

Amherst Ice Allocation Pilot Project: Summary Report, October 2017

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Executive summary

In August 2016, the Town of Amherst launched the *Ice Allocation Policy Pilot Project*, an initiative that eliminated the ice-time fees at the Amherst Stadium for youth and youth serving organizations during the 2016/2017 ice session. Believed to be the first initiative of its kind in Nova Scotia, the pilot project aims to address the steady decline in use of the Amherst Stadium over the past several years by reducing financial barriers to accessing programs and services at the Stadium.

Additionally, the project was envisioned to be an important investment in the health and well-being of community members by promoting and supporting physical activity among youth and their families. An evaluation comprising document review, online survey and focus groups/interviews, took place over April-May 2017 to provide a better understanding of the impact that the pilot project has had on the use of the Amherst Stadium and participation in the programs and services there.

Key findings

Document reviews

A review of key documents received highlighted the following during the 2016-17 ice season:

- The Amherst Skating Club (ASC) and the Cumberland County Minor Hockey (CCMH) both reported increased registrations for their programs.
- The ASC received \$19,000 of ice-time savings during the ice season of 2016-17, while the CCMH received \$45,000. This enabled these organizations to reduce registration fees for their participants.
- CCMH teams saved an additional \$2400 in tournament registration fees.
- The amount of money generated by the hockey tournaments in Amherst (e.g., lodging and meals) was estimated to be approximately \$98,580.00. This excludes potential economic advantages for other businesses or local shops.
- The Stadium reported that ice-time use increased by 225 hours when compared to the previous year; the Stadium staff saw a 50-60% increase in public skating this year.

Online survey

Highlights from the online survey revealed that:

- 72% of participants agreed that their visits to the Stadium increased compared to the 2015-16 ice season.
- 76% of participants perceived that physical activity increased among youth during the 2016-17 ice season.
- 82% of participants agreed that the cost of \$60,000 to provide no-fee ice-time to youth was a worthwhile investment.
- 92% of participants agreed that the Town of Amherst should continue to invest financial support to increase and maintain physical activity among youth.

Focus groups/interviews

Key themes that emerged from the focus groups and interviews included:

- Positive changes since the launch of the project:
 - Increased activity at the Stadium
 - Economic spin-offs
- Successes of the project:
 - Helped youth be more active
 - Increased equitable access to programs and services
 - Provided additional opportunities for skill development (e.g., clinics)
- Challenges of the project:
 - Communication issues (e.g., incomplete information about project provided to general public)
 - Scheduling ice-time by user groups (e.g., allocation of ice-time)

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on feedback from the evaluation participants and observations by the research team.

1. Greater connectivity between businesses and the Stadium. For example, highlighting the advantages of the policy to businesses and encouraging them to promote the programs and services of the Stadium to guests (e.g., hotel staff telling patrons about the walking track, etc.).
2. Better communication, which includes:
 - a. Providing concise information about the project to user groups and general public
 - b. Networking with local businesses for data collection and mutual promotion
3. Improved scheduling by user groups, which includes¹:
 - a. How to deal with cancellations
 - b. How to ensure equitable ice-time
 - c. How to streamline the process of requesting ice-time
4. Enhanced tracking, monitoring and evaluation. For example, while anecdotal information is needed, records such as food sales at the Stadium canteen and local restaurants during tournaments, as well as hotel stays, could provide a deeper understanding of the policy's impact.

¹ Scheduling issues are external to the Municipality and are the responsibility of the sports organizations. These organizations are aware of these issues and will strive to reduce them for the next ice season.

Introduction

In August 2016, the Town of Amherst launched the *Ice Allocation Policy Pilot Project*, an initiative that eliminated the ice-time fees at the Amherst Stadium for youth and youth serving organizations during the 2016/2017 ice session. Believed to be the first initiative of its kind in Nova Scotia, the pilot project aims to address the steady decline in use of the Amherst Stadium over the past several years by reducing financial barriers to accessing programs and services at the Stadium. Additionally, the project was seen to be an important investment in the health and well-being of community members by promoting and supporting physical activity among youth and their families. Physical activity plays an important role in promoting health and well-being by supporting growth and development, preventing chronic illnesses, decreasing stress and increasing strength and energy².



The project was launched following a Municipal Council session held at the Amherst Stadium that was open to community members and users of the Stadium. This session provided background information about the pilot project and its intended purpose. Council voted unanimously in favour of the motion to amend the town's ice allocation policy by including a clause to eliminate ice-time fees, and to allocate \$80,000 from the Town's operating reserve to cover any loss in revenue. Town administration and council members, as well as major user group representatives were all consulted ahead of the decision and supported the pilot project.

Based on previous year's ice use, the projected savings for Community Sport Organizations (CSOs) was estimated to be about \$40,000 for minor hockey and \$18,000 for the skating club. A condition of participation in the pilot project required CSOs to pass the savings onto registrants through lower registration costs. The anticipated savings were projected to range from \$75-\$350 depending on the participant and the program. The pilot project aligns with the philosophy of the Town of Amherst that provides many free or low cost active living opportunities to provide equitable programs and services to residents.

During the planning stages of the pilot project, the Evaluation Committee for this project recognized the importance of gathering information about the effectiveness of the project to the Town of Amherst Council, community members, user groups and other stakeholders, as well as to determine opportunities for improvement of the project. The Applied Research Collaborations for Health (ARCH) research team at Dalhousie University was contracted to lead the project evaluation. This report will outline three evaluation objectives:

- Determine if the pilot project effectively increased usage of the Amherst Stadium
- Understand if the pilot project contributed to the short-term outcomes outlined in the project's logic model (Appendix A)

² Public Health Agency of Canada (2017). Physical Activity. Retrieved from <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca>.

- Identify opportunities for improvements to the project

Methods

The evaluation included the following activities to gather data:

1. Document review
2. Online survey
3. Focus groups

Document review

The purpose of the document review was to determine the impact that the project had on the usage of the programs and services of the Stadium, registration numbers, registration costs, and economic benefit to the community. Youth organization user groups were contacted and asked to provide any relevant records/reports that documented registrations numbers, registration fees, and usage of the Stadium. Unfortunately, given that many of these groups are volunteer-run and were unaware at the beginning of the 2016-17 ice season that these data would be needed, there were not many documents to include in this review. However, the documents that were received (e.g., registration reports, tournament spending, etc.) were very insightful and provided adequate data to provide a high-level documentation of the project. Documents were reviewed and relevant data, as outlined in the objectives of the evaluation, are discussed in key findings.

Online survey

An online survey was developed and administered to gather information on perceptions and observations regarding the ice allocation project, including any changes in Stadium activities and participation the during the project compared to the previous ice season and attitudes about the project. The survey was developed collaboratively with the project's Evaluation Committee and administered through Opinio, a secure online survey service provided through Dalhousie University. The survey used both ranking (Likert-scale) and open-ended questions to gather information.

An electronic link to the survey was sent from the research team via email to the Director of Recreation to distribute through local networks and social media sites. The survey was distributed to approximately 400 potential participants that included Stadium staff, youth group organizations, user groups, business owners, community members, and families. The survey was active from April 11th, 2017 to May 14th, 2017 and several reminder emails were sent to remind potential participants to complete the survey if they had not already done so. A paper copy of the survey was also made available to capture responses from community members with limited access to a computer. As well, the survey collected data from both users and non-users of the Stadium. A total of 138 (135 online surveys and 3 paper copies) completed surveys were received (129 users & 9 non-users), resulting in a 35% response rate.

