

Growing your players

Your club can, and does, offer a real asset to the local community and if you want to grow your membership you may need to think a little differently – whether you want to attract more young people or encourage adults to adopt a healthy and active lifestyle, proving that your club can offer much more to the community than just a competitive angle may be a challenge.

This Top Tips will give you some practical steps and ideas that you can put in place. Either from a position where you may be struggling for players to field teams, to diversifying your offer to the community and developing new opportunity's be that competitive or recreationally.

The most important aspect to remember is that help is close by at hand, in most cases you will find back up and support within your community, this is something that we will aim to uncover.

So let's get started and attract new players and members.

Step 1: Establish A Need & The Target Group

If you want others to support your ideas and ventures, then a little time and effort here will pay rewards and help you to maintain a clear focus and strategy along the way.

Make contact with your local authority sports development staff or your county sports partnership for advice, they can and do have a lot of access to facts and figures etc. in your area, these can range from participation rates, contacts, health and crime stats etc.!

Here are some of the ways to gather the information and create a picture that will help drive the development.

- Stage an open day at the club, see if people are keen to get involved.
- Get involved with other community events, festivals, and activities.
- Go and speak with local head teachers, start by sending a letter with your intentions then follow up no more than 10 days later to request a meeting.
- Speak with your local authority sports development team; ask them to assist in a survey with people in community.
- If you don't have a sports development officer locally get in touch with the neighbourhood officers, PCSO's (Police Community Support Officers), they are really useful resources in your community.
- Check out Sport England's Active People Survey, if you need help with this contact your local authority or county sports partnership.
- If you are targeting adults, think of who and where they spend much of their time, e.g. in a place of work and again do some simple survey work. (*TIP: make sure it's to the point, useful to you and does not take too much time of people.*)

Once you have identified the following:

- **Need** (We know the need and we have the information)
- **Target Group** (In our community we know that Adults are not taking part in active lifestyle etc., also know that local children don't have a lot of activity either)

Then it's time to move on to the plan.

Step two: Time to plan activity.

This does not need to be a huge task both in the writing and the various elements. One problem that you can create is that you can over plan and it will not really make much difference, other than sitting on top of a dusty pile of papers! Your plan will help you to ensure that you are to the point