

Recreation and Sport Facility Allocation Framework

What We Heard Summary

User Group Survey • 2026

Prepared by O2 for The City of Calgary

Project Background

The City of Calgary is developing a Recreation and Sport Facility Allocation Framework to guide how City-owned and operated recreation, sport and parks spaces are assigned and booked. The framework will support clearer, more consistent and equitable decisions while recognizing that demand often exceeds available space.

The work advances GamePLAN and CONNECT: Calgary's Park Plan. These directions support fair access, public benefit, participation across the sport continuum and improved access for underserved and underrepresented groups. Developing the framework may require changes to existing allocation practices, including the role of historical bookings.

In August, The City surveyed organizations that have previously booked City spaces. The survey tested early findings, explored users' experiences and asked respondents about potential allocation considerations. The results will help The City understand areas of support, concern and potential impact as the framework is developed.

Who We Reached

The online survey was open from Aug. 21 to Sept. 14, 2026. The invitation was emailed to 1,843 user groups, and 243 contributions were received from 235 contributors, a response rate of about 13%. This engagement sought feedback from users that have previously booked City parks and recreation spaces. Most respondents (68%) have booked for 10 years or more. Groups that do not currently book space were not surveyed, though their feedback may be captured in future engagement opportunities.

Contextual Realities

Five key themes from survey responses are highlighted below. These themes provide a high-level summary and are not intended to represent every perspective shared through the survey. The City is also reviewing the detailed quantitative results and written responses.

This summary reflects the perspectives of survey respondents and does not represent City positions or any decisions.

1. Existing groups place high value on continuity of access

User groups place a high value on keeping the spaces and times they already have from year to year.

In their Words: *"we also appreciate the ability to retain time in a year over year (even if it was not the top choice of time) as communicating to our customers what we can offer needs to be done early to grow the program" (user group response).*

2. Groups identified opportunities to make unused booking time available

Groups want space used well and support releasing unused bookings sooner. Many

In their Words: *"There are times we won't be using our allocated (and paid for) gym time slot, but there is no incentive to give it up because there are no refunds unless*

say current refund rules give groups little reason to give back time they won't use.

changes are made at least 4 weeks in advance. Prior to Covid I could cancel my booking 1 week in advance and receive a refund. I would do so more often if that policy was re-instated" (user group response).

3. Groups want the system to be easy and consistent

Groups want clear rules that work the same way across facilities, but many find it hard to understand how decisions are made today. The booking system itself is often hard to use.

In their Words: *"Allocating space more fairly. It's never been explained as to what a "priority user group" is and why they exist" (user group response).*

4. Respondents had differing views on prioritizing access for underserved groups

Prioritizing access for underserved groups received less support than other considerations tested. Newer user groups were generally more supportive than longer-standing groups. The survey focused on organizations that have previously booked City spaces and did not capture groups that have been unable to access the allocation system. The finding therefore reflects the perspectives of current users rather than all potential users of public recreation and sport spaces.

In their Words: *"We are a very new organization, therefore, when existing soccer clubs hold on to permits, they do not use it [and that] really limits our ability to effectively run our soccer organization." (user group response, booking for under 10 years).*

5. Groups want permits and booking tools that adapt as their needs change

Respondents described challenges adjusting bookings as program needs change. Some indicated that these challenges can discourage groups from releasing or modifying space they no longer require.

In their Words: *"…more difficult to plan future seasons due to the permit process and implementation of wanting to drop one floor time requiring an entire new permit so clubs burn floors to save the pain in trying to be efficient and only booking floors they know they will use" (user group response).*

How This Will Be Used

The survey is one source of information, among many informing the Recreation and Sport Facility Allocation review and future Framework. It helps The City understand how current users experience the allocation system, what they value and where proposed changes may create concerns or operational impacts.

Final recommendations will also be informed by facility demand and utilization, public benefit, operational requirements, the needs of people and organizations that do not currently have access and policy direction established through GamePLAN and CONNECT: Calgary's Parks Plan. As the review moves forward, the City will also examine how sound business practices, consistent processes and fiscal responsibility support a fair and sustainable allocation system. While recognizing the different needs of user groups, the allocation system also needs clear and consistently applied expectations that support effective use of limited facility time, create opportunities for others to access available space, and responsibly manage public resources. This includes considering how practices such as payment and booking requirements, cancellation and return timelines, and expectations for the use of allocated time can balance flexibility for user groups with the City's ability to reallocate space, recover costs and maximize the use of scarce facility capacity.

The framework is intended to support clearer, more transparent and equitable allocation decisions. As a result, future recommendations may not align with every preference expressed through the survey and may affect some current booking practices. The City will use further engagement to test potential approaches, understand impacts and support a manageable transition where changes are proposed.