

Become a Winter Town

A Toolkit for
Embracing Winter



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Purpose

Winter offers communities a unique opportunity to reimagine public spaces, celebrate seasonal culture, and strengthen social connections. The Winter Town Toolkit is designed to help communities embrace winter as a vibrant and valuable season, rather than one to simply endure.

South East Sport, Culture & Recreation District has created this resource to provide guidance, inspiration, and practical tools for municipalities, community organizations, and local leaders who want to activate their towns in the colder months. Whether you are just getting started or looking to build on existing winter initiatives, this toolkit will support you in becoming a more inviting, engaging, and resilient "Winter Town".

By embracing winter, communities can boost local economies, improve well-being, and foster year-round vitality. This toolkit shows you how to make that happen - through thoughtful planning, creative programming, and strong community collaboration.

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What is a Winter Town?

“The Winter City movement is a design and behavioural approach to improve the quality of life in northern settlements, to ensure that winter is better coped with and celebrated, not just endured.”

- Wayne K.D. Davies

Winter Towns help encourage residents to be active and get out, even in the dark and cold months of winter. They strive to increase the quality of winter life, focusing on access, opportunity, and sustainability in programming and planning.

Access

Reducing barriers that prevent people from enjoying the outdoors. Including physical, environmental, educational or financial.

Opportunity

Creating ways for people to gather and engage in winter related activities, programming, and events.

Sustainability

Creating strategies to improve the quality of life experienced during winter that will last through long-term planning.

Areas of Focus:

- Fun and Activities
- Winter Events
- Design and Infrastructure
- Mobility
- Health and Safety
- Winter Mindset

Winter Town Benefits:

Becoming a winter town can help strengthen your community.

There are three main areas that the benefits of becoming a winter city fall under (8 80 Cities).

Social

Winter can be an isolating time of year; by increasing winter engagement we create opportunities to combat loneliness and isolation. Enhancing accessibility and inclusiveness can encourage more people to get outside. Creating desirable outdoor spaces and event year round contributes to a vibrant and livable community (N, Pressman).

Health

Being active is an important part of staying healthy, both physically and mentally. Encouraging year-round activity greatly increases quality of life. Both indoor and outdoor activities are important to promote. Indoor activities can be more accessible, especially for aging populations, where winter weather can create safety and health risks. Outdoor activities that expose people to nature can help lower stress, improve attention, boost mood, better self-regulation, and make us more social, according to the Canadian Psychological Association (March 2024).

Economic

When viewed as an asset, you can work with winter instead of avoiding it. Special events can help create local tourism opportunities and encourage folks to get outside and interact with the local community and businesses. Efforts can be targeted to increase foot traffic in business districts.

How to Become a Winter Town

Development, Planning & Evaluation

Setting Goals and Measurable Outcomes

- Define the starting point and baseline for projects and identify assets and strengths. This is also important for evaluation.
- Engage with the community to determine needs, desires, and community readiness.
- Utilize outcomes that are measurable to help with monitoring progress for set goals and objectives.

1 Assess Community Assets and Existing Strengths

Becoming a Winter Town does not necessarily mean you have to build or create something brand new. Look at existing programs and infrastructure. Consider some of the following questions:

- What existing programming are you already doing during the winter months?
 - Could you target existing programs to improve access and increase participation?
- What existing programs are you offering during the summer?
 - Could these be adapted for the winter?
- What existing Winter Facilities do you have?
 - Are there ways to improve access? Are there physical, educational, or financial barriers that could be targeted to increase use in underrepresented groups?
- What summer facilities do you have that could be adapted for winter use?
 - Are there summer facilities that could be utilized if there is public desire? Possibilities include golf courses, baseball diamonds, etc.

2 Engage the Community

“For pilot projects in winter cities to have meaningful impact on winter life the planning, coordination, delivery and evaluation phases should be representative of the community’s stated desires for parks and public space during the winter.”

- Winter Place Making Guide, 8 80 Cities

Utilize both formal and informal ways to engage with the community.

