



## Breaking the Ice: Supporting Fair Ice Allocations

Hockey has a rich history of bringing Canadian communities together. But as the game grows in popularity among women, girls and gender-diverse players, ensuring fair access to ice resources and opportunities for those groups has become a challenge for hockey associations across Canada.

Ice time is a limited resource, especially during “prime time” hours, and allocations are often based on historical precedent, where well-funded and attended men’s teams have supported the development and maintenance of local ice facilities. Women’s ice sports, including hockey, have traditionally received less ice time, but growth of the women’s game in recent years has made gender equity a key priority for local and regional program managers. Rink owners (generally municipalities) are now being asked to allot more playing and practice time for female teams, often at the expense of legacy allocations.

### Thinking differently

Recognizing the issues in striking a fair balance as participation rates climb, Hockey New Brunswick recently took steps to support the province’s female associations in their quest for more ice time. Early in 2022, the organization’s Female Commissioner, Jennifer Tower, addressed a letter to rink administrators requesting a better system of ice allocation based on the current needs of all user groups – rather than historical precedent. Representatives from the organization have also met with local governments and recreation departments to share best practices for addressing gender equity in minor hockey.

“There are more than 100 ice facilities in the province, but we don’t own any of them,” says Nic Jansen, Executive Director, Hockey New Brunswick. “What we’re doing is asking decision makers to think about doing things differently. Everyone seems open to discussion, but there hasn’t been enough movement on this issue.”

### The importance of data

Fuelled in part by Canada’s success in high-profile international competition and the introduction of professional women’s leagues, growth and interest in women’s hockey continues to outpace men’s hockey in many parts of Canada. In New Brunswick, for example, female hockey registrations climbed 16% for the 2022–2023 season over the previous year, while male registrations declined by 6%.



“It’s important to ensure that ice is allocated based on actual registration data and trendlines,” Jansen points out. As key decisions about how ice times will be divided are often made in the spring and early summer for the start of the fall season, registration data needs to be ready and presented to local ice allocators to provide a complete picture of the community’s needs.

An additional challenge for fledgling female hockey leagues is the necessity to sometimes form teams with players from several neighbouring communities. Where municipalities lack a system for allocating taxpayer-funded ice resources to players from outside their boundaries, women and girls may be prevented from participating until community teams have enough enrolment to exist on their own. At the same time, ice rates may vary considerably between hosts, complicating the overall viability for some teams. Hockey New Brunswick is encouraging municipalities to cooperate to support cross-regional teams by allocating ice times based on the percentage of players from their area for any given team.

“There are a lot of variables between municipalities in terms of ice rates and availability, so this solution requires a fair bit of flexibility and leadership, but it can be done,” Jansen says.

## Tipping the balance

Having met with female associations to provide support and guidance, Hockey New Brunswick has the following advice for female hockey associations seeking to change the status quo:

1. Female teams may fear negative backlash when advocating for more resources, so being ready with information is essential. HNB recommends researching the interests and concerns of other user groups, and networking extensively with key decision makers to understand how ice is typically allocated.



2. Present actual, current registration data and examples of teams or players that may be negatively impacted by historical ice allocations. It may be the information needed to help change minds and create new policies.
3. Where cooperation among municipalities is necessary to keep female teams or leagues viable, provide potential solutions based on registration data to guide the discussion.
4. Take advantage of outside support and resources. For example, Hockey New Brunswick points to gender equity resources online and available from organizations such as Recreation New Brunswick to help guide the discussion.

## Just the beginning

Gender equity in hockey resources has come a long way; there is still work to be done. By addressing disparities in funding, visibility, and opportunities, stakeholders can help create a more inclusive and equitable hockey community where all players, regardless of gender, have the resources and support they need to succeed.



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