NRPA Quick Guide: Developing an Inclusive Swimwear Policy

Introduction to Quick Guides

As professionals entering into a DEI journey, the first barrier we often confront is: Where do I begin?

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) — and sometimes Justice — work is hard. It takes time, asks us to confront uncomfortable topics and requires change. To add to those challenges, we may be met by others who don't understand "why," prefer to stay in their comfort zone and resist change. Some of us have community and agency support, and some of us are still looking for allies.

Quick Guides are designed for all park and recreation professionals, but especially for those who may have limited support and are looking to make tangible, meaningful changes in their communities and places of work. We believe individuals can make profound, positive changes and these guides are available to give individual professions the benefits of the NRPA community. Quick Guides are tools to help you address specific areas where DEI principles can be incorporated in parks and recreation by providing background, research, considerations and examples.

Quick Guides consider that each agency, community and approach is unique. They provide ideas and paths to implementation on a variety of topics and have been created by a team of dedicated NRPA members from all over the country, who reached out to their extended networks to compile multiple perspectives and solutions. Each Quick Guide focuses on a specific area to provide a clear and comprehensive resource.

Back to the original question, the NRPA DEI Network adopted the Quick Guides project to give you an answer — You can start here! Our vision is that you will find a Quick Guide that speaks to you, one that falls within your area of influence, or one that addresses an inequity or barrier that exists in your community. Utilize that Quick Guide to, well, guide you through the process. Be on the look out for more Quick Guides such as Events and Program Naming, Inclusive Hiring Practices, Starting a DEI Committee, Sports Policies and more.

Thank you for all that you do and deciding to start somewhere.

Purpose

This guide is designed to assist aquatics facility operators and programmers with the development or redevelopment of a swimwear policy that is inclusive and appropriate for your aquatics facility and your community.

Why Are We Doing This Work?

- To foster a fair and supportive environment

- To ensure everyone has equal opportunities and representation

- To enhance overall societal well-being by valuing differences and incorporating diverse perspectives

Background

Lack of requirements for swimwear in a swimming pool or aquatics facility can pose a danger to swimmer safety, water quality and facility maintenance. To maintain safety and cleanliness, keep these goals in mind:

1. The swimmers should be safe; avoid clothing that causes hazards.

2. The facility needs to stay clean and damage-free; avoid clothing that may damage equipment and/or compromise water quality.

Narrow requirements for swimwear in a swimming pool can create barriers and limit access to your community based on a variety of factors, including socioeconomic status, religion, culture, gender identity and disability. To promote inclusion, keep these factors in mind:

1. The cost of swim-specific clothing can create a financial barrier.

2. Some swimmers may need or desire to cover various parts of their bodies based on religion or culture, disability and/or any other reason.

3. Swim-specific clothing can be gendered and create barriers for people with other gender identities and/or gender expressions.

While swimwear policies are not unilaterally applicable to all agencies, this guide incorporates information from multiple perspectives for aquatics facility operators to consider as they undertake policy development efforts.

Steps to Policy Development

1 Identify Goals: What Is the Desired Result for Having/Creating a Swimwear Policy?
Sample goals:

- To reduce public confusion over attire that is or is not allowed in your facility
- To provide front-line staff with clear direction when encountering customer questions or complaints about swimwear
- To promote a welcoming, inclusive and safe aquatics environment

2 Identify Included Attire: List Clothing That Is Permitted in Your Pool(s)
Sample included attire:

- Swimsuit (one piece, two piece)
- Board shorts
- Rash guard
- Burkini
- Jammers
- Swim skirt
- Wetsuit
- Tight-/Form-fitting attire
- Polyester/nylon/spandex
- Aqua socks
- Swim diapers/diaper covers

3 Identify Excluded Attire: List Clothing That Is Not Permitted in Your Pool(s)
Sample excluded attire:

- Jeans/Denim
- Cut-off shorts
- Torn/Frayed clothing
- Baggy/Loose-fitting clothing
- Underwear
- Visibly dirty/Soiled clothing
- Street clothes/shoes
- Clothing that restricts movement
- See-through attire/Nudity
- Regular diapers

4 Clarify the Gray Areas: Make Decisions You Can Stand Behind
Take time to thoroughly evaluate the reasons for allowing or not allowing non-traditional swim attire. Does this attire pose a real safety risk or operational risk? Are your reasons fact-based or anecdotal? Include the reasoning in your policy messaging and be prepared to explain when asked.