Rules of Engagement:

- Take it to the streets – Meeting people where they are is key to engagement.
- Be Inclusive – Adopt an intergenerational and inclusive lens
- Play with Purpose – Put the engaging back in engagement
- Create Buzz – Eye-catching, informative, and accessible
- Value People’s Time – Ensure reciprocity
- Take Action – When hosting pilot projects, pop-ups, and interactive community engagements, collect feedback that will inform future iterations of winter planning in your community.

8 80 Cities, Winter Placemaking Guide, Page 20

8 80 Cities has great resources to use for engaging community members in the creation, planning, and evaluation stages of projects:

- 8 80 Cities [Civic Engagement Tools](#)
- 8 80 Cities [Winter Cities Toolkit](#)

3 Strategy Development

Identify a challenge to address and the Objectives/Goals you want to focus on. Identify the outcomes that would demonstrate you’ve had an impact and what actions would help get you there.

Example: Winter Life/Safety

Objective	i.e. Improve Sidewalk Winter Safety
Outcomes	i.e. Increased pedestrian traffic during the winter
Actions	i.e. Create volunteer snow removal service, provide community sand box

Timeline & Seasonal Planning

Get ahead, start the planning process in the warmer months to take advantage of different grants. This is also a good opportunity to collect feedback during high engagement periods.

Your Timeline will depend on the scale of your goals. A combination of Long-Term and Short-Term approaches can generate excitement for winter and create sustainable solutions to improve winter life.

Sometimes solutions that require more time and resources may be necessary for improving winter accessibility and safety. Bring a four-season approach to planning for new infrastructure and policy. How would the conditions of winter impact or be impacted? For more information on managing large scale projects check out the Saskatchewan Parks and Recreation Association's (SPRA) self directed module series: [How to Manage Large Scale & Scope Recreation Projects](#).

Short-term solutions and quick wins are an important part of building excitement and engagement with your community and partners.

There are many strategies to approach planning for achieving targeted outcomes and goals. One strategy described by Project for Public Spaces is the *Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper* movement.

Evaluation

Tips for Monitoring and Collecting Feedback

Utilize a mix of Quantitative and Qualitative Data

- Track participation numbers
- Collect feedback after events

Check out this tool from the Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute (CFLRI) and the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association (CPRA):

[Sport, Physical Activity, and Recreation \(SPAR\) Impact Calculators](#)

Utilize different methods to collect and distribute feedback

- Surveys can be posted on city websites via an open link
- QR codes on posters can help target specific areas or audiences

Involve key groups

- Continue to keep community members involved in the evaluation process
- Collect feedback from stakeholders and partners

Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper

According to the Project for Public Spaces, the *Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper* (LQC) movement focuses on short-term projects that can make an impact. These projects range from new amenities, programming, art, or design changes that are part of a bigger and more long-term strategy.

LIGHTER

Make your project flexible and manageable. This allows you to try new things without the financial burden that a permanent fixture might involve. Examples used by Project for Public Spaces are neighborhood blocks applying for a temporary street closure, or parks and restaurants using movable seating instead of permanent ones. The light component allows you to test out new ideas and adjust as needed.

QUICKER

Projects that are lighter, quicker, and cheaper avoid the time constraints caused by navigating codes, approvals, and licensing issues that large-scale projects can create.

CHEAPER

“Cheaper reflects a fundamental shift away from design-led capital investments and towards affordable programming and management solutions.” The size of your project will influence its cost. The goal is to make an impact while avoiding the high financial and time-related costs of capital projects.

For LQC to be successful, consider whether the space is already accessible and safe.

Other strategies for short-term projects to explore could be: Tactical urbanism, DIY urbanism, or pop-up urbanism. These strategies often intersect and overlap because they focus on reducing cost and procedural/administrative barriers to create positive changes in public spaces.

Communication and Promotion

Four Seasons Approach

Utilize winter imagery in town marketing materials to promote a more positive winter mindset. Promote year-round vibrancy by demonstrating that there is something to do in all four seasons.