After the survey closed on May 14th, 2017, descriptive summary reports were created. The survey responses to the ranking questions were analyzed by the frequency that respondents agreed (strongly and mostly agreed comments were combined) or disagreed (strongly and mostly disagreed comments

were combined) with survey statements, and the ‘neither agree nor disagree’ responses were interpreted to denote uncertainty. Open-ended survey responses were examined for emerging themes. Key survey findings are presented below. Several graphs of key findings are included throughout the key findings section of the report and the remaining graphs can be found in Appendix 2.

Focus groups and interviews

Focus groups provided an opportunity for participants to discuss their perceptions and observations about the project. Participants were asked to reflect upon any notable changes they observed because of the project and what they perceived to be the greatest strengths of the project as well as any challenges or ways to improve the project. Two focus groups were conducted:

1. Representatives from businesses and community groups (n=3)
2. Representatives from youth organization user groups of Stadium (n=4)

Also, several Amherst recreation staff were in attendance to observe the focus groups and to contribute relative context and background information about the project (n=3). Focus group participants were invited to attend the focus groups based on either their knowledge and networks within the community or as representatives of the youth organization user groups. The focus group questions were developed by consulting with the Evaluation Committee and were used as a guide to facilitate the focus group discussions. The focus groups were held in Amherst at the Town Hall. Several representatives were unable to attend the focus groups and were interviewed via telephone (n=5). The focus groups and telephone interviews were recorded with permission from the participants and were transcribed verbatim to facilitate analysis. During data analysis, emerging concepts were coded and themed to contextualize the participants’ perceptions and observations.

Key findings

Document review

The document review highlights the key areas that were impacted through the implementation of the project such as the registration numbers, Stadium usage, and economic factors.

Approved user groups:

- Public skating
- Amherst skating club (ASC)
- Cumberland County minor hockey (CCMH)
- Amherst Regional High School
- Skate Nova Scotia
- Roy Maltby Hockey
- Rothesay Netherwood School, NB
- Riverside School
- Ringette NS, PEI and NB
- Novice & Atom Penguins



Registration data: The Amherst Skating Club and Cumberland County Minor Hockey both reported increases in participant registrations:

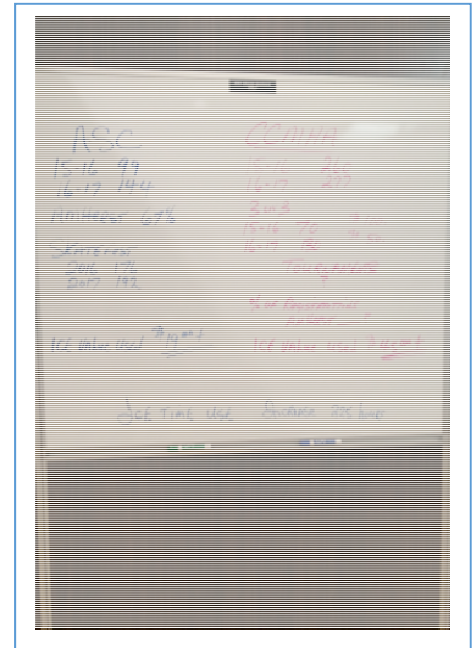
Organization/Club		Registrations	
		2015-2016	2016-2017
Amherst Skating Club	Skating Club	99	144
	Skatefest	176	192
CCMHA	Minor Hockey	260	277
	3 on 3	70	130

Table 1: Registration data for 2015-16 & 2016-17.

Registration fees & Stadium usage: A review of the documents received showed that the Amherst Skating Club (ASC) received \$19,000 of ice-time savings during the ice season of 2016-17, while Cumberland County Minor Hockey (CCMH) received \$45,000. This enabled these organizations to reduce registration fees for their participants. Most of the players in CCMH were from Amherst (65%) and the remaining players from the Cumberland County, and 67% of the ASC skaters were from Amherst.

In addition to the money saved for registrations, this project also helped CCMH teams save an additional \$2400 in tournament registration fees. As well, the cost of 3 on 3 hockey was reduced by \$50 in the 2016-17 season. Finally, ice-time use at the Stadium during the project increased by 225 hours when compared to the previous year. For example, Stadium staff saw a 50-60% increase in public skating over the project year.

Estimated economic spin-off: Although the documents received regarding economic spin-offs to the community were limited, a year-end report from CCMH reported that due to reduced tournament fees, Amherst hosted an additional tournament during the 2016-17 hockey season. The amount of money generated by the hockey tournaments in Amherst (e.g., lodging and meals) was approximately \$98,580. This does not include potential economic advantages for other businesses or local shops.



Online survey

Profile of survey participants

Most of the participants were either from the Town of Amherst (56%) or from another community in Cumberland County (41%). Participants aged 35-44 accounted for 53% of completed surveys, and 17% were between 45-54 years of age. Also, well over half of the participants were parents/family members of youth using the Stadium (37%) or a community member (19%), and representatives from both community sport organizations (10%) and community organization (10%) accounted for 20% of the completed surveys.

Awareness of the project

Most of the participants (82% of users, 55% of non-users) were aware of the no ice-time fees during the 2016-17 ice season. The survey asked participants to comment on what they knew about the project, and once again, most people were aware of its purpose and conditions: *“To remove the financial barriers to help promote physical activities for the youth in our community”*. However, several comments suggested that there was confusion about the terms of the project and that it was difficult to get answers to their questions.

Usage of Stadium

On average, 39% of the survey participants reported that they used the Stadium 1-2 days per week, 33% used it 3-5 days per week, and 21% used it more than 5 times per week. The remaining 7% did not use the Stadium (non-users), and their comments will be discussed later in the report. When asked if their use (e.g., to attend programs) of the Stadium changed during the 2016-17 ice season compared to that of 2015-16, 58% of participants reported that they used the Stadium more in 2016-17 while 42% reported that it stayed the same (there were no reported decreases in Stadium usage).

“More hockey, more involvement with Can Skating... after spending more time at the rink, we took an interest in the walking track for the winter months... Great way to stay active” (Survey participant).

The online survey asked participants what type of activities they participated in while at the Stadium. The reported activities were: 71% minor hockey; 62% spectator of Stadium activities; 60% public skates; 57% walking track; and, 28% skating clubs/programs (see Figure 1).

