



Healthy Communities Through Recreation, Parks, Physical Activity and Culture

BRITISH COLUMBIA RECREATION AND PARKS ASSOCIATION

BCRPA Fitness Registration Program 2010 – 2012 Business Plan Fitness Leaders

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	i
SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION	5
PRIORITIES	5
KEY OBJECTIVES.....	6
SECTION 2: BACKGROUND	7
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	7
RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS.....	7
Summary of Facility Research.....	7
Summary of Fitness Leader Research	8
Other Key Findings	8
ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN.....	9
Economic	9
Government/Political.....	9
International Fitness Industry Standards	9
Fitness Industry Trends.....	9
SECTION 3: FITNESS BUSINESS PLAN	11
SECTION 4: CONCLUSION	13

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BCRPA is committed to leading the parks, recreation and culture sector in building and sustaining healthy active communities, including fostering economic and environmental sustainability. We inspire and support community leaders and practitioners through advocacy, communication, education, resources and other services.

The BCRPA supports this mission in part through the management of the Fitness Registration Program. Since its launch in 1984, the program has set standards of practice in the provincial fitness industry and manages a delivery network that ensures those wanting to work in the industry have standard training that allows them to deliver safe, efficient and effective fitness leadership.

The Fitness Registration Program has a current registration of over 4,000 leaders and plays a significant role in enhancing individual quality of life and in building healthy communities through the provision of a variety of health and wellness programs and activities at the local community level.

With the desire to enhance the registration program to meet the current and future needs of the industry, the BCRPA undertook the development of a comprehensive 3 year business plan for the program. The results of an extensive consultation and research process indicated that there is growing confusion regarding the registration and renewal process; there is a need for a nationally recognized quality standard and that the development of an online searchable database would promote qualified fitness professionals to fitness facilities and the general public.

The key objectives for the business plan are as follows:

- Ensure Operational Effectiveness
- Expand the Fitness Registration Program
- Respond to New Opportunities

The business plan lays the foundation for our long and short term direction for the next 3 years. It includes ongoing long term, specific short term, and immediate objectives. The immediate and short term objectives relate directly to the long term goals and include the investment needed to achieve the priority areas.

Ongoing long and short term operational activities include the coordination of the annual BC Fit Conference; managing the provision of group fitness insurance to all BCRPA Fitness Program Members; and recognition of outstanding contributions to the fitness industry through the annual Fitness Leadership Awards program.

The immediate priority areas identified in the plan are:

1. Moving to exam-based outcomes for all fitness leader designations and creating and managing a process for delivering exams online
2. Creating and maintaining an online, searchable, public Registry of Fitness Professionals
3. Developing a marketing and communications strategy
4. Enhancing benefits to BCRPA Fitness Program Members

The online exam infrastructure and the online Registry of Fitness Professionals are two priority areas that have the ability to meet the needs of the BCRPA Fitness Program as identified in the research: a standardized exam infrastructure available any time to anyone; and an online, searchable, public Registry of Fitness Professionals where fitness leaders are able to update their information in real time. The Registry also serves as the place where, at any time, a facility manager or member of the public is able to find out who in the fitness industry has passed the appropriate exam(s) and met other registration criteria.

This plan is a critical and invaluable document that provides the framework, the direction and the clarification that the BCRPA Fitness Program requires to remain a viable and credible standard for fitness professionals in BC.

The investment in the immediate priority areas will not only enhance the benefits to leaders associated with the Fitness Registration Program but will also enhance our ability to profile the qualifications of fitness professionals to the public and facilities, as well as making a significant contribution towards the development of a national standard for instructor excellence.

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

Since its creation in 1984, the role of the BCRPA Fitness Program has been to identify and promote the highest professional standards for fitness leaders in BC. Over the course of its 25 year history, the program has become the recognized standard against which fitness professionals can assess their credentials. It is regarded as ‘the’ regulatory body throughout the Province.