Safety & Education

Communicate tips and precautions for enjoying winter activities safely. Create targeted messaging for more vulnerable groups like seniors and newcomers. What events, recreation opportunities, or support services might be more important to promote to seniors in Winter? [How can you help newcomers embrace winter in Saskatchewan?](#)

Regina Open Door Society – [Newcomer's Guide to Winter](#)

Spread the Word

Utilise a variety of communication methods, i.e., Digital signage, Social Media, Printed Materials, Posters, Table Talkers, etc.

Do you have an event you want to promote to a larger audience? You can submit it to Tourism Saskatchewan to get it posted on their [Events Page!](#)

[Sask Sport](#), [Sask Culture](#), and [SPRA](#) also have pages to submit your events.

STEPS FOR GETTING STARTED:

STEP 1: Assess local population and target underrepresented audiences that face barriers to knowledge (i.e., language, ability, cognitive, visual).

STEP 2: Establish a main framework for knowledge sharing (i.e., website, pamphlet).

STEP 3: Provide alternative versions of knowledge sharing based on main framework and targeted underrepresented groups within the community (i.e., multilingual pamphlets, audio for the visually impaired, braille, video graphics).

STEP 4: Meet people where they are at to distribute information.

8 80 Cities, Winter Placemaking Guide, Page 50

Creating and Building Partnerships

Partnerships can help support your goals and create opportunities to share ideas and resources, and reach new audiences. Many towns have partnerships with businesses and organizations to sponsor and run an event or activity during their winter festivals.

Engaging in partnerships with community members, businesses, and organizations can lead to meaningful projects that are driven directly by local needs and desires.

CONSIDER NEW PARTNERSHIPS

STEP 1: Take an audit of surrounding organizational assets and seek to amplify them to support placemaking

STEP 2: Seek out new partnerships with neighboring communities, organizations, and institutions to winterize spaces in creative ways.

STEP 3: Engage residents on the preferred spaces and uses to host a pilot winter placemaking project.

STEP 4: Collect data on pilot projects, resident feedback, and potential partnerships.

8 80 Cities, Winter Placemaking Guide, Page 33

Potential partnerships could be with:

Sports Groups, arts & culture groups, recreation clubs, regional libraries, local businesses, community organizations, or even local residents!

Example: Riverhurst Light Up Main Street

Light Up Main Street is an ongoing project offering an opportunity to sustain and grow Riverhurst's Main Street.

This vintage lighting project was sponsored by the individual community residents past and present, and the Village of Riverhurst. Each lamp post displays a plaque to acknowledge those that sponsored it.



[Source: Town of Riverhurst, Community Groups](#)

IDEA Focused

Inclusion, Diversity, Equity & Accessibility

Inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility (IDEA) can help create more connected communities and a deeper sense of belonging. Work towards improving the quality of winter life for everyone and incorporate strategies to include IDEA in Winter Town projects and planning. Incorporating IDEA into your planning process earlier is easier than trying to do it after, make it a priority for new projects.

Inclusion

Inclusion is an active, intentional, and continuous process to address inequities in power and privilege, and to build a respectful and diverse community that ensures welcoming spaces and opportunities to flourish for all (UBC Equity and Inclusion Office).

Diversity

Differences in the social identities and lived experiences and perspectives of people that may include race, ethnicity, colour, ancestry, place of origin, political belief, religion, marital status, family status, physical disability, mental disability, sex, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, age, class, and/or socio-economic situations (UBC Equity and Inclusion Office).

Equity

Equity refers to achieving parity in policy, process and outcomes for historically, persistently, or systemically marginalized people and groups while accounting for diversity. It considers power, access, opportunities, treatment, impacts and outcomes, in three main areas:

- Representational equity: the proportional participation at all levels of an institution;
- Resource equity: the distribution of resources in order to close equity gaps; and
- Equity-mindedness: the demonstration of an awareness of, and willingness to, address equity issues. (UBC Equity and Inclusion Office)

Accessibility

Accessibility is the provision of flexibility to accommodate needs and preferences, and refers to the design of products, devices, services, or environments for people who experience disabilities. It can also be understood as “a set of solutions that empower the greatest number of people to participate in the activities in question in the most effective ways possible” (Baker, J. & Vasseur, L.).