- Sports bras
- Basketball shorts
- T-shirts
- Leggings/Leotards
- Water shoes
- Jewelry (long chains, dangling earrings)

5 Identify Conditions: List Specific Conditions for Swim Attire Related to Your Pool
Sample conditions:

- No attire with grommets, buttons, buckles or metal decorations that could damage slide surfaces
- No loose-fitting shirts on slides
- No masks or goggles on diving boards

6 Identify Policy Point of Contact: Who Makes Interpretation Decisions?
Identify who will field complaints and resolve customer concerns or policy disputes:

- Site point of contact
- Complaint process
- Final decision-maker
- Enforcement authority
  (specify: _____)

7 Draft Your Policy: Pull It All Together
Considerations:

- Identify if this is a policy, procedure, rule or guideline
- Ensure your policy addresses your stated goals and includes all of your swimwear requirements
- Follow the guidelines of your organization for policy language and format

8 Solicit Feedback: Include All Areas of Your Organization That Will Be Affected
Potential stakeholders:

- Front-line aquatics staff
- Recreation programming staff
- Facility maintenance team
- Marketing and communications team
- Community stakeholders, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, asexual and two-spirit (LGBTQIA2+) organizations, faith-based organizations and affinity groups

9 Finalize and Secure Approval: Formalize/Codify Your Policy
Organizational process considerations:

- Determine if your policy requires approval from director/board/council prior to implementation
- Follow the guidelines of your organization for policy language and format

10 Publicize: Inform Staff and the Public of Your New Policy
Make every effort to ensure the public is aware of the policy before they visit your pool(s):

- Provide staff training and talking points to ensure consistent enforcement and communication to the public
- Share your new policy through your normal communication channels
- Contact registered users and/or program participants
- Post on your website
- Utilize social media
- Create and post language-inclusive signage at all pool sites
- Consider the use of photos/graphics and icons to communicate your policy

Opportunities and Challenges

Opportunities

- Consider sponsorship or donation programs to provide low-cost or no-cost swimwear
- Review restroom policies — in conjunction with swimwear policies — to ensure they are as welcoming as possible
- Review staff uniform policies — in conjunction with swimwear policies — for lifeguards and other aquatics staff members
- Review uniform policies — in conjunction with swimwear policies — for associated teams and leagues
- Be open to feedback and revisions based on future trends and advances in swimwear

Challenges:

- Individual perceptions of acceptable nudity
  - Check your state and local laws regarding the definitions of nudity
  - Be prepared to address garment transparency
  - Educate your staff about body tape and its use amongst the LGBTQIA2+ community
- Staff training
  - Provide staff the information and talking points so they are comfortable explaining and having conversations about the policy
  - Ensure staff are trained to perform rescues on individuals wearing all permitted clothing options

Talking Points

When talking to patrons:

- Approach the situation with respect and empathy
- Try to have conversation in a more private space away from patrons/the main entrance but also with other staff nearby who can hear and witness interactions
- Listen to the patron
- If need be, explain your policy
- Have the policy with you and use the visual aids, if needed, to guide conversation about what is and is not appropriate
- Refer them to your organization's point of contact if they wish to have a further conversation about it

When talking to employees:

- Ensure employees understand the goals of inclusion
- Allow them to ask questions
- Have the policy with you and use the visual aids, if needed, to guide conversation about what is and is not appropriate

Example Policies

WHAT CAN I WEAR IN THE POOL?

YES- Swim Suits, Speedo, Swim Shorts, Swim Skirts

YES- Water Socks, Swim Diapers

YES- Burkinis, T-Shirts, Wet Suits, Transtape

YES- Rashguards, Clean Workout Attire

NO- Boxers, Bras, Underwear, Thongs, Nudity

NO- Jeans, Shorts, Cut-Offs, Sweatpants, Street Clothes

NO- Soiled Clothing, Baggy Clothing, Regular Diapers, Zippers, Metal, Grommets

This graphic was created by Orangevale Recreation and Park District using this guide.