The Fitness Program is managed and supported by BCRPA staff. In addition, volunteers representing various regions of the province are drawn from the fitness industry to provide guidance to the program through their involvement with the Fitness Advisory Council (FAC).

In 2007, the BCRPA CEO offered the FAC the opportunity to have a formal business plan developed to assist the Fitness Program in setting priorities and direction and fulfill its role in the fitness industry.

One of the first steps in developing the plan was a review of research done for the BCRPA in 2002 that compared “certification” with “registration” and investigated what several other organizations were doing with regards to certification.

To summarize the research achieving ‘certification’ is the result of completing a specified course of study or meeting other third party criteria. It is typically a one time occurrence. Once you are certified, you are certified for life. An example would be achieving a university degree.

In contrast, ‘registration’ is an ongoing process. Professionals who have achieved a particular certification are eligible to be registered, and once registered, are then required to meet further criteria within a set period of time or they lose their registration. Typically registration also includes adherence to a code of ethics or conduct and meeting continuing education requirements.

As a result of this 2002 research, the BCRPA confirmed its status as a registrar for the fitness industry in BC. The BCRPA is currently the only entity in Canada that has taken on this role. Others have chosen to organize themselves as certifying bodies, providing both certification standards and instruction.

Moving forward into the next 25 years, the BCRPA has the opportunity to capitalize on its position as a registrar and entrench itself as the standard bearer for the industry both in BC and potentially beyond our borders. The BCRPA Fitness Program Business Plan was created for this purpose.

PRIORITIES

Before initiating the business plan project, six items were identified by the Fitness Advisory Committee as important priorities for the Fitness Program.

- Maintain the highest non-degree standard in BC, resulting in qualified fitness professionals
- Increase demand for BCRPA Fitness Leaders
- Strengthen BCRPA positioning as the leader in the fitness industry
- Increase Fitness Leader desire for BCRPA registration
- Ensure operational effectiveness
- Increase revenues and/or resources

These priorities helped in the construction of survey questions that would gather information as to how well the Fitness Program was meeting those priorities now and how we could improve for the future.

KEY OBJECTIVES

After reviewing the key findings from the research data as well as the current economic climate, and with a desire to build a program that would meet the expressed needs of the industry, three key objectives emerged:

- Ensure Operational Effectiveness
 - Streamline the registration process
 - Work towards a single national standard
 - Work with the entire fitness industry to align the industry
- Expand the Fitness Registration Program
 - Seek endorsement of the leader standards
 - Create tools/opportunities to engage and educate the public, fitness leaders and fitness facilities about the work of the BCRPA in the industry
- Respond to New Opportunities
 - Raise the profile and value of the BCRPA and Fitness Leaders to the public
 - Become a strong advocate for the industry
 - Work with the entire industry to advance its image and importance

SECTION 2: BACKGROUND

The business plan for the Fitness Program has been informed by partial research conducted by external consultants. FAC members and other key industry stakeholders have each contributed their insights and helped shape this document, which has also benefited from a critical review of the program by fitness registration program staff on its shortcomings and potential.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The consultants used a variety of research methods including:

- A review of the current BCRPA model including policies and procedures, budget, previous research and existing documents and programs
- A review of other models, both national and international
- One-on-one interviews with staff, fitness leaders, facility management/owners, FAC members and other key industry stakeholders
- Online survey of current, pending and lapsed fitness leaders (approximately 1,100)
- Online survey of facility owners/managers (approximately 150)
- SWOT analysis of findings

RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

Summary of Facility Research

There are some themes that consistently appear in the answers to the different questions posed to facilities. We would be wise to address issues or concerns that show up frequently.

The research clearly shows that “Certification” is the number one criterion on which facilities base their hiring and that facilities in BC place a high premium on BCRPA registration with 77% indicating that BCRPA registration is mandatory or highly recommended. Despite this, 24% have uncertified fitness staff working in their facilities and 4% of facilities do not require any certification when hiring fitness staff.