IDEA Continued...

The Canadian Parks and Recreation Association has identified the importance of inclusion and access in the 2024 Update to their Framework for Recreation in Canada and has set the following objectives to “increase inclusion and access to recreation for populations that face constraints or barriers to participation.”

1. Co-develop (with equity denied groups and relevant partners) and implement strategies (including engagement approaches), policies, and programs that ensure all community members across the lifespan – taking into consideration race, culture, gender identity, girls and women, sexual orientation, income, rural/urban location, and ability, etc. – have equitable access to parks and recreation opportunities and services, including access to inclusive eating spaces.
2. Learn about and implement actions that create a sense of belonging for all members of the community in both indoor and outdoor spaces and places. Consider the implications of intersectionality. Identify, evaluate, and eliminate systemic racism.
3. Proactively collaborate with Indigenous communities to develop policies, strategies, and activities that reflect their context and preferences for engagement.

The Framework for Recreation in Canada Report includes operational and strategic ideas to meet each of the above objectives.

[*Framework for Recreation in Canada - Framework Update: March 2024, Canadian Parks and Recreation Association*](#)

For more information on how to incorporate IDEA into your Winter Town planning, check out the following resources and tools:

[A Blueprint for Building Quality Participation in Sport for Children, Youth and Adults with a Disability](#)
Canadian Disability Participation Project

[Bright Futures: INclusion in Recreation and Parks](#)
SPRA Webinar Training on Demand

[Creating Inclusive Playgrounds: A Playbook of Considerations and Strategies](#)
Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital

[REIMAGINING PUBLIC SPACES - Accessible Public Places for All](#)
Evergreen

[Welcoming and Inclusive Communities Toolkit](#)
Multicultural Council of Saskatchewan

Winter Design

Winter Design

Focusing on the design of the physical and visual environment can help improve community vibrancy and the quality of winter life. While winter can be beautiful, it can lack the same visual excitement that other seasons like summer and fall have. Factors such as warmth, light, and colour can help make spaces feel more inviting and engaging.

Warmth

Winter is cold; there is no denying that this is a major factor influencing winter activity. Increasing access to warm spaces, both outside and in, can help alleviate this barrier. Look at ways to create and improve access to warm spaces outside. New or expanded partnerships could be a great way to improve access to indoor spaces. Below are some tips for getting started with lighting from the 8 80 Cities Winter Placemaking Guide.

STEPS FOR GETTING STARTED:

STEP 1: Take account of local assets like fire pits, nearby public washrooms and sheltered areas and centralize the program or event around this space.

STEP 2: Ensure fun and programming has a balance of movement, access to indoor/protected spaces, and heating elements.

STEP 3: Embrace existing attractions like ice rinks and ski trails to build placemaking on community assets.

Winter Placemaking Guide, 8 80 Cities, Page 30

INDOOR SPACES:

STEP 1: Evaluate existing local spaces and community organizations that can provide potential partnerships in making multifunctional spaces.

STEP 2: Spread the word about partnerships and opportunities for indoor warm activities with a target audience.

STEP 3: Create and strengthen partnerships every year by reviewing usage data and look for ways to improve the relationship for both parties.

Winter Placemaking Guide, 8 80 Cities, Page 45

Lighting

Daylight hours drop significantly in the winter, adding lighting to outdoor spaces can help extend those hours. Lighting can help improve safety and contribute to feelings of warmth. They can be used to encourage movement and enjoyment in outdoor spaces. Below are some tips for getting started with lighting from the 8 80 Cities Winter Placemaking Guide.

STEPS FOR GETTING STARTED

STEP 1: Identify attractive architecture, pathways, and public spaces that lighting and art could be used to illuminate.

STEP 2: Tie in lighting with a larger placemaking strategy or reoccurring event.

