



A Sporting Chance

A Guide to Attracting More Participants to your Sport

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INTRODUCTION

Sport and physical activity holds a significant place in the Australian psyche. Whilst its status remains high, research shows the number of Australians participating in organised sport is declining. The increasing cost of sport means groups must adopt new ways of attracting members in order to survive.

It has been recognised for some time that there are a number of groups within the community with a higher proportion of inactive people in comparison with the population at large. These groups - older adults, women, people with a disability, people from non-English-speaking backgrounds and ethnic groups, Kooris and people who suffer economic hardship - are also less likely to be members of sporting organisations.

It has been found these groups face common barriers to playing sport. These barriers include transport, support, community attitudes, cultural and linguistic diversity, financial costs, physical access, staff and volunteer skills, specialist services, lack of information and limited promotion. Addressing these will make your organisations more welcoming and cater for each member's needs.

Potential benefits to sporting organisations include:

- increased membership;
increased funds from affiliation/registration fees;
- potential to attract new sponsors;
- opportunity to improve facilities; and
- opportunity to increase volunteer numbers.

This guide has been developed to help sporting organisations tap into new markets by providing examples of sports already realising the benefits of widening their net.

THE VISION

Forming a strategy

Each sport's state association must be committed to the notion of "access for all". This means the development of a policy, strategy and action plan. Apart from providing sporting associations with new opportunities to increase membership, there are also legal requirements, stipulated by the Victorian Equal Opportunity Act (1995), which all associations should be familiar with.

A **policy** simply states the association's philosophy regarding commitment to all groups. To ensure success, the sport will need a long-term **strategy**.

Sporting organisations may also want to develop an action plan to determine the barriers that limit access to certain groups. It includes a plan and time frame to eliminate these barriers.

GETTING STARTED

Appointing a coordinator

A coordinator should be appointed from within the existing staff structure and have the freedom to develop and oversee the required changes. The coordinator would have two major responsibilities:

- the ongoing implementation and evaluation of the strategy and action plan; and
- the development and implementation of the inclusive structure for that sport in Victoria.

The state of play: Initially the coordinator must outline the current situation

On a local level, they must identify:

- Opportunities currently offered by the association and affiliated clubs
- barriers to participation (including physical accessibility of venues)
- existing expertise (coaches and officials); and
- interested coaches, clubs, officials and volunteers

On a wider level, they must identify:

- activities similar to yours offered by other activity providers
- existing expertise within the sporting organisations
- the overall structure and delivery of sport for athletes
- interested individuals who have the experience for an advisory committee, and
- number of athletes within the target group already participating in local clubs

Establishing an advisory committee

Once a coordinator has been appointed and the situation assessed, an advisory group should be established to guide the process. The advisory group should be representative of all relevant parties, including special needs groups sporting organisations and a certified coach (particularly a coach that can take on the responsibility of organising training and development for other coaches).

A STRATEGIC DIRECTION

With the advisory committee and taking into account the structure of the sport, it's now time to establish the overall strategy for developing opportunities for all groups.

If the national sporting body has a strategy for including all groups, the state plan should reflect this. It is suggested the strategic plan lasts at least three years and contain goals, performance benchmarks and individual responsibilities.

BUDGET/FUNDING REQUIREMENTS

Once the strategic plan has been established, the advisory committee/sporting association will need to estimate the costs involved in bringing this to fruition. Sources of income will also need to be determined. It's likely outside sources of funding will need to be used - it may be helpful to consult VicSport's guide to Grants and Funding.

Note: It is possible that the state sporting association will apply for funding to develop the strategic plan itself. If this is the case then "seeding" funding could be sought once the vision and the commitment have been established.

TRAINING - PREPARING FOR SUCCESS

It is crucial that the sport prepares its coaches, officials and the club personnel, the people who will actually be delivering the activity, for success. For most people there will be the "fear of the unknown" factor that must be overcome, as well as the general lack of experience. This fear and lack of experience can be dealt with through education and training.

Interested coaches, officials and clubs should be identified early on. It will now be a matter of organising training. There will be reasonable costs involved in accessing the required education and training. How these costs will be met will depend on the individual sport and their strategic plan.

MARKETING AND PROMOTION

Internal marketing

Internal marketing is aimed at the sporting organisation itself. Once the state sporting association has made a strategic commitment to include people from different groups it will need to formally endorse and market the concept to its members. It will be up to the state association to provide the leadership to its members, including clubs, coaches and officials. It's helpful to produce promotional information to distribute to members explaining why the initiative is important, why the state association is further expanding pathways for people from disadvantaged groups, what the aims and objectives are and what's in it for clubs. In brief, it is vital the entire organisation embraces this philosophy and commitment.

