

## VicSport Update : LGA Facility Access Research

There is no doubt access to facilities has been, and will continue to be for the foreseeable future, the single largest factor inhibiting growth in participation rates in sport and active recreation pursuits. Long before the impact of the current water restrictions kicked in it was clear, with increased urban development, population growth, and greater demand from a wider variety of sports looking to expand participation, facilities built decades ago to meet the needs of the population then, do not meet the needs of the new millennium.

To successfully meet the future needs of our growing participation demands we need a long-term plan to strategically develop multi-use facilities that have the capacity to meet the needs of a growing population, but that is then and this is an issue of some urgency. In the short-term, there are some steps that can be taken to help alleviate the immediate pressure however, and the first is to ensure we are currently utilising our existing facilities in the best way possible.

To help address the issue of maximising use of existing facilities VicSport, with funding support from VicHealth, has recently completed the *'Local Government Authority Facility Access and Usage Assessment Project'*. The aim of this investigation was to work with LGA's to better understand the patterns of use of current sport and recreation facilities and to identify areas where improvement could be made.

To collect information 37 Victorian LGA's were interviewed to determine what is regarded as industry practice in relation to facility access and utilisation. This analysis involved understanding the processes and policies used to allocate facilities, means of determining 'maximal' utilisation of facilities, and processes used to capture information regarding allocation and usage data.

In addition in depth case studies of four LGA's who agreed to work with VicSport on this project were conducted. Interview and case study investigations showed many LGA's do not have in place established processes and procedures required to analytically review facility access and utilisation. It was also evident there was no lead agency or collection of councils who had worked together to establish a best practice system of managing access and utilisation of facilities.

Whilst the processes demonstrated across LGA's were as varied as the 79 councils themselves, as a result of the investigations undertaken during this research three 'core' requirements for the development of better facility management practices were identified.

They are:

1. **Asset Analysis** – a comprehensive inventory of sport and recreation facilities, including associated amenities, such as change rooms, lighting, barbeque areas or parking for example, and current state of repair, needs to be conducted in the first instance.
2. **Facility Utilisation** - If councils are to develop strategies to improve utilisation and ensure equitable access for all members of the community, it is vital information regarding current user groups is captured and analysed to understand, and if appropriate improve on, current facility utilisation patterns.
3. **Data Capture** – information regarding asset analysis and facility use is best captured in an interactive electronic format with the capacity to collate or analyse the data.

In consideration of these main findings, the following key recommendations for the future were developed:

1. **Collect and centrally locate data** - It was agreed the establishment of accurate asset databases containing details of current facilities and their amenities, along with comprehensive details regarding facility usage patterns, (including current user demographics, peak user times and down times, and activities the facility is used for), would assist LGA's to maximise facility allocation. Ideally this information should be stored in a centralised database with the capacity to complete interactive data analysis.
2. **Develop information management systems** - To complete interactive analysis, LGA's require access to an information management system capable of storing, collating and analysing captured data. As part of this investigation a number of 'off the shelf' systems currently in use were reviewed. Whilst it was evident these systems go some way towards providing the interactive functionality desired, some modifications are required to these products to effectively meet this aim.
3. **Sector Education** – As always education is necessary to assist both LGA's as primary facility providers, and sport and active recreation groups as users, understand the importance of working together to maximise facility usage. Consultation and cooperation will be required if we are to achieve equitable allocation of available resources.

**4. Establish best practice management parameters** - Clear guidelines to assist LGA's better manage facility access and usage must be established. This must be done in consultation with council's and sporting groups and should address a range of issues such as:

- Inefficiencies of seasonal blanket leases versus hourly/daily bookings
- Development of procedures for promoting shared use of facilities, including clubrooms, pavilions etc
- Ensuring smaller sports have equitable access
- Maintenance requirements and fallow periods for grass surfaces
- Data capture and analysis methods

Whilst it is true some of our facilities, particularly indoor courts, are nearly fully utilised, for many others there is a significant opportunity to improve on current usage levels. By working together sporting groups and LGA's can help to ensure facilities are accessible to a wide range of users. Better understanding our usage patterns will also help build needs-based evidence for future facility development.

Kate Roffey  
CEO

---