



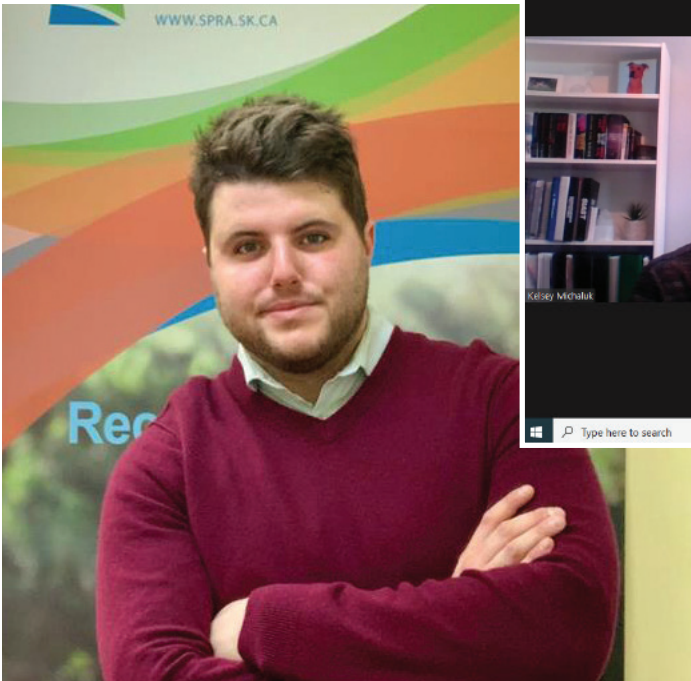
Boosting capacity to reach stakeholders and deliver services through virtual engagement

WHEN COVID-19 RESTRICTIONS began curtailing in-person gatherings, the Saskatchewan Parks and Recreation Association (SPRA) did what many organizations did – it found ways to use more online channels to deliver its programs and services. Beyond the necessity driven by the pandemic, SPRA also saw an opportunity to enhance its virtual-engagement expertise and develop new tools to reach a broader range of stakeholders across the province.

“We wanted to demonstrate innovation in our use of virtual connection and engagement,” says Kelsey Michaluk, SPRA’s Youth Engagement Consultant.



REGINA,
SASKATCHEWAN



Mathew preparing for the 2021 SPRA Virtual Conference

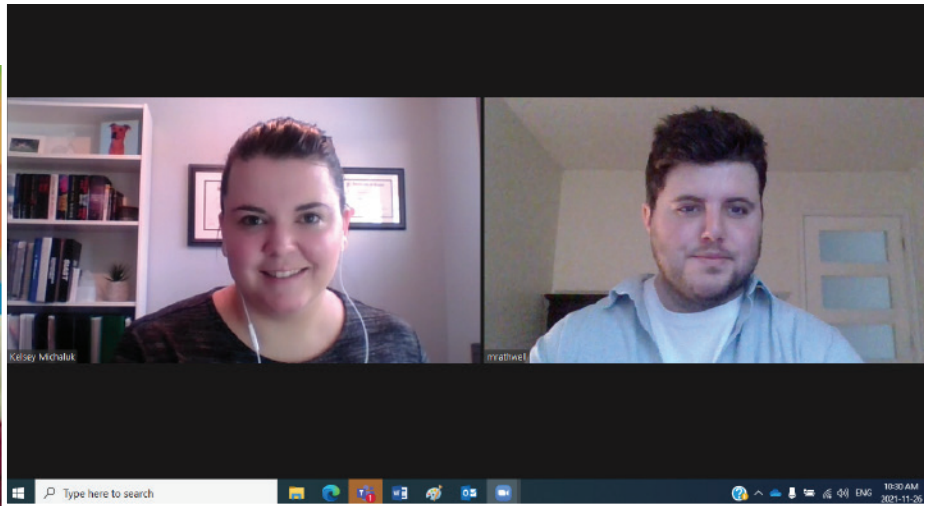
Traditional engagement models predicated on in-person meetings aren't always accessible to everyone, Kelsey explains. "Strengthening our virtual offerings can help us reduce barriers to participating in our programs, services and events – barriers such as limited time for staff or the cost of travel.

"The pandemic may have sped things along, but SPRA has long recognized the advantages of having the tools to reach a virtual audience as a complement to in-person options."

The association was able to hire a new employee to help them bolster their virtual capacity, thanks to funding from CPRA's Youth Employment Experience program. The aim of the program is to create new employment and mentorship opportunities for young people in the parks and recreation sector, while also giving organizations resources to expand and strengthen their programming.

Mathew Rathwell, a Regina resident who is 26 years old, joined SPRA as Virtual Program and Event Assistant. "The CPRA grant gave us a valuable opportunity to bring Mathew onto our team, where he's applied his knowledge and abilities to help SPRA expand virtual-engagement best practices and to try out novel approaches in virtual environments," says Kelsey, designated as Mathew's primary mentor.

Mathew has a degree in Sport and Recreation Management from the University of Regina and plans to build a career in the sector. "With SPRA being a recreation leader in Saskatchewan, I saw joining the team as a great opportunity to gain valuable work experience within the field," says Mathew.



Kelsey and Mathew meeting and working together virtually

"And SPRA supported me as I learned more about online service delivery and virtual training and contributed to new online offerings. Being able to learn about and adapt to the virtual environment will serve me well in the future."

Mathew developed tools and conducted research to support several SPRA training courses in the transition from in-person to virtual. This included SPRA's Play Leadership, Forever...in motion and Building Maintenance Level 1 courses. These virtual offerings impact a variety of members of SPRA's training audience including play program leaders, older adult physical-activity leaders and facility operators in Saskatchewan.

One of his major projects has been developing a Best Practices for Successful Virtual Training tool for SPRA facilitators and course instructors – a product useful for those delivering training that has been adapted for virtual delivery.

In addition to developing these tools and resources for virtual training courses, Mathew played an important role in setup and delivery of SPRA's second virtual Conference in November 2021. The theme of the event, "Connect – Educate – Inspire" drew on the concept of how our industry finds new ways to connect and share knowledge, to inspire and provide new creative experiences within communities.

As pandemic lockdowns eased, SPRA has been able to add some in-person training, while retaining virtual options and dividing some courses into short modules that parks and recreation staff can easily fit into their work schedules.

"The timing of the CPRA Youth Employment Experience funding was excellent and SPRA is pleased that it's continuing to strengthen virtual programs and events to meet the needs of the Recreation Industry and support our partnerships," says Kelsey. 🍁