External marketing

To attract participants to your sport they need to be aware of the opportunities being offered. This marketing will not only need to include the potential participants themselves, but also their parents, carers and service providers. There are several avenues that can be used to achieve the marketing of the new opportunities.

INTRODUCING PARTICIPANTS TO THE SPORT

An ideal way to introduce people with special needs to your sport is to host a series of "have a go" events. These provide:

- coaches with further hands-on experience;
- participants with an introduction to sport as a "beginner";
- parents and carers the chance to ascertain the sport's professionalism; and
- the start of a database of participants.

TRAINING & COMPETITION: Once the state association has attracted participants and hosted introductory sessions, the next step is setting up a delivery structure, using the knowledge of the advisory committee and other experts.

Important concepts to remember when setting up this structure include:

- the closer to the existing structure, the easier and more cost-effective it will be;
- something should be provided for at all levels, from the continued introductory sessions to elite training squads
- ongoing communication with the sporting groups will ensure schedules do not conflict and that each athlete is given every opportunity possible for training and competition. A co-operative effort will also facilitate the sharing of resources and expertise (the sporting groups and contact details are listed in the support directory); and
- awareness some athletes will have the ability to integrate into the mainstream competition at some point. This should be recognised and encouraged. However, in all situations, the decision should be based on the individual athlete's choice and ability.

THE FUTURE

Possibilities for continued growth include:

- regional/state championships;
- expanding the network of coaches and clubs;
- training for officials;
- elite training squads; and
- resource development.

Much of the information included above has been reproduced with permission from the South Australian State Disability Sports Program (1999) Inclusion Guidelines

THE AGEING POPULATION

Victoria's ageing generation is expanding and evidence suggests that as an individual's age increases, the likelihood of them **participating in sport decreases. To maintain or attract a high** participation rate of older people, it is necessary to understand what constitutes an ageing athlete.

Statistics suggest many stop participating in organised sport between 25 and 34 years of age. For many, this will force a reassessment of what an ageing athlete is and it may adjust what methods are undertaken in order to attract these people.

Before making it to the Masters category, people typically encounter changes in lifestyle and to reach this group such changes must be noted and attended to.

Many Masters athletes seek different goals from their sport. Some seek additional socialising, some are concerned with finding a path to greater health and well-being while others thrive on the competitive nature of sport. With this in mind, the competition must be structured to best suit the majority of participants.

A significant advantage afforded to those coordinating Masters events is that the organisers are often in the same age group as those participating. This enables a better understanding of the athletes and better equips them to handle issues that are pertinent to the age group.

As with all athletes, it is important to have accessible role models to encourage and inform participating athletes.

CASE STUDY- Victorian Baseball Association: Masters League

Aim

To attract players over 40 to competitive baseball

Strategy

Seek out the target market, improve their access to the sport and maintain them by initiating a Masters league.

The Victorian Baseball Association (VBA) recognised that they had a high rate of retirement of players after their fortieth birthday. While more than half their members were in this age group, only 6 per cent of these people were active players. It was determined that this could be attributed to the lack of a suitable competition for people in this age group.

The association recognised that the teams were not in a position to accommodate a new team at will and adopted a program that included a direct mail campaign and heavy advertising campaign aimed at the intended market. A strong word of mouth campaign was also mounted among parents of junior members.

“Come and try” clinics were organised in order to refresh people's skills and educate them as to the appropriate stretching regimes for competing. The first two-month season in 1995 was organised directly from these come and try days and was timed so that it led to participation at the Masters Games

Reproduced from "Victorian Masters Sport Resource Kit", Sport and Recreation Victoria, 1999

The VBA and its clubs saw a number of benefits from this program, including:

- increased use of facilities in normal downtime; .
- increased memberships of clubs; and .
- extension of individuals' lives as participating members.

Keys to the implementation of the programs included:

- overcoming the initial apathy of club members towards Masters competition
- using the existing database to contact the target market
- providing a social environment to participants; and
- timing the competition so it did not interfere with coaching or officiating duties.

The VBA met the needs of its target market, thus developing a successful program. By recognising that there is often a reason for low participation, a negative trend can be reversed.

Contact:

COTA – Council of the Ageing

PH 03 9654 4443

COTA is committed to enhancing the wellbeing of older Victorians through physical activity and ensuring the needs of older adults are included in sport and recreation programming and service delivery.