Facilities are clear, (83%), in their belief that there is a need for a single national standard to alleviate the confusion about the quality of the various certifications available. Further, 82% of facilities believe there needs to be better national recognition of qualifications and 74% believe that there needs to be a national registry.

Finally, facilities are concerned about the retention of their staff (49%) and the qualifications of their staff (47%). Most facilities recognize that there are liability issues when staff members with either no qualifications or expired qualifications are working with clients. Facilities want to help their staff find available and affordable opportunities to obtain and maintain their qualifications and to have the process for registration be more efficient.

Summary of Fitness Leader Research

Similar to the facility data, common themes also emerged from the fitness leader data. In addition, common themes across both groups were found that would be especially important to note and look for ways to address.

Fitness Leaders also place “Certification” as the number one priority for hiring and 81% of them recognize BCRPA registration as the most widely accepted “Certification”.¹ They are also very clear in their support for a single national standard (70%) and the need to have their certifications recognized nationally (75%).

While there is strong satisfaction with BCRPA (63%), the answers to different questions in the survey point to concerns about the registration and renewal process. This is similar to the responses from the facilities and specifically point out concerns regarding the cost of registration and renewal as well as frustrations with the process. In fact, 39% of fitness leaders surveyed on the reasons they have allowed their registrations to lapse cite that the renewal process was too time consuming and administratively frustrating. A further 20% indicated cost as the reason. These were the two highest responses.

Other Key Findings

As mentioned, common themes emerged from the research conducted with both facilities and fitness leaders. Not discussed in the summaries above are some fundamental issues within the BCRPA Fitness Program that need to be addressed. Foremost among these is the general confusion about the difference between a Registrar and a Certifier. Secondly is the confusion around “membership” as it relates to BCRPA and the BCRPA Fitness Program.

One of the most important steps that we can take is to better define our role as a Registrar versus a member service entity within the Fitness Program. Making a clearer distinction between the two will assist BCRPA fitness leaders as well as fitness professionals from other organizations in better understanding our mandate.

In addition, clarifying our role as a Registrar will clearly separate the BCRPA from virtually every other fitness entity, which operate as certifiers. As a Registrar we can work in partnership with fitness organizations instead of in competition with them. As a Registrar we can offer a service to fitness professionals, fitness facilities and the general public – an objective, third-party standard that can be applied to graduates of all fitness organizations.

While facilities and fitness leaders are both asking for a single, national standard and national recognition for those meeting that standard, there are only two entities that currently exist that can fill that role – the government and the BCRPA.

¹ The Fitness Industry has used the terms “certification” and “registration” interchangeably. Responses should be interpreted with this in mind.

ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

Economic

- With the economic downturn, fitness classes and facilities may potentially be considered a luxury, rather than a necessity
- Average income drops with age and by 2020, the majority of Canadians will be over 50 years of age
- Making fitness a priority is key with government as it relates to decreasing health care costs
- Pricing changes in any tight economy must come with a strong value-added focus

Government/Political

- Major initiatives at this time are mostly related to activating sedentary populations, (a provincial goal of 20% by 2010), and decreasing health care costs or any other factors impacting the economy
- Provincial governments have not yet been focusing on training and certification regulation in relation to fitness professionals in Canada, however, there is increased focus on regulation in the US with several states introducing legislation for consideration
- Studies have been initiated to link getting active with health care savings, including a study by Fitness Industry Canada showing that 1 million active Canadians translates into \$2.5 billion in health care savings
- Initiatives are in place and being examined to encourage fitness such as the child tax credit (approved provincially and nationally) and the adult tax credit (approved to date in Nova Scotia)

