A few years in we started to get our feet beneath us. We worked together on creating the first ever Canadian Sport Policy, a new Physical Activity and Sport Act, contributions to the Federal Budget process, a new national sport dispute resolution mechanism, the formation of Own the Podium (and Road to Excellence), and maintained a meaningful presence on Parliament Hill on an ongoing basis. We helped double Sport Canada’s budget. Since we were working together, we also launched the Team Sport Coalition, Heritage Sports Group - and we all worked on the development of the Canadian Sport for Life model. Working together informally was creating real results.

Phase Three - Forging a New Path

Phase Two meant we had accomplished (at least to some degree) a great deal of the vision that we laid out in the BHD. So, Phase Three meant having a look at where we could go from here. We took a leadership role in the Sport for Development movement, and we formalized our work on Parliament Hill with Lobby Day. Our continued advocacy was part of the equation in ensuring that sport funding has not suffered amid across-the-board funding cuts at the federal level.

This also involved building a web presence and spreading the Sport Matters network across the country.

SMG was very connected to the development of the Canadian Sport Policy 2.0 which was approved by Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers responsible for sport in 2012.

Phase Four - The End of the Beginning

SMG has come to a crossroads. We have limited capacity and unlimited opportunity. Choices are continually made to help guide us through the next decade in the sport sector. And all of this will have to be done in a world where elections, Olympic and Paralympic Games, Pan Am Games and Parapan American Games and many other initiatives won't stop for us while we figure it out.

Phase Five - Better Sport, Better Canada

We can control a lot about Phase Five. We can be a part of making the SMG a vital voice for Canadian sport and a big part of the sector for years to come.

This document is adapted from a historical perspective written in 2013 for a Sport Matters Planning Day. Thanks to Karen O'Neill, Joan Duncan, Marg McGregor, Dave Patterson, Victor Lachance and others for their considered input.

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