Women in sport

While there have been improvements made in maintaining and improving the participation rates of women in some sports, there are still many areas that can be improved upon. If a club or organisation is to access this group it is important that they understand the problems that may be retarding greater involvement.

For a long time there has been a lack of qualified women to coach and manage female athletes, often resulting in a misunderstanding of gender based concerns. Providing opportunities for accreditation of coaches and officials will assist with these problems, as will improving the roles and profiles of women in management positions within sport.

The environment in which women compete is important, as is the level of encouragement that is directed towards female competitors. An ability to understand that women may seek different benefits from sport when compared to their male counterparts will enable a sporting structure to be developed that better meets these needs. These issues may be of even greater significance when dealing with females of school age or from non-English-speaking backgrounds.

Providing alternatives to the traditional sports and formats can achieve greater participation rates, as can the inclusion of women in developing a structure that helps meet their specific goals within the sport. With this involvement, it is also more likely that the sport can win back women who have participated in the past.

It is the club or organisation's role to ensure that women are supported by anti-harassment policies and that all actions undertaken within a sporting or social context fall within agreed codes of conduct, ensuring a mutually beneficial environment.

CASE STUDY - Coaching Pathways, Soccer Tasmania

Aim: To produce an environment that encourages women to involve themselves in coaching

Strategy: To have the women's council work in conjunction with Soccer Tasmania to produce more female coaches and thus improve the state of women's soccer in Tasmania.

In 1998 the Tasmanian Women's Soccer Federation and Soccer Tasmania amalgamated and, as a result, a women's council was formed to run women's soccer in the state. The council recognised the lack of opportunities for women and the lack of qualified women coaches working at levels above primary school. It also recognised the discomfort many women felt expressing themselves in mainstream coaching courses.

As a result a women-only level-one soccer course was organised and the seven major southern-based clubs were required to send four participants per club to the course. Those four participants had to be either active players or players who had retired at the end of the previous season. A total of 26 participants attended with 18 completing the course.

The coaching course was held over three sessions with an emphasis on understanding the functions of the organisation and setting achievable goals. The majority of the 18 then attended a development clinic for junior girls and with the help of Soccer Tasmania development staff, were able to put their new skills to the test. As a result of this successful course, the clubs have instigated a new league for 1999 – an under-16 girls' competition with women who attended the original coaching course coaching all of the participating teams. In addition, Soccer Tasmania aims to conduct advanced coaching sessions and create pathways for more women to become senior coaches within the league.

Reproduced from "How to include Women and Girls in Sport, Recreation and Physical Activity Strategy and good practice", Australian Sports Commission, 1999

A number of positive results can be noted from the Soccer Tasmania case study:

- the lack of opportunities was noted and a plan of action developed
- support was given at a club level
- a modified program, with a women-only component, was developed
- the goals set during the course were achievable; and
- a new league has been formed.

A number of proactive actions were taken in this example following the identification of a problem within soccer. By attending to the direct needs of women within the sport and taking their advice, a program has been developed that ultimately helps Tasmanian soccer as a whole. In the broader context of women in sport this example also proves that there are alternatives available to traditional women's sport.

Ethnic groups and those from non-English-speaking backgrounds.

In order to access ethnic groups and those from non-English-speaking backgrounds (NESB) it is important to understand the current environment and the history of these groups.

Young people from NESB have been shown to be competing in organised sports but this is often not under the guidance of the relevant State Sporting Association (SSA). Promotion of the existence of the SSA within these groups is often overlooked and it may be that the target market is not getting the message at all.

To reach these groups it may be necessary to consult the relevant community groups in order to understand the reasons for the low participation rates. Issues such as racism, gender-specific restrictions, low levels of parental involvement, cultural differences and the availability and location of facilities can all have an impact on participation in organised sport.

By acknowledging these difficulties and the general hardship involved in resettlement, it will become easier to develop an approach that successfully incorporates ethnic groups and those from NESB into existing clubs and associations.

CASE STUDY - Flemington Community Centre

Aim

- To identify an alternative support person to provide the role of parent
- To link established teams from ethnic community competitions into SSA competition

Strategy

To link established teams from ethnic communities into SSA-affiliated competitions

Financial assistance was provided to the Flemington Community Centre (FCC) to enter under-16 and under-18 men's basketball teams in the Albert Park Junior Basketball competition.

The teams consisted of young men from the local FCC basketball competition, which attracts over more than 100 local young people. An FCC youth worker provided transport and coaching in conjunction with an adult member of the Vietnamese community.

The teams consisted of 18 young men aged between 14 and 17 years from the following countries: Afghanistan, Canada, Chile, China, East Timor, El Salvador, Ethiopia, France, Portugal, Somalia, Vietnam.