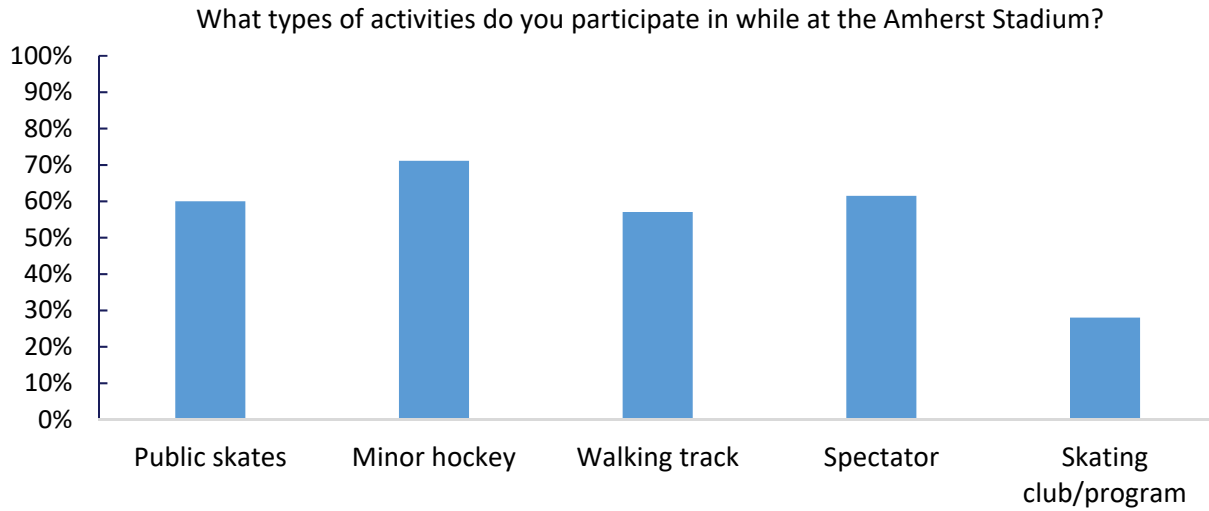


Figure 1. Types of activity participation at Amherst Stadium during 2016-17 ice season.

Impacts of the policy

When asked if their/their family’s visits to the Stadium (e.g., includes spectators as well as program participants) increased during the 2016-17 ice season, the majority of participants, 72%, agreed that their visits to the Stadium increased compared to the 2015-16 ice season (see Figure 2). Likewise, when asked if their/their family’s participation in Stadium activities (e.g., skating programs, walking track, etc.), 71% agreed that participation in activities increased compared to the 2015-16 ice season.

“The ice has been used a lot more and kids are having fun. The walking track has been used by so many more people. A great addition to our town”
(Survey participant).

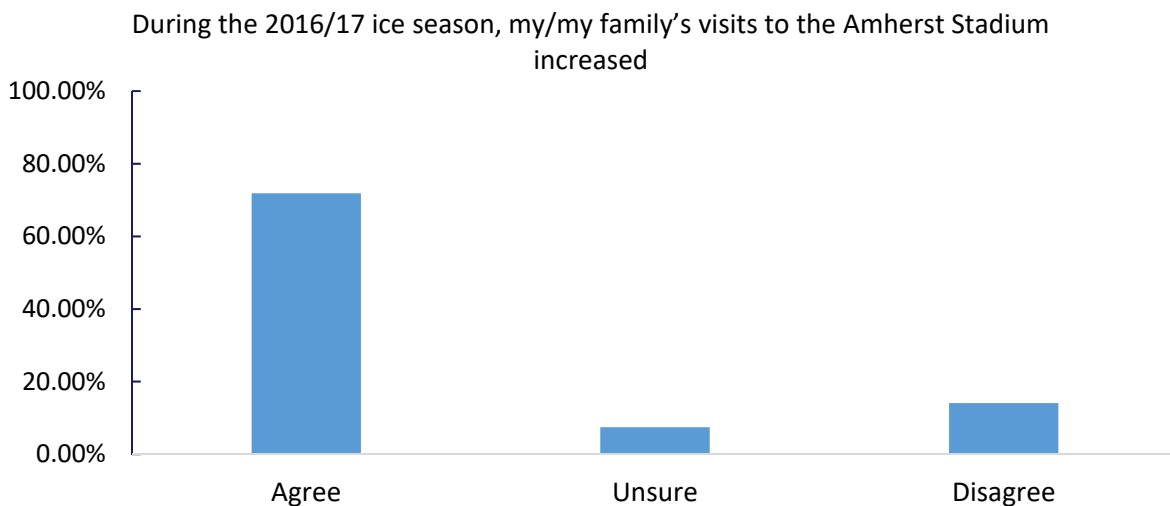


Figure 2: Visits to Amherst Stadium during 2016-17 ice season.

The survey asked participants if they/family members saved money accessing services/programs (e.g., reduction in registration fees). Seventy-three percent agreed that they saved money as a result of the project (see Figure 3). When asked how much money was saved, while the answers ranged from \$0-\$750, the majority of participants reported that they saved \$100-\$300. However, some participants mentioned that even though they saved money in registration fees, they also spent more money in gas. Also, several participants stated that minor hockey raised the cost of registration, resulting in fewer savings than anticipated (although the cost of registration would have increased regardless of the project).

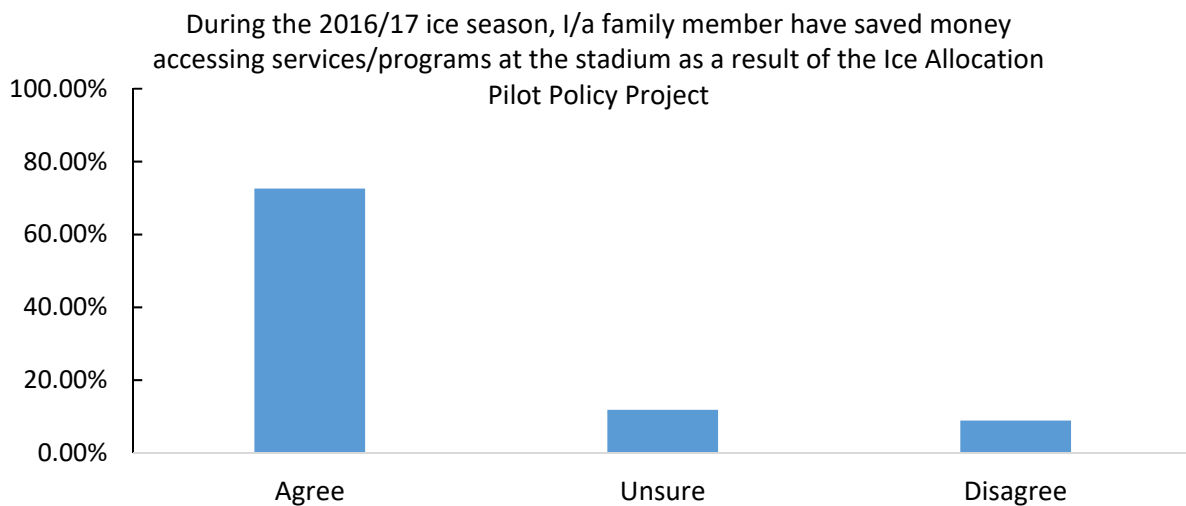


Figure 3: Money saved accessing Stadium services/programs during the 2016-17 ice season.

When asked if the project helped increase physical activity among youth in Amherst, 76% of participants perceived that physical activity increased during the 2016-17 ice season. Likewise, 82% of participants agreed that \$60,000 to provide no-fee ice-time to youth was a worthwhile investment (see Figure 4), especially if it can be proven that youth usage of services/programs at the Stadium increased and that other programs/services in the community do not get overlooked because of this project. An overwhelming 92% of participants agreed that the Town of Amherst should continue to invest financial support to increase and maintain physical activity among youth. However, several comments related to the cost of the project noted that only a small number of the population participate in hockey and skating, so the benefits are not widespread. Also, one participant noted that “[the project] may increase youth activities, but the kids who are there now will be there regardless because the sports mean a lot to them”. This comment is somewhat negated by the impressive number of participants’ comments that stated that this year is the first that they/their children participated at any programs or services at the Stadium.