STEP 3: Work with local partners like business improvement areas or chambers of commerce to support, fund, and organize the illuminations with support of local businesses and organizations

Winter Placemaking Guide, 8 80 Cities, Page 43

Colour

Like light, colour makes outdoor spaces more vibrant and inviting. Here are some tips for using colour from Edmonton's Winter City Design Guide:

TIPS FOR GETTING STARTED

- Use contrasting or saturated colour palettes on building façades to highlight pedestrian-scaled building massing and entrances, and to improve the visual interest of streets.
- Consider incorporating dense materials, such as brick and stone, to absorb and retain heat.
- Design façades to sensitively reflect light onto streets, north-facing neighbouring buildings and/or into open spaces. Lighter colours on south-facing walls also passively reflect light.
- Use colour and lighting on awnings to add interest and character to all types of buildings, such as stores and offices.

Winter Design Guidelines, Winter City Edmonton

For more information about winter design, check out The City of Edmonton's [Winter Design Guide](#).

Winter Inspiration

Celebrating Community Impact: Winter Edition

Petals and Positivity Workshop

Arcola

Photo Credit Vanessa Dahl



Oilwomen's Skate & Sled Sheds

Weyburn

Photo Credit South East District



Winter Community Fun Day

Whitewood

Photo Credit Whitewood Public Library



Let's Get Physical with Wheatland Senior Centre

Weyburn

Photo Credit Wheatland Senior Centre



Creative Winter Events

Dickens Fest

Carlyle

Photo Credit Stephanie Zoer



Christmas Tree Lighting

Carievale

Photo Credit Laura Stanley



CHILLFEST

White City

Photo Credit Town of White City



Winter Wonderland

Moosomin Regional Park

Photo Credit Sierra D'Souza Butts



Freeze It

The Peter Nabholz Circle Skate Way

Moosomin

Photo Credit Mike Schwean



CrokiCurl

Windthorst

Photo Credit Laura Kish



Winterize Summer Activities Disc Golf

Moose Jaw

Photo Credit CANVA



Cross Country Night Ski

Indian Head Golf & Country Club

Photo Credit PLBernier Getter Images



Cool Collabs

Skate With the Rockets

Town of Redvers

Photo Credit City of Redvers



Festival of Lights

Woodlawn Regional Park & Local Businesses

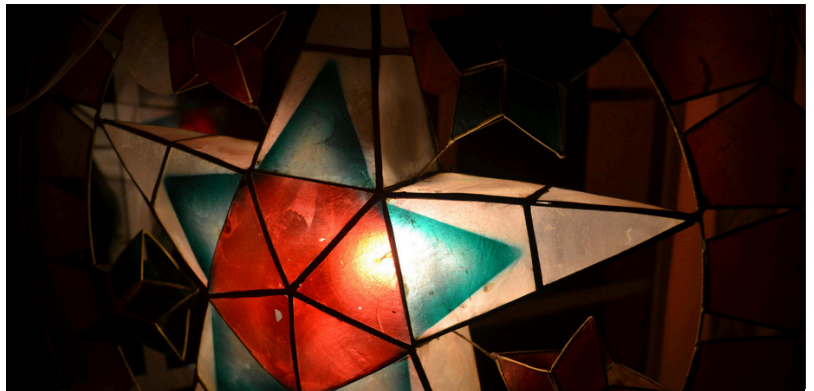
Photo Credit David Willberg



Philippine Lantern (Parol) Making Workshops

Southeast Regional Library, Ogema & Sask Culture

Photo Credit Alen Rio pixabay



Inside Out

Estevan Art Gallery & Woodlawn Regional Park

Photo Credit Chantel Schultz



Snow and Tell

Shake the Winter Blues

Oxbow

Photo Credit Oxbow Arts & Cultural Committee



Warming Huts

Winnipeg

The Hug Mug - Grade 11 Art Students from Mennonite Brethren Collegiate Institute, Winnipeg, Canada