Most participants had lived in Australia between three and six years.

The two teams had not previously competed outside of the FCC competition; however, in their first season in the under-16 and under-18 competitions they were third and second in the Albert Park competition.

Reproduced from "Sport: creating a level playing field", Sport and Recreation Victoria in conjunction with Ethnic Youth Issues Network, 1998

From this case study it is clear that:

- youths from non-English-speaking backgrounds are participating in organised sport outside State Sport Associations
- there is a need for additional involvement from the local ethnic community
- there are limitations placed on broader involvement by location unless transport is made available
- significant interest can be generated once logistical problems are overcome
- there is a high level of assistance needed from local community groups

It is clear from this example that many of the hurdles commonly perceived to inhibit broader involvement of ethnic groups in sport can be overcome but it is only with a good understanding of the problems faced that this can be accomplished.

Contact:

Centre for Multi-Cultural Youth Issues, CMYI

Phone: 9340 3700 [Email: info@cmyi.net.au](mailto:info@cmyi.net.au)

The CMYI is concerned with all issues affecting youth from ethnic backgrounds.

People with a disability

Accessing individuals who have a disability requires an understanding of what the individuals are seeking from their involvement and what are the limiting factors surrounding their impairments.

The need to include people with a disability in sporting and recreational exercises is important, but so too is the need to allow them to develop at their own pace. For some, the goals may be elite, such as the Paralympic Games, while others seek only to become more active and involve themselves in a sport that is new, or one that they ceased doing some time ago.

There is a great deal of expertise available when accessing people with a disability and when used in conjunction with knowledge specific to a sport there are numerous ways of providing for their inclusion. Modified rules are often utilised and can allow for a person with a disability to become part of an able-bodied team, or they may be altered to accommodate a team league made up entirely of people with a disability.

Within competitive sport there are a number of targets that athletes with a disability may set themselves and, as with able-bodied athletes, a high level of coaching expertise is necessary if they are to be reached. To provide for these athletes, a structure may have to be in place that allows these athletes every opportunity to achieve their goals, just as would be the case with able-bodied athletes.

Attention should also be paid to the needs and availability of the athletes' carers as it can directly relate to the athletes' well being and safety. The logistics of transport and coaching may change significantly when access is limited or when training and competition sites change regularly and as a result, cost, too may have to be considered.

CASE STUDY - The Victorian Orienteering Association

Aim: To involve people with a physical disability in the sport of orienteering

Strategy: To adapt current practices in order to accommodate this new group into the existing program

In 1997 the Victorian Orienteering Association (VOA) was approached by Leisure Action seeking its involvement in a program to cater for people with a physical disability.

Having had no previous experience in this field, the VOA sought examples of programs developed overseas but felt that in its volunteer-based environment these were not workable. Still keen to include people with a disability into their sport, the VOA felt that it was possible to include people in wheelchairs into their existing "street orienteering" events.

Funding for a pilot program "Going in the Right Direction" was secured and assisted in introducing people with disabilities to the sport of street orienteering. This enabled the

VOA to trial and test approaches and modifications required in creating an inclusive sporting environment, as well as raising awareness amongst the able bodied orienteers of the needs of people with disabilities. It also demonstrated that an interest by people with disabilities in participating in orienteering and therefore provided incentive to the VOA in continuing its efforts in targeting this group.

Following the pilot, modification of existing rules has occurred, a grading procedure related specifically to the wheelchair athletes has been introduced into the events calendar and key contacts established at a club level to facilitate the participation of people with disabilities. Information sessions are now also conducted at the beginning of each season for potential new orienteers.

Transport and funding have been ongoing concerns for the VOA, but their desire to succeed has meant that each week during the season there are up to fifteen participants with disabilities competing among some 250 able bodied members in Melbourne's Eastern suburbs.

The program is now being run in other parts of Melbourne and has recently been implemented in Bendigo, where more than 30 people with disabilities attended the opening session.

Each year the VOA has developed its program further and, just two years on, is now able to draw from a wealth of experience in developing programs for people with a physical disability.

The VOA case study highlights a number of issues:

- collaboration is critical, harnessing collective strengths, resources and expertise; . involving people with disabilities into a sport can take a number of forms. As
- demonstrated by the VOA, an existing program can be effectively modified; and .
- once a program such as this is set up, it should still be reassessed and adjusted to meet the changing needs of the individuals'.

Koori Groups

Traditionally, sport and recreation has played a vital role in Koori communities and Australian Aborigines have a long and proud history across many sports in this country. A recent testimony to this was Cathy Freeman's 400m gold at the Sydney Olympics.

