A Guide to Offering Gender-Specific Swim Programming

'Gender-specific swim' (or 'gender swim') is the term used to refer to programming at pools in which there is an opportunity to participate in water recreation with only the same sex individuals, including staff and lifeguards. Gender swims are offered for modesty and cultural belief reasons, and are open to all people regardless of age, religion, race or ethnicity. Here are some tips to offering gender-specific swim programming at your facility:

Scheduling

- Require any people of the opposite gender in the changing rooms that could go back out onto the pool deck to leave before programming starts.
- Schedule just prior to or just after regular public programming hours. This helps with staffing efforts.
- Schedule 30 minutes before and after swim session to prepare space.
- Offer regularly, such as once a week or once a month, on an easy to remember schedule.
- If it's a private rental, contractually an agency representative needs to be present.

Programming

- If offered as a public swim, using public funding, you may need to provide the same level of programming for both men and women.
- If possible offer swimming lessons for all or part of the participants.
- Consider pool capacity and staffing. The student teacher ratio is usually 1 teacher to 8 participants. The pool capacity for lessons is about half of the pool space. Pool capacity for open swim is normally 50.
- Provide a short orientation for new participants to cover safety rules, locker room usage, and the importance of attending each week lessons are offered.
- Consider offering age-specific sessions for adults, teens and children.

Partnerships

- The following organizations may be interested in partnering with you to offer a gender-specific swim:
  - Community health clinics
  - Schools
  - Community organizations
  - Hospitals or medical centers

Promotion

- Partner with neighborhood organizations to promote.
- Distribute flyers to local community groups, medical and community health clinics.
- Encourage current participants and partners to tell others (word of mouth).
- Be clear that this opportunity is for all women/all men, regardless of religion or culture.
- Include picture of women in more modest swim attire.
- Establish a registration deadline and hold registration events in the community.

Funding

- Check to see if your organization can waive fees or offer reduced fees for private rentals.
- Allow access to scholarship funds for swim lessons.
- Seek donations from businesses.
- Seek grants—such as neighborhood matching grants.
- Ask participants to pay for a portion of the cost. This helps encourage attendance and participation.
- Money for private rentals can't be solicited on Seattle Parks property; registration events and payments by individual users will need to be elsewhere.

Policies

- Review pool policies regarding acceptable clothing to permit clean, non-swim attire for modesty and those who cannot afford bathing suits.

Materials
• Materials to cover the windows, such as curtains, paper or other coverings, tape. • Ask community partners to help fund materials if needed. • If running a private rental have an attendance sheet and ask for participants' emergency contact numbers.
Preparation: Before and After Swim
• Cover all windows with paper, fabric, blinds, curtains – enlist the help of volunteers from the user organization.
Rules and Requirements
• Children of any gender under the age of 8 are permitted to swim with parents. • Children under the age of 6 must be with a parent • Require staff in the pool area (lifeguards, swim lesson instructors) to be same gender. Front desk staff may be opposite gender. • Make safety a priority.
Keys to Success
• Be flexible with pool rules about swim wear. • Post information in other languages. • Have staff or volunteers from the organization you work with be present to help guide participants, and assist the pool staff with language barriers and supervision. • Have staff or volunteers from the organization you work with help with recruitment, transportation and/or other potential barriers. • Give the partnering organization a list of essential pool safety rules to have participants read and sign when signing up; translate if appropriate. • Evaluate the program on a regular basis. • Ask for feedback from the participants. • Clearly communicate with the user organization on a regular basis. • Start your planning early, so you can hire the necessary staff and the organizations you are working with have plenty of time to recruit participants and collect fees if needed. • Have volunteers from the community staff the swim sessions. This way, they'll have ownership of the program and can spread information out to their neighbors while getting to know their neighbors that are participating in the swim. • If a private rental, keep in mind that the session will be at a time when the pool is otherwise closed to the public. Providing a stipend to a member of the community living in the area to run the program is more feasible than having agency staff willing to work a short shift afterhours, • When starting, provide training for staff who will work during the swim. Ask for help from community organizations ask if a representative from the community would be willing to come and do a presentation on cultural norms so that lifeguards are better prepared to sensitively enforce safety procedures.

Developed by Everyone Swims! partners: Seattle Children's Hospital, Seattle Parks and Recreation, Neighborhood House, and AMG Management/Kent Meridian Pool. Made possible by funding from the Department of Health and Human Services and Public Health Seattle & King County.

For more information, visit www.seattlechildrens.org/dp