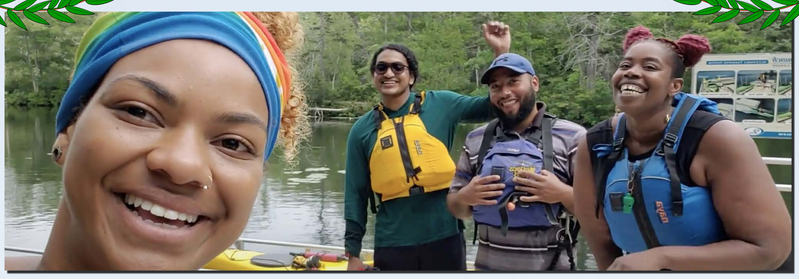
Nova Scotia Outdoor Network

Brought to you by the Nova Scotia Outdoor Network

A Project of Recreation Nova Scotia

As part of NS Outdoor Network's work to connect the outdoor sector in Nova Scotia, we are collecting stories and data to both highlight and celebrate the work helping people connect with nature. Our aim with communicating these stories is to share the impact of the outdoor projects and initiatives, to help amplify the good work taking place, and to allow these stories to educate and inform other practitioners. If you have a story to share please contact us.

PROJECT BRANCH OUT



In the Summer of 2021 Fawn Logan-Young, a Youth Ambassador with Parks Canada, delivered an initiative called 'Project Branch Out'. The program was designed to offer unique experiences for BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour) youth in camping, hiking, and paddle sports. Project Branch Out offered these guided sessions for free, partnering with various leaders and organisations to deliver the activities.

As Fawn completes her one-year role with Parks Canada, we caught up with her to reflect on the project itself and what lessons may apply for other recreation practitioners looking to engage youth in the outdoors.

WHAT WAS YOUR CUE FOR THIS PROJECT? HOW DID THIS COME ABOUT?

"I would say to start off, what got me into outdoor recreation was an initiative I started called Different Rooute which aimed to reconnect youth with the outdoors, themselves, and community. Through that I actually connected to Recreation Nova Scotia (RNS) which I have worked for in the past. Through these two experiences together – Different Rooute gave me a good subjective experience about diversity in the outdoors and I think RNS really gave me more of the objective side of things. I was really able to grasp a bit more of the recreation industry and something I really noticed was that when 'inclusion' was mentioned it was often regarding impairments or physical barriers but rarely was the topic of 'culture of social inclusion' an issue.

> **"I guess my main goal since was to increase the leadership and representation of people of colour and indigenous people specifically in Nova Scotia."**

Also I realised that being mindful of barriers is also very important because intersections of the experiences of these communities obviously vary. And the only way to bring about leadership, I think, is to actually introduce people who haven't had the opportunity to use these spaces in the first place - a place that they feel safe and welcome to do so."

With the Parks Canada Youth Ambassador position based in Nova Scotia, Fawn was able to utilise some existing partnerships and build on some existing programs, as well as forge new partnerships to create new opportunities.

> **"Although PBO seems like something that popped out of thin air, I would say this has taken me about four to five years worth of networking of being able to bring all of these people and groups together into one project."**

"I think that's something I would really stress for people in the future who are trying to do partnerships is it's not about the destination so much as the journey!"

WHY DO YOU THINK THE PROJECT HAS BEEN SUCCESSFUL? HOW DID YOU DEFINE THAT SUCCESS?

"Originally, I think we saw measuring success as things like how many participants e.g., with the pandemic in mind we hoped we might reach 80 people over the Summer. I think what we got was about half of that. So yes, one might say that's a failure, but to me, it was not – It was a success!"

> **"What made it successful beyond the numbers is the fact that the quality of the experiences, the testimonies of people..."**

for example there was a mother and daughter who came with the Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre to go paddling and they had never paddled before, let alone paddled together. They mentioned that this was not the last time they'd be paddling and that they had found a new hobby for the Summer. So, when you hear things like that it's really hard to quantify and I don't think reporting necessarily should ever take over the lived experiences of the participants.

Again, people were able to try new outdoor experiences and a lot of people, the majority, of people who took part in these activities like paddle-boarding, kayaking had never done so before."

"I think the real fun thing about it was people who were really nervous, whether it was their weight, the fact they couldn't swim, anything to take you out of your comfort level or what would have caused anxiety – as soon as they got onto the water I think a lot of people were like 'Ont This isn't so bad!' or it went from people being completely scared of crashing into a rock to realising there's a fun game you can play by jetting yourself off of that rock with your paddle! So, I think it was really cool to see from the beginning people who might have been a bit anxious by the end not wanting to get out the water."

WHAT PARTNERSHIPS HAVE BEEN CENTRAL TO THIS PROJECT? WHO DID YOU CONNECT WITH TO MAKE THIS HAPPEN?

"Learn to Camp Halifax – if it wasn't for them this project wouldn't have come to be. Of course, Aaron (Shenkman) who oversees Learn-to-Camp has been such a great connection. Him and I had been in talks because I think as wonderful as LTC is, Aaron as well saw the need for a program like Project Branch Out. Him and his team 100% have been on board and helped to get it off the ground. It wouldn't have happened without them.

Somebody else who was a big part of this project was Alexi Rodriguez who is a paddle expert, I'd say! He knows a lot about paddling in Cape Breton. He also has an initiative called 'Different Strokes' which, like PBO, aims to get BIPOC folks in Nova Scotia onto the water, specifically kayaking.