“I think this is a great plan and the cost is small when you consider future costs on the healthcare system and the town in general by having less active and healthy people in the town. Why have such nice assets and venues sitting unused when they are open and available” (Survey participant).

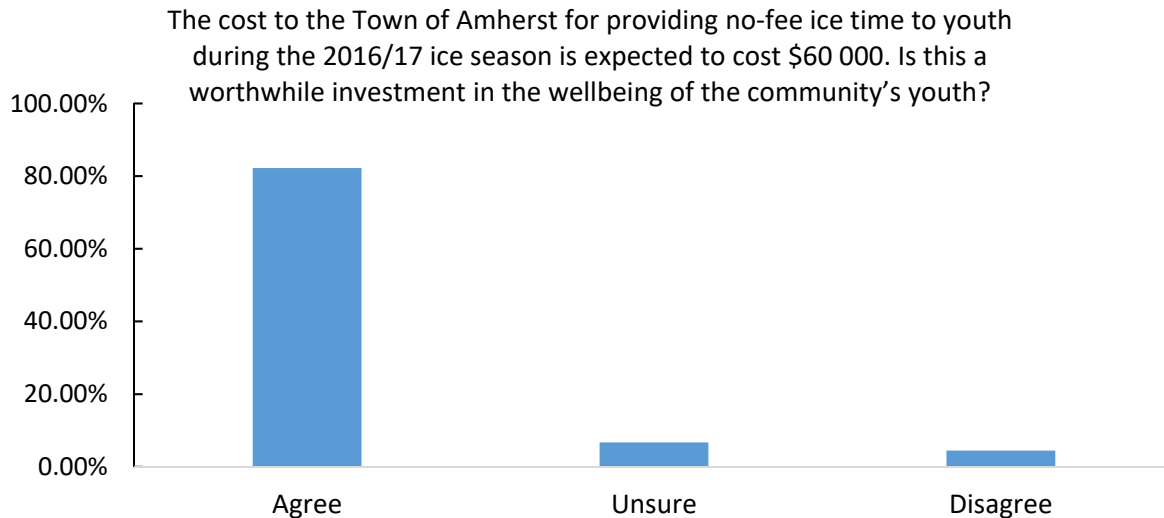


Figure 4: Support for investing in youth well-being.

Open-ended question

Participants were asked to comment on any changes they noticed at the Amherst Stadium during the 2016-17 ice season and overwhelmingly, the most common change reported was the overall busyness of the Stadium and increased activities (e.g., skating programs). A sample of participants' comments include:

- *There seems to be a lot more people around.*
- *More people using the walking track.*
- *Many more people participating in all skating programs.*
- *More activity.*
- *A lot more young kids trying skating or hockey.*

Also, participants were asked if there were any additional services/programs at the Stadium that would encourage them to use it more and their suggestions included more summer activities, improved ice-time scheduling, more variety of activities and physical activity equipment, skate/helmet lending program, and for the project to be continued next year. A sample of participants' comments include:

- *Open it to a roller rink with music when the ice is removed.*
- *Summertime activities.*
- *Support for adult (women's) hockey and ringette.*
- *Supports for whoever completes ice-time scheduling; ice-time schedule to run a little smoother.*
- *More variety of events. During the winter it is just hockey and skating.*
- *More ice-time when youth are not in school.*
- *Just keep up what you are doing.*

Finally, the survey allowed participants to provide additional comments about anything regarding their experiences at the Stadium during the 2016-17 ice season and most participants reiterated their support

for the project. Others mentioned the challenges of ice-time scheduling³, as well as concerns about security, needing more ice-time for specific groups, and garbage left behind during/following Ramblers games. One participant believed that the project resulted in increased hockey registration fees: *“Although the Town reduced the fees for ice-time, minor hockey simply increased their fees to off set this amount. There is no way they would have increased the fees so much if not for this pilot project”*. Another participant stated that the money they saved in registration fees was lost in gas and other travelling expenses. Additional comments included:

- *Though my children loved CanSkate, it is a very disorganized program. Some more organization with this program would be great.*
- *Permit running on the walking track (a few limited times per week).*
- *I think any investment in our children is positive and benefits everyone.*
- *Hope this new initiative continues!*
- *Thank you Amherst for trying this project and putting youth first.*



³ Scheduling issues are external to the Municipality and are the responsibility of the sports organizations. These organizations are aware of these issues and will strive to reduce them for the next ice season.

Non-users of the Stadium

Seven percent of the survey participants indicated that they were non-users of the Stadium. Reasons for non-use included lack of activities (e.g., exercise programs), lack of time, and the perceived bias towards hockey to the exclusion of other activities and cost. Interestingly, there was a range of opinions regarding the project among non-users. Several survey participants stated that they did not use the Stadium but they supported the project. One participant stated that *“it’s an excellent innovative and creative project. Kudos to you!”* and another that it is a *“great public service”*. However, several perceived it to be a burden for taxpayers for *“a very narrow sport population”* although another participant’s statement inadvertently countered this reason by stating that *“baseball is free”* which could also be perceived as a narrow sport population. However, the advantages of increased out-of-town visitors to the Stadium and the potential economic spin-offs for the town because of the project (e.g., more tournaments) are valid counter-argument to these objections. Nevertheless, despite several participants, both non-users and users, questioning the worthiness of the project, most survey participants were very supportive of the project. Support for the project is discussed in greater detail in the focus groups and interviews, as are some of the challenges, and in many ways echoes what was found in the surveys.

Focus groups

The perceptions and observations of the focus group and interview participants about the project highlight that the project has resulted in many positive outcomes and was an overall success despite several challenges.

Notable changes at the Stadium during the 2016-17 ice season:

The most significant change mentioned was the **increased activity at of the Stadium**. Several participants noted that in previous years the Stadium was often dark and the parking lot was often empty, but during the project it was perceived to be much busier. Other participants reported that they were happy to see parents and grandparents using the walking track while their youth participated in programming, as well as more spectators at hockey games due to free admission to all games. Also, reduced registration and tournaments fees resulted in more participants enrolled in programs, more teams playing at the Stadium during tournaments, which in turn increased the number of both local community members and out-of-town guests. This increased busyness, in turn, was believed to increased **economic spin-offs** for the Town of Amherst and surrounding areas. Participants observed an increase in food purchased at both the Stadium cafeteria and local restaurants, as well as other venues such as bowling, parks and other activities within the community. One participants stated that *“there’s been a lot more bustle about with festivals or tournaments and teams coming from out of town... and it was cool seeing the restaurants, not that I like waiting for a table, being busy”*.

“We can’t always reduce poverty, but this [project] is a huge win” (Community group representative). *“So the facts are that we need to raise our income, but in the meantime, we still have to be active”* (Recreation staff).

Successes of the project:

By far, the most common success identified by participants was that the project **helped youth be active**; by reducing registration fees, programs at the Stadium became more affordable for many families and allowed some youth to participate for the first time. This helped reduce exclusion, which in turn **increased equitable access** to physical activity opportunities. Many participants stated that the municipality was showing its commitment to the health of the community by supporting and investing in youth and families. As a result of this investment, youth sport organizations **provided additional opportunities for development**. For example, the Amherst Skating Club was able to bring in an additional facilitator for a skating seminar hosted at the Stadium. Also, hockey coaches were able to mentor more youth in officiating skills and were able to invite National coaches to share their expertise with players. As well, more access to ice-time for practice helped increase skills development for hockey players and skaters, while inexperienced youth were given an opportunity to register for a learn to skate program, many for the first time.