International Fitness Industry Standards

- A national registration system based on minimum performance standards is the international benchmark of success
- A system of self regulation is the standard versus government legislation
- Separation of performance standards from the training required to achieve those standards allows for third party reliability and a measure of quality control and is the recognized common practice in countries striving for a single, national standard
- Recognition and promotion system of all those meeting the minimum standard regardless of how they achieved the standard
- Currently, over 30 countries in the world have independent, competency based registration systems for exercise/fitness professionals

Fitness Industry Trends

- The number one trend for the past two years from the American College of Sports Medicine world wide survey of fitness trends was the demand for “educated and experienced fitness professionals”

- Secondary trends are related to the various types of fitness programs available (strength training, core training, Pilates are up; yoga, spinning and stability ball are down) or the class format (group and small group training are up; one on one training is down)
- Participation numbers within the fitness industry are growing, however, this increase is related to increases in population size and does not reflect an increase in participation on a percentage basis
- In North America, there are hundreds of organizations and individuals who offer “certifications” creating increasing competition between each certifying organization

SECTION 3: FITNESS BUSINESS PLAN

The ongoing activities as well as new items planned for immediate, short and long term implementation are outlined below.

ACTIONS	Descriptions	Objectives	Activities	Timeline
FITNESS ADVISORY COMMITTEE (FAC)	Advisory group of fitness industry representatives across BC	Provide advice on fitness related matters to BCRPA Fitness Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual face to face meeting • Quarterly conference calls • Fitness Leadership Awards Selection • Representatives on other committees (i.e. BC Fit Committee) 	Ongoing
NATIONAL FITNESS LEADERSHIP ALLIANCE	Advisory group drawn from provincial fitness organizations across Canada	To develop common national standards of practice for the fitness industry in Canada	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual face to face meeting • Monthly conference calls 	Ongoing
FITNESS REGISTRATION	Initial registration of new Fitness Program Members	To manage an efficient and viable registration system.	• Improve delivery model	Ongoing
			• Improve communications regarding benefits of BCRPA registration	Immediate
			• Create a handbook for fitness leaders to clarify policies and procedures	Immediate
			• Enhanced leader benefits	Immediate
			• Review the current Code of Ethics and develop a Code of Conduct and a Disciplinary Process	Immediate
FITNESS RENEWAL	Ongoing registration of current Fitness Program Members	Develop and manage a renewal system which will meet the needs of the fitness industry	• Approve workshops and courses to ensure Fitness Program Members can earn CECs	Ongoing
			• Improve delivery model to streamline renewal process	Short Term
			• Review and revise needs based on the implementation of online exams	Short Term
FITNESS CONFERENCE	Two day educational and networking event for fitness professionals	Professional development	• Provide workshops on topics directly related to fitness leadership	Ongoing
			• Showcase products and services of benefit to fitness leaders	
			• Conduct a feasibility study on the conference and how it fits into the role of a registrar	Short Term
			• Expand to include future streams for public and for facilities	Long Term
FITNESS MANUALS	Materials available for purchase to assist fitness leaders in	Revenue generation and provision of service to fitness industry	• Approve appropriate fitness manuals for various modules	Ongoing
			• Maintain a stock on hand as service to fitness leaders	