Also, Girls on Boards in the Valley. We did a paddle boarding session with them. Wonderful initiative and because they've already established a goal of particularly targeting girls and women who we know are underrepresented often in paddle sports. So, working with a group like that who already have a very specific agenda was really easy to collaborate with them."

Further outreach was conducted with the likes of Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre, RNS, YMCA, ISANS and other community serving organisations.

"Working with pre-established groups really helped because their branding and networks very easily bring more participants."

Some pre-established relationships existed with Learn-to-Camp and Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre, for example, built on trust and respect. Aside from that, there has been an ongoing effort to continue to create networks over time, something Fawn has been working on for much longer than her role at Parks Canada.

WHAT CHALLENGES DID YOU ENCOUNTER AND WHAT BARRIERS DID YOU FACE IN GETTING THE PROJECT TO WHERE IT IS?

"I would say there are three main challenges I'd point out. The biggest one and I think the most controversial one for some people is the event being free. So yes, it's wonderful that the event was free because it helped one barrier for those participating, for instance we were able to get a bus for the MFC and everyone who went to Keji for camping their travel was paid for, their tents were paid for etc. However, the other side of that, when events are free I think there are less incentives by participants or less value placed on the event itself. We would have times when we booked up, then when the day came we would only have half the participants."

When planning similar events in the future, one suggestion for Fawn and others, is to take a small refundable deposit when people sign-up. The idea of eliminating the cost barrier seems like a good idea, but Fawn urges caution when doing so not just for the reasons about value above.

"There's often the talk about these programs being free that tags on the assumption that every person of colour or Indigenous person needs the financial support – like the saviour complex almost. And that's not the case. Of course statistically these groups may be more likely to be experiencing these [financial] barriers but it's also finding that balance of creating a space that doesn't seem like charity and it actually seems like a program and not so much like a white saviour complex!"

Another challenges for this project was weather not allowing activities to take place – so for next time, Project Branch Out would make sure to have ready-to-go back-up dates in the event of inclement weather.

"Last but not least, I think something that became a challenge that I didn't foresee even though a program specifically for BIPOC communities was the cultural needs vs demand. What I mean by that is that sometimes with the barriers that are faced, or say, the capacity in which an event can happen, I think depends on figuring out what cultural differences or cultural communications you need, vs how many participants will need these accommodations."

One particular example cited was for an activity that ultimately did not happen due to circumstances not allowing for the accommodations to be made, in this case, being able to run separate events with genders separated.

"We didn't have the time to know we were doing the event with the cultural competence that we needed and therefore thought it was better to not have the event, to do the event another time when we knew how to do it. The risks of doing it incorrectly outweighed the benefits of having the event itself, we figured it was better to not have the event at all. So yeah, cultural competence, as obvious as it seems, I think is often overlooked in terms of what that actually means when being applied"

"I think the biggest, issue sometimes with planning events like these is people want to try to condense something that takes a lot of human work like outreach and networks – you can't just do it overnight and say you've done an event to accommodate a group of people without actually doing the work"

HOW DOES THE SUCCESS OF THIS PROJECT AND THE PROCESS OF PUTTING IT ON INSPIRE OR INFORM OTHER WORK?

Building on the feedback and demand for the initiative, there will be a Project Branch Out 2.0. With much of the first year being spent on figuring out what was possible and working through the logistics, the second year should allow for more outreach and greater focus on the participants.

"We can build the partnerships stronger – it's just a snowballing effect which networking does which I also think is a beautiful thing about the outdoor sector in Nova Scotia. There is community and then there's people who really want to make changes and want to connect they just don't necessarily know how to make those connections. So, I hope PBO can really help connect more Nova Scotians, not even just people in the BIPOC community but I know there's a lot of allies I work with too that are interested in knowing how to bring projects like this to their community."

"I would say that something that has come out of this project, something that I've had more insight and maybe my recommendation that I would make for other organisations looking to do projects like this, is to understand that this is a larger issue it's not just about not seeing Black people or people of colour outside, it's about creating real leadership. PBO only addresses one of these issues, which is trying to give people an experience they haven't had or necessarily would have seen themselves doing. For me, I hope that that just leads to people becoming leaders from this experience. I think people need to see again that this issue is not so homogenous, if they are going to have a project similar there are many other angles to be looked at and tackled.

And money where your mouth is! I think a lot of time people are looking for a solution that often tends to be a band-aid solution. I think the 'money where your mouth is' mentality is what organisations also need to do. If creating inclusion and diversifying the outdoor sector is truly a goal that you or your organisation wants you need to re-evaluate your budget to know that there is funding that is actually going to go specifically towards doing work. Whether it's Anti-Racism work, whether it's inclusion work, whether it's advocating, anything – you can't do it without a budget!"

QUOTE FROM PROJECT PARTICIPANT:

> **"It's like I feel represented and this right now, I needed it on a lot of levels!"**
>
> - Program participant (Kayaking)

RESOURCES:

'Blackness in the Outdoors' (blog post) – Fawn Logan Young

'The Outdoors Still Has a Major Diversity problem' – Shape

'Outdoor recreation has historically excluded people of color. That's beginning to change' – CNN

MORE EXAMPLES/CASE STUDIES:

'These 5 Organizations Are Working to Make The Great Outdoors More Inclusive' – Women's Health

Thank you for reading! If you have a story about great work happening in the outdoor sector please reach out! Contact Graham Mounsey at gmounsey@recreationns.ns.ca.

Learn more about the NS Outdoor Network

Connect with us!

SUBSCRIBE TO OUR NEWSLETTER

Nova Scotia Outdoor Network