“I mean, there were kids that I’ve talked to this year that skated this year, and have never skated before”
(Focus group participant).

Challenges of the project

Communication issues were identified as major challenges for the project. Many participants stated that “getting the word out” about both the project and the terms associated with it (e.g., who qualifies for free ice). Unfortunately, the project was late launching and there was some confusion about it once it did launch. As well, several participants mentioned that communication to local businesses (e.g., hotels and entertainment venues) could be improved. **Scheduling of ice-time** by user groups was also a challenge of this initiative which included how to deal with last minute cancellations, increased demand for ice-time, and equitable allocation of ice-time. Despite expressing frustration about scheduling conflicts, participants also recognized that this was a pilot project and that “growing pains” are to be expected. Also, several participants acknowledged that although a reduction in registration fees is a good investment, there are additional expenses that still make it difficult for some families to participate in the programs and services of the Stadium such as the cost of skates and gear, and the costs associated with travel (e.g., increased tournaments and practices, etc.) such as gas, hotels, and meals. Finally, perhaps not so much a challenge but a caution is the issue of “**running beyond capacity**”- for example, how will the Town deal with an increase in hotel and restaurant demands as a result of increased visitors to the community.

Suggestions for improvement

Suggested actions to address these challenges by the focus group/interview participants include:

- Improved communication about the project to the general public and user groups
- Increased collaboration with local businesses
- Streamlined scheduling procedures by user groups

Discussion

This report provides insight into the perceptions and observations of survey and focus group/interview participants about the *Ice Allocation Policy Pilot Project*. Feedback from participants highlight the project's success in helping to reduce costs associated with using the Stadium.

It also provides evidence that the project had a positive impact on Stadium usage, registration numbers and economic factors. Overwhelmingly, participants were pleased to see their town invest in the health of youth and families and it turn, that families took advantage of this investment. The project helped increase physical activity among community members which contributes to overall health. As previously mentioned, physical activity supports growth and development, helps prevent chronic illnesses, decreases stress and increases strength and energy. In other words, it contributes to holistic health which includes physical, mental and social health. As one participant stated regarding youth and sports: *"it's learning how to deal with success and failure, socialization, ... not just the physical aspect of it"* (Youth sport organization representative) while another participant mentioned the importance of teaching discipline and commitment. This is true not just for participation in sports such as hockey and ringette but also for activities such as public skates, and figure skating.

"Aren't our kids worth that though"
(Community member regarding the cost of the project)?

"We don't charge to play in the ball field, we don't charge to play on soccer fields, we don't charge to walk on trails, we don't charge to play in our playgrounds, so why the rink"
(Recreation staff member)?

Investment in this project aligns with other initiatives within the municipality such as financial support for swimming and maintenance of sports fields. These initiatives are offered free through government funding so a question raised by a recreation staff member was, *"why is this not the same for the Stadium"*? Several participants disagreed with the project because taxpayers are required to pay for the small proportion of the population that accesses the programs and

services of the Stadium. Yet this is the case for many other sports and/or activities within the municipality. For example, not all residents of Amherst play baseball or soccer, yet their taxes help cover the costs associated with maintenance of these fields; utilized facilities, including the Stadium, help create a vibrant and active community, which can result in a greater sense of community pride.

These initiatives, including the Ice Allocation Policy, all help to address inequity within the community. While it does not solve all issues related to financial insecurity, it provides support for those who cannot afford additional expenses above and beyond their basic needs. These initiatives help remove stigma for people who cannot afford it but want to access community services and programs. One focus group participant discussed how people who can afford services and programs often do not understand how difficult it is to access these resources. Initiatives that remove barriers to accessing programs and services benefit both income secure and insecure community members.

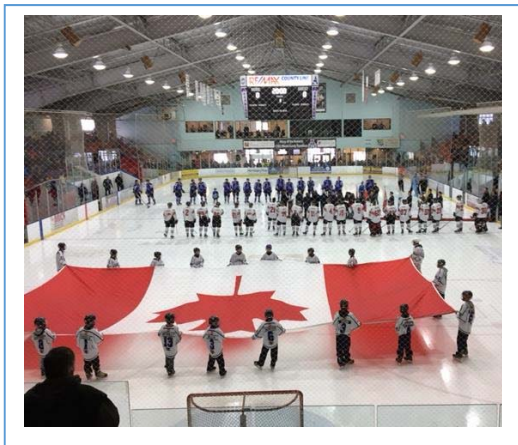
Finally, while health benefits for the sake of health itself is the primary goal, economic benefits are also important. The project highlighted that an investment in the health of the community can have

economic spin-offs that can benefit the Town of Amherst. The elimination of ice-time fees for youth organizations resulted in increased activity at the Stadium that in turn also lead to increased visits to the community, including out-of-town guests. This also increased hotel stays, restaurant meals purchased and other spending in the community. Although it may be difficult to determine the health and social return on investment (ROI) when projects are implemented, the economic impact can be more easily tracked, monitored and reported. Moving forward, this project provides organizations and businesses within the community the opportunity to highlight any economic spin-offs.

“This initiative was unexpected but much appreciated by many families using the facility and allowed new families to register that were not able to do so in past years” (Survey participant).

Strengths and limitations

This report provides information about the overall success of the project. The multiple-method approach of this evaluation gathered information from a variety of sources, all of which revealed consistent findings. Moreover, the focus groups/interviews gathered rich descriptive data from knowledgeable community members and youth sports organization representatives while the document review provided objective data regarding registration numbers and Stadium usage. Although surveys are



an effective method for gathering data for community members, a limitation of this method is self-report bias. Another limitation of this evaluation was the low number of non-users of the Stadium, limited documents to review and approximations of the project’s impact on economic spin-offs.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on feedback from the evaluation participants and observations by the research team.

1. Greater connectivity between businesses and the Stadium. For example, highlighting the advantages of the policy to businesses and encouraging them to promote the programs and services of the Stadium to guests (e.g., hotel staff telling patrons about the walking track, etc.)
2. Better communication, which includes:
 - a. Providing concise information about the project to user groups and general public
 - b. Networking with local businesses for data collection and mutual promotion
3. Improved scheduling by user groups, which includes:
 - a. How to deal with cancelations
 - b. How to ensure equitable ice-time
 - c. How to streamline the process of requesting ice-time
4. Enhanced tracking, monitoring and evaluation. For example, while anecdotal information is needed, records such as food sales at the Stadium canteen and local restaurants during tournaments, as well as hotels stays, could provide a deeper understanding of the policy's impact.

Conclusion

This report provides an overview of the positive effects that the *Ice Allocation Policy Pilot Project* had on both increasing utilization of the Amherst Stadium and increased registration of the programs and services provided at the Stadium. Evaluation findings highlight the importance of removing barriers to participation in physical activities by increasing access to programs and services and providing increased equity. This in turn increases opportunities for youth and their families to become more physically active and enjoy healthier lifestyles. Also, the project provides initial support for the potential for economic spin-offs for the community. While not without its challenges, this project was an overall success and is an example to other municipalities about how an investment in physical activity and youth, is also an investment in both the health and economy of the community which will ultimately have an impact on future outcomes.