Canvas of Snow

Artist - Sonja Hinrichsen

Photo Credit Sonja Hinrichsen



Art Outside All Year Round

Brandon Artist -Weiming Zhao

Photo Credit Brandon Sun, 2014



Snow Safety

Snow Angels Community Grant

Regina

Photo Credit Pixelshot



Community Sand Boxes

Edmonton

Photo Credit City of Edmonton



Warm Hearts -Jacket Repair Project Saskatchewan Waste Reduction Council

Saskatoon & Regina

Photo Credit Baloncici Getty Images



Get a Grip Campaign & Vial of Life Program

Carleton Place, ON

Photo Credit Gonzalo Martinez Getty Images



Winterpy

Energy Dash and Splash

Estevan & Fresh Air Fitness

Photo Credit Ashlyn George



SNOWGA

Wascana Centre & Bodhi Tree Yoga

Photo Credit The Provincial Capital Commission



Back2Nature Wellness & Adventures

Echo Valley Provincial Park

Photo Credit Saskatchewan Parks



Workshop: Nature Journaling

Sask Outdoors

Photo Credit Sask Outdoors



Funding & Resources

Grants:

South East Sport, Culture & Recreation District: SE District has funding available for programming! Check out our [Funding Page](#) for more information

Sask Lotteries - Community Grant Program: Each community receives funding from Sask Lotteries for sport, culture and recreation programming.

[Saskatchewan Parks and Recreation Association \(SPRA\) Grants:](#)

- Training Grant
- Parks for All Action Grant
- Framework in Action Grant
- Get Moving Grant
- Community Rink Affordability Grant (Government of Saskatchewan)
- School Playground Equipment Grant (Government of Saskatchewan)

SPRA's [Grant Guide](#) is a great tool for financial resources:

There are a wide range of grants from different organizations available that could be applied to Winter Town Initiatives. You Could:

- Improve wind breaks by planting trees through [Tree Canada's Community Tree Grants](#)
- Partner with your local Snowmobile Club to improve trail signage or offer more safety education through the [Yamaha Outdoor Initiative Grant](#)

Winter Specific Grants

- [Sask Energy Share the Warmth Program Grant Program](#)

Fundraising & Revenue Generation:

Revenue generation and fundraising can help provide funding for programming. Successful winter events can also generate funds for the community and the surrounding areas.

Examples:

[Whitewood Bonspiel](#)

[Arcola Snow Mobile Derby](#)

[Farm it Forward](#)

Sponsorship:

Find a Sponsor – Partner with local businesses, organizations, or even local community members to help support events or projects!

Create a sponsorship package. Sponsorship Packages are a great way to demonstrate what promotional services your group can offer in exchange for financial support (UBC Experimental Learning HUB, Faculty of Applied Sciences).

Support can look like:

- Monetary
- Donation - a gift with no strings attached
- Gift-in-kind - noncash property or service

Check out UBC Experimental Learning HUBS - [Sponsorship Package Toolkit](#) for information to get started.

Be the Sponsor - Create a sponsorship opportunity in your operation budget for community organizations to host events. For example, YXE has created a grant for local community organizations to submit events that target winter town goals.

You could help support initiatives that promote:

- Community Safety
- Winter Design
- Winter Fun

Lending Programs:

Equipment

[Big Foot Snowshoe Loan](#)

[Geocaching and GPS Loan](#)

Other Resources:

Tools For Non-Profits

More resources for non-profits are available at <https://charityresourcehub.ca/>

Communities in Bloom

[SPRA is the provincial coordinator for Communities in Bloom](#), “a national program that recognizes community participation in projects involving beautification, heritage, and environmental awareness. It's a great opportunity for communities to generate civic pride and local participation and gain recognition across the country.”

Placemaking

[Canada's Placemaking Community](#)

[8 80 Cities Winter Placemaking Guide](#)

Design

[Winter Places: A Design Guide for Winter Placemaking](#)

[Winter Design Guidelines](#)

Winter Town Strategies

[Saskatoon Winter Strategy](#)

[Edmonton Winter Strategy](#)

Final Message:

We hope this Toolkit has provided you with some helpful information and inspiration on your journey to **Become a Winter Town**. The South East Sport, Culture & Recreation District offers a variety of other resources to help support your goals, such as grants and webinars!

Check out our [website](#) for more!

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