Prince George County, MD | 2022-Approved-Swimwear
(aquaticpros.org)

Cosumnes CSD in Elk Grove, CA: FAQs · Can I wear a shirt or other clothing when swimming?
(cosumnescsd.gov)

City of Walla Walla, WA: Swim Attire | City of Walla Walla
(wallawallawa.gov)

Normal, IL: Aquatic Centers | Normal, IL - Official Website
(normalil.gov)

City of Fontana, CA: Swimwear Policy and Pool Guidelines | Fontana, CA - Official Website
(fontanaca.gov)

Columbus, OH: Pool Rules | Columbus Recreation and Parks Department
(columbusrecparks.com)

New Zealand: Pool rules
(aucklandleisure.co.nz)

Glossary of Terms

This glossary provides a starting point for understanding the different types of swim attire, but it is essential to keep learning and engaging with DEI topics to foster inclusivity and equality.

For further guidance, please visit the Equity Language Guide.

Burkini/Burqini
A style of swimsuit for women. The suit may cover the whole body except the face, the hands and the feet (i.e., some people who wear burkinis cover their heads, and some do not — it is often cultural and personal preference that dictates what and how it is worn).

Jammers
Jammers are form-fitting swim shorts used mainly in competition to obtain speed advantages. They are generally made of nylon and lycra/spandex material but can be made polyester, and they have a compressive fit to reduce water resistance.

Trans Tape/Body Tape
A type of medical-grade tape that is designed to help flatten the chest area of transgender and non-binary individuals. It is commonly used by people who cannot or do not want to undergo chest surgery to achieve a more masculine or non-binary appearance.

Water Shoes
Slip-on or lace-up shoes with a rubber sole and a mesh, neoprene or PVC upper; can be worn for protection in the water but also for water sports, hiking and street use.

Water/Aqua Socks
Close-fitting socks — often made of neoprene — designed for insulation and protection in the water and walking on deck.

Acknowledgements

Contributors to *Developing an Inclusive Swimwear Policy***:**

Inclusive Swimwear Quick Guide Lead:

Robin Steinshnider | City of Dallas (Texas)

Inclusive Swimwear Quick Guide Team:

Stacie Campbell | City of Pearland (Texas)
Guillermo Navarro | City of Emeryville (California)
Eilien Ramirez | City of Crestwood (Missouri)

EiP Quick Guides Project Leads:

EiP-QG NRPA Liaison | Autumn Saxton-Ross, Ph.D., NRPA (Washington, D.C.)
EiP-QG Project Lead | Becky Herz, Orangevale Recreation and Park District (California)

EiP Quick Guides Project Team:

Elisa Accardi-Harrison | City of Wichita (Kansas)
Jodie Adams | (Montana)
Lulu Ballesteros | Tualatin Hills Park and Recreation District (Oregon)
Heather Carter | City of El Cajon (California)
Diego Cevallos | City of Burbank (California)
Tracey Crawford | Northwest Special Recreation Association (Illinois)
Teri de Rosier | Cosumnes Community Services District (California)
LaKeisha Dickens | Las Vegas Department of Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association (Nevada)
Brandi Dionne | City of West Sacramento (California)
Megan Henry | Sunrise Recreation and Park District (California)
Jenny Hymans | Five Rivers Metro Parks (Ohio)
Sabina Kasumova | City of Atlanta (Georgia)
Susan Krause | City of Waco (Texas)
Tammy Martinez | City of Avondale Estates (Georgia)
Bronwen Mastro | Bend Park and Recreation District (Oregon)
Eric McClain | (California)
Amy Pellman | Metro Parks of Butler County (Ohio)
Tede Price | City of Lee's Summit (Missouri)
Solita Riley | New York City Department of Parks and Recreation (New York)
Cheryl Salazar | Playce Studio Ltd. (California)
Deb Smith | Maine Recreation and Parks Association (Maine)
Max Soo | New York City Department of Parks and Recreation (New York)
Chelsea Van Assche | City of Westerville (Ohio)
August Vandiver | City of Pearland (Texas)
Zach Zuchowicz | Oakland County Parks (Michigan)

NRPA Editing and Design Team:

Ivy McCormick (Maryland)
Vitisia Paynich (California)
Meagan Yee (California)