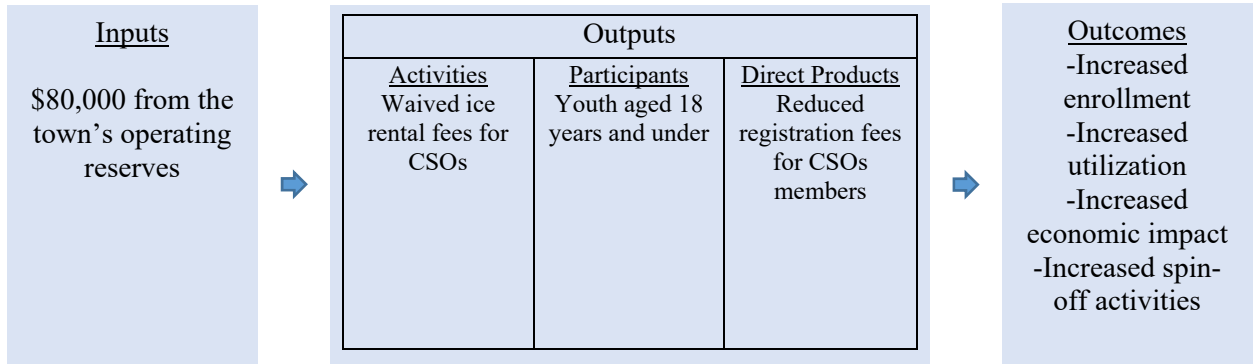
Acknowledgements

Bill Schurman, Peter McCracken and members of the *Amherst Ice Allocation Pilot Project* Evaluation Steering Committee, including representation from Town of Amherst, Sport Nova Scotia, NS Communities, Culture and Heritage, and the Nova Scotia Health Authority, provided ongoing direction and support for the development of this report. A special thank you to Dr. Sara Kirk for her guidance throughout this project and to our research assistants Mariah Jarvis and Melissa Stewart for their support throughout the evaluation.

Appendix 1

Program Logic Model + Evaluation Framework

Program: Town on Amherst Ice Allocation Policy Pilot Project
 Objective of program: to eliminate ice rental fees for CSO organizations providing youth programs which will reduce member registration fees and increase youth enrollment.

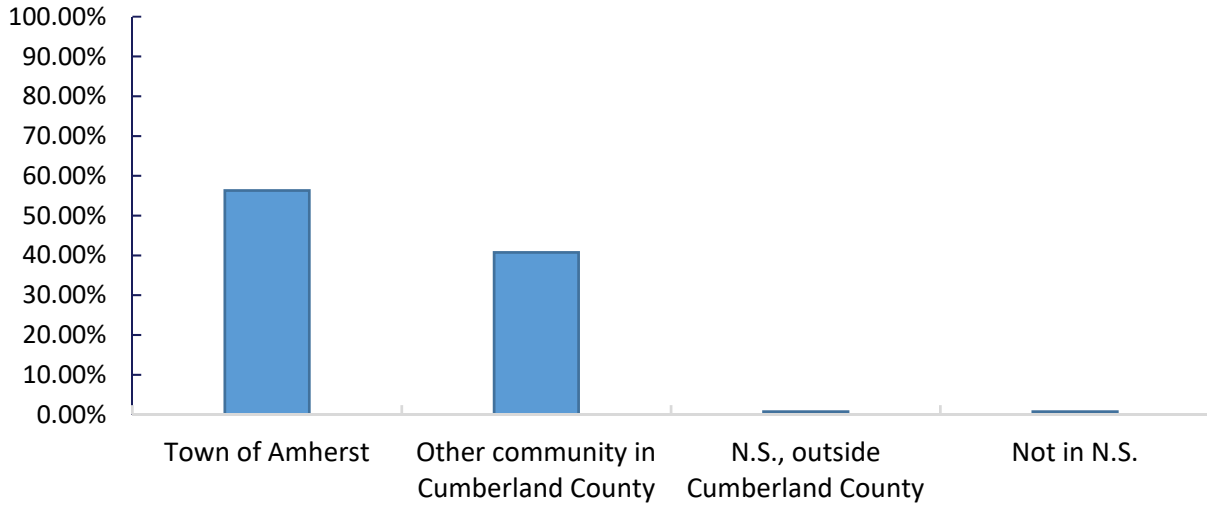


Evaluation Plan: "tell the story" to understand the outcomes of the project and opportunities for improvement.