Unfortunately, many Aboriginal communities live below the poverty line and have a poorer health status than the average Australian, including a lower life expectancy. Research has shown that mainstream health promotion activities are not usually culturally relevant to Koori communities, especially in relation to lifestyle.

Other barriers the Koori community often face in reaching mainstream sporting activities include geographic isolation (transport issues), economic factors and racism, such as negative stereotyping. There is also a limited knowledge amongst the Koori community about what information is available regarding sport and recreation.

To be effective, sport and recreational activities must be planned closely with members of the target community to ensure they are culturally relevant.

CASE STUDY - Victorian Soccer Federation

Aim

- To evoke an interest in soccer amongst young members of regional Victoria's Koori community.
- To inform Koori youths how to take part in soccer in their region.

Strategy

To work closely with the Koori community in the region to modify existing programs and develop links with the community and competitions in the area.

The VSF's "Goalkick" initiative is a 12-week training program for both girls and boys, including skills practice and modified games. The co-ordinator of this program saw the benefits participants were receiving by being involved and wanted to extend this opportunity to various community groups that don't have equal access to such programs. The Koori community in the Morwell region was identified as being one of these groups.

Before trying to introduce the program, it was felt that greater interest in soccer in the area should be evoked. This was achieved by staging one of the Victorian Soccer League Tynan and Eyre pre-season cup matches in the region.

Following this, contact was made with Sport & Recreation Victoria's regional Koori reference group in the area. A number of meetings were held between the parties, and although initially a lack of motivation and interest was identified in the community, the VSF worked alongside them to successfully introduce the program.

The Goalkick coordinator trained two Koori development officers in the region to deliver the program to the 48 children involved. Financial assistance awarded to the Koori community covered the cost of equipment for the program, which was then left with the group for future use. Links were also formed with the Gippsland Soccer Association, resulting in players from the Gippsland Falcons attending some session to assist with the activities. Through this linkage, Goalkick participants were also made more aware of the avenues available to them within their community to continue with soccer.

This case study highlights:

- there is a much greater chance of implementing a successful program if close links are made with the local community;
- it may be a good idea to evoke interest in the sport within the community before commencing a program, ie through demonstration matches; and
- participants may be more willing to continue with the sport on completion of the program if, during the program they are exposed to the pathways available.

Contact :

VAYSR: Victorian Aboriginal Youth, Sport and Recreation Co-Operative Ltd.

Phone: 03 9484 5351 Email: vaysr@bigpond.com

VAYSR's objective is to plan, develop and deliver culturally relevant sport and recreation programs and opportunities within the Victorian Koori Community.

Socially Disadvantaged

Interventions that interrupt and break down the cycle of boredom leading to anti-social and high-risk behaviour are invaluable in providing a quality of life for many men and women.

An organisation, Reclink, has successfully been providing recreational and sporting opportunities for Melbourne's homeless, disadvantaged, addicted, mentally ill and unemployed men and women. Beginning back in Melbourne in 1990, it now comprises 45 agencies offering sporting and recreation activity in structured programs. However, pathways seem to be lacking that allow for the personal development and advancement of individuals and groups beyond core Reclink activities.

By working with relevant community groups such as Reclink, mainstream sporting organisations can help establish these pathways. Quite a number of individuals involved in Reclink's activities have displayed high skill levels within their sport, suggesting that, for many, it's not their ability holding them back, but other barriers, such as participation costs (fees and uniforms etc), transportation issues and the fear of "not fitting in".

Developing an inclusive program for the socially disadvantaged would require a lot of planning, but Reclink's 45 associated agencies can be utilised as resources.

CASE STUDY - The Victorian Cricket Association

Aim

- To assist in providing recreational opportunities to less privileged Victorians.

The Victorian Cricket Association became aware of Reclink's cricket program and realised the enormous benefits participants were receiving from playing the sport. The VCA were able to provide Reclink with valuable resources to assist them in providing opportunities for the socially disadvantaged. This assistance included providing Reclink with access to the MCG centre wicket for their competition's cricket finals. The VCA have since conducted coaching courses especially for Reclink, resulting in four participants becoming qualified level one coaches

Through their involvement with Reclink participants, those within the VCA developed a greater sense of understanding of the importance sport can play in the lives of people who face extreme hardships.

This case study demonstrates that:

- providing access can include opening doors and providing people with access to facilities that they wouldn't otherwise have the chance to visit/utilise; and
- existing programs often may require little or no modification to include these.

CONTACT:

Reclink - 03 9419 6672