	completing courses		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re-evaluate service based on revenue expectations 	Short Term
FITNESS INSURANCE	Provision of liability insurance to BCRPA Fitness Program Members	Substantial benefit to the fitness leaders and to fitness industry in BC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with HUB International Insurance Inc. to provide group fitness insurance to Fitness Program Members 	Ongoing
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with HUB to provide personal training insurance to all BCRPA registered personal trainers at a preferred rate 	
FITNESS COMMUNICATIONS	Materials created to update Fitness Program Members on BCRPA activities as well as professional development opportunities	Service to members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FitLife BC Magazine and ezine (quarterly) 	Ongoing
		Showcase advertisers and sponsors Build awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fitness ebulletin (monthly) • Develop marketing & communications strategy for the Registry to clarify the role of a registry 	
FITNESS LEADERSHIP AWARDS	Recognizes BCRPA Fitness Program Members who have demonstrated outstanding contributions to fitness leadership in the community	Manage the Fitness Leadership Awards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate adjudication of the nominations with the Fitness Advisory Committee 	Ongoing
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate the nomination, selection and award process 	
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and revise the program as needed for 2009/10 	
FITNESS EXAMS	Tests designed to measure theoretical knowledge of fitness leaders in various specialty areas	To ensure that fitness leaders understand the theory behind the delivery of fitness programming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expert committees to provide growing pools of test items 	Immediate
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop the infrastructure to deliver exams online 	Immediate
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigate trademark and copyright regulations to ensure protection of BCRPA properties 	Immediate
REGISTRY OF FITNESS PROFESSIONALS	Searchable, online public registry of all fitness professionals who meet performance standards	A service to BCRPA members, private entities and members of the general public allowing them to check credentials and current status of fitness professionals they are engaging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotion of a single industry standard 	Immediate
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of standard performance measurement tools available across industry 	Immediate
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek government endorsement of standards 	Immediate
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigate trademark and copyright regulations to ensure protection of BCRPA properties 	Immediate
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop disclaimers that will protect the BCRPA from potential fraudulent information and misrepresentation by fitness leaders 	Immediate

SECTION 4: CONCLUSION

For the past 25 years, the BCRPA Fitness Program has set the standard for the fitness industry in BC and has been viewed as ‘the’ regulatory body throughout the province. In fact, the SWOT analysis points out that it has been self-sustaining for many years which is both unique and impressive as compared to other Canadian provincial fitness programs. As we surpass 4,000 members we are already the largest provincial fitness association in Canada. There is much to be proud of.

However, the fitness industry has changed dramatically since the turn of the century and this has created a need to evaluate the future direction of the program. The research conducted to support the business plan identified areas of concern across fitness leaders and fitness facilities. These include:

- Confusion over the value and quality of one certification over another with so many different certifying bodies crowding the field
- Accessibility, availability and clarity of the registration and renewal process for BCRPA Fitness Program Members
- Liability due to uncertified staff

In addition to these, the BCRPA Fitness Program has identified our own concerns:

- Administrative challenges to managing a growing number of fitness leaders
- Opportunities for new sources of revenue

The focus of the BCRPA Fitness Program in the next 3 years will be to build and expand our ability to provide the fitness industry with standardized evaluation tools and to use our position as a Registry to unite the industry behind one national performance measurement standard. The BCRPA is in a unique position as it is the only organization in Canada that has been set up to be a Registrar for fitness leaders. As a Registrar, the BCRPA does not deliver education programs and does not derive income from the training of fitness leaders in BC. As such, we are not a direct competitor with any of the certifying bodies and are able to work across the industry as we are not a threat to their business models.

In order to minimize the liability risk for facilities and for the fitness leaders they employ, it is imperative that the BCRPA make initial registration and ongoing renewals more accessible, particularly to regions of the province with limited access to courses on a regular basis. The business plan outlines the action steps towards a more streamlined registration and renewal system that utilizes internet tools.

The growth of the registration program has created an overload on staff at the BCRPA. We need tools to be able to meet the demands of growth. The online exam infrastructure and the online, searchable, public Registry of Fitness Professionals are two priority areas that have the ability to meet the needs of the BCRPA Fitness Program as identified in the research: a standardized exam infrastructure available any time to anyone; and an online, searchable, public Registry of Fitness Professionals where fitness leaders are able to update their

information in real time. The Registry also serves as the place where any facility manager or member of the public can go 24/7 to find out who in the fitness industry has passed the appropriate exam(s) and met other registration criteria.

The BCRPA Fitness Program has been a leader in the fitness industry for 25 years. The business plan clearly demonstrates the need for investment in tools which will enhance the ability of the BCRPA to continue to play a leading role in fitness leadership in BC for today and into the foreseeable future.