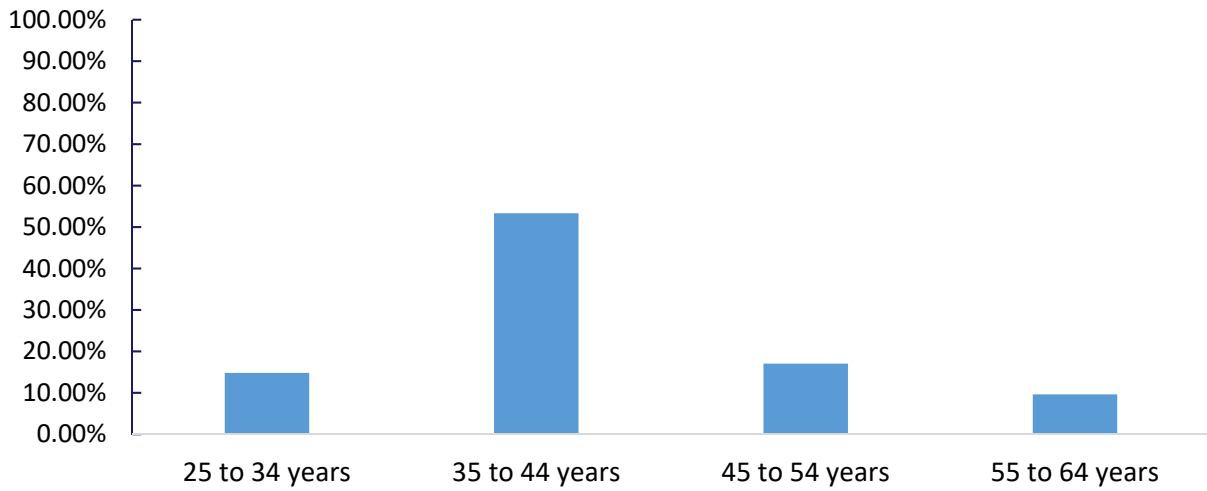


Appendix 2

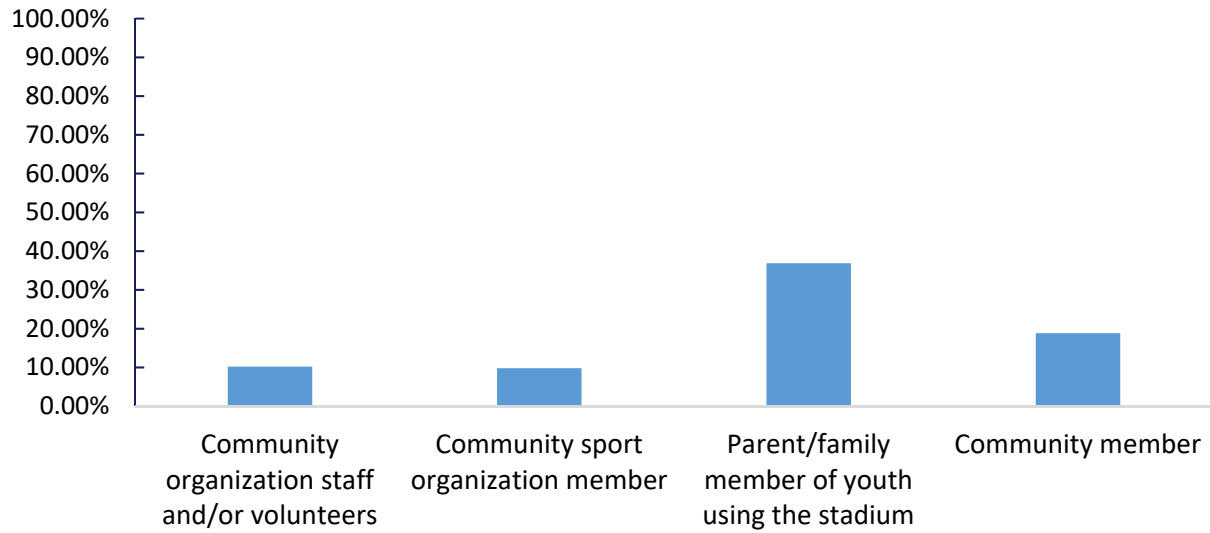
Where do you live?



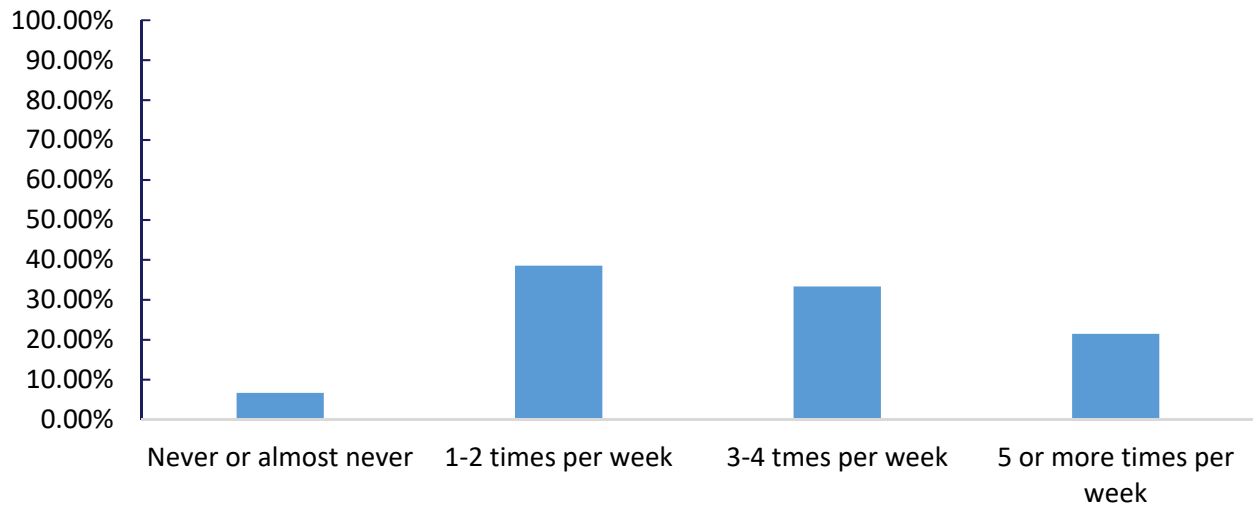
What is your age?



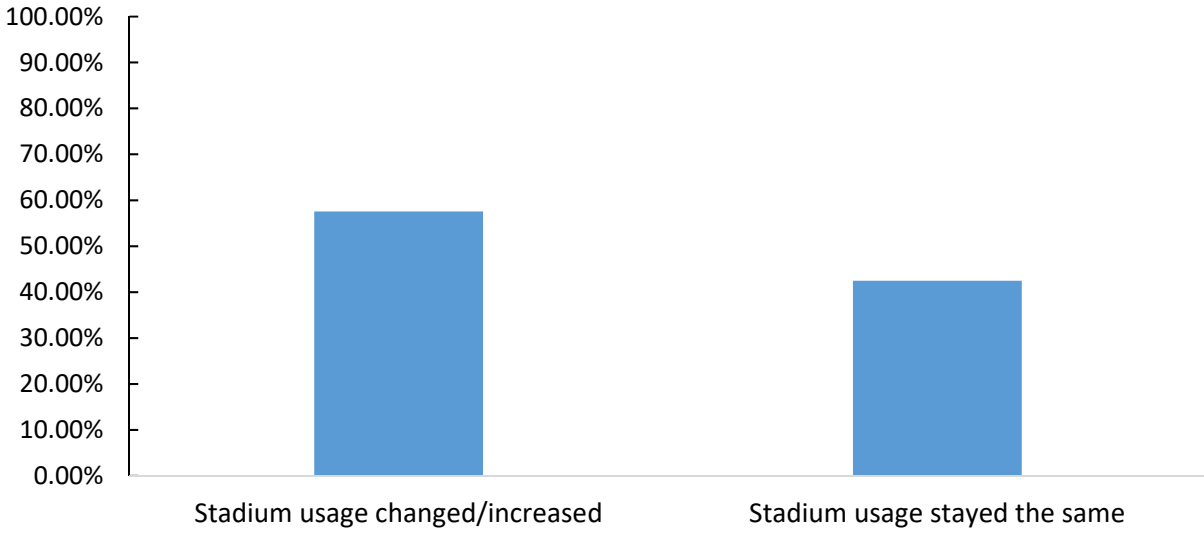
Which of the following professions/positions apply to you?



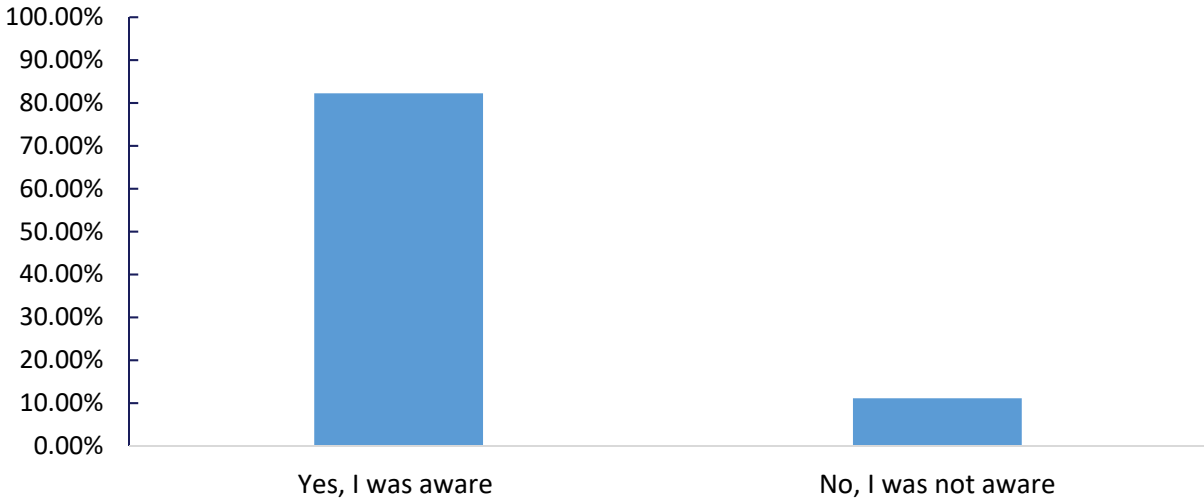
How often, on average, have you/your family used the Amherst Stadium during 2016/2017?



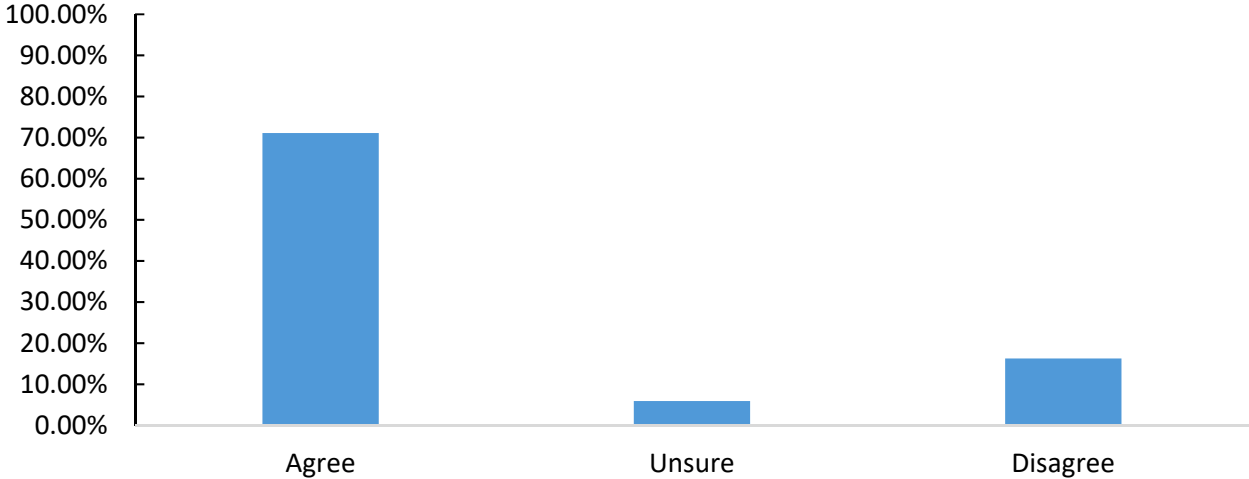
What is the difference in your/your family's use of the Amherst Stadium?



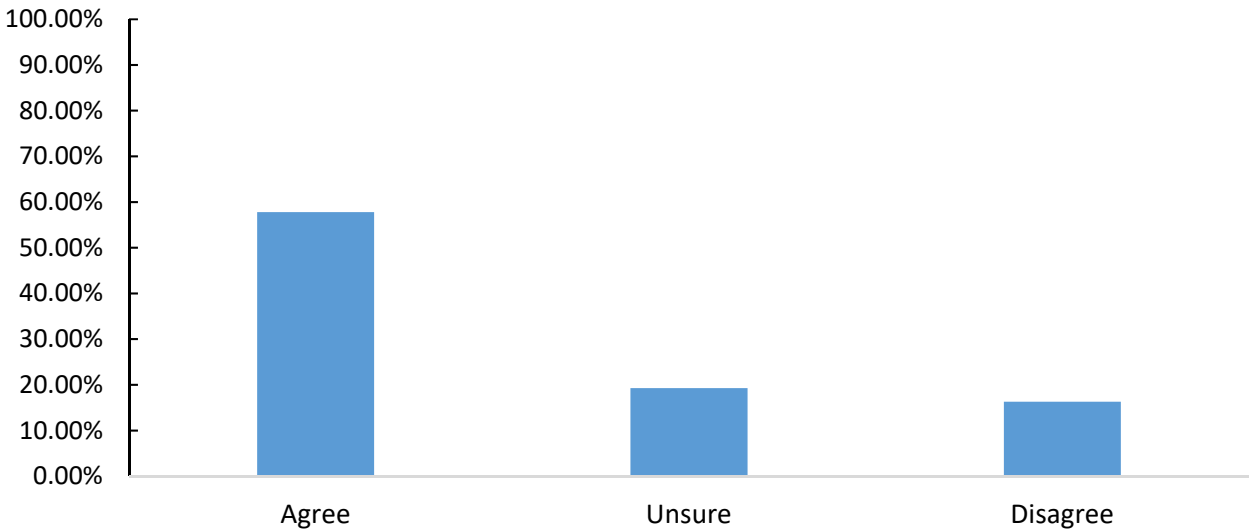
Prior to doing this survey, were you aware that the Town of Amherst implemented a new Ice Allocation Policy during the ice season?



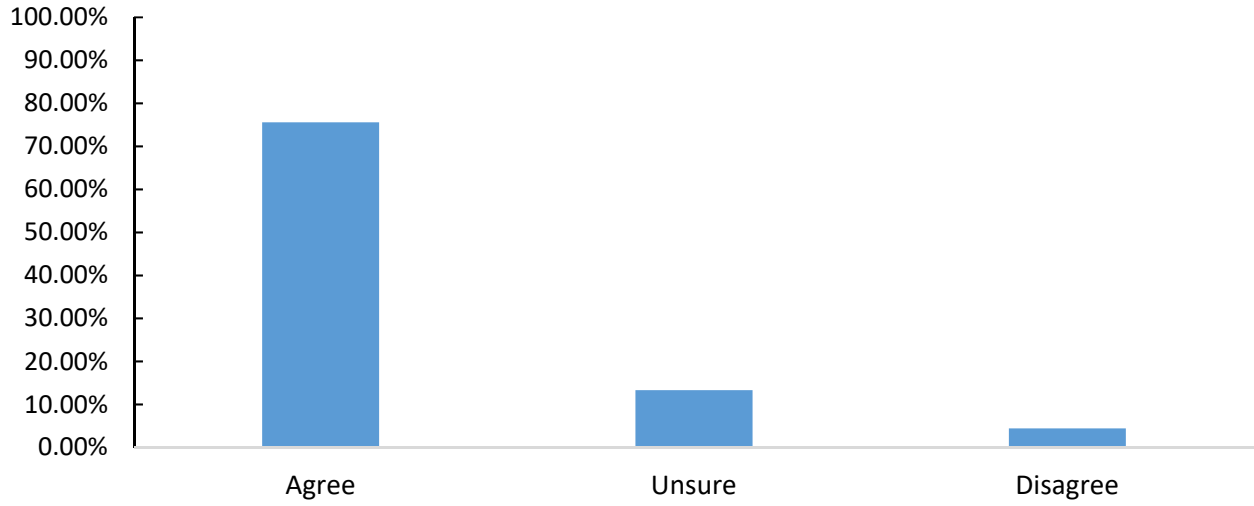
During the 2016/17 ice season, my/my family's participation in stadium activities has increased.



During the 2016/17 ice season, I/a family member experienced less barriers to participating in programs/services at the stadium



The Ice Allocation Policy was an important initiative that helped increase physical activity among youth in Amherst: agree or disagree?



The Town of Amherst should continue to invest financial support to help increase and maintain physical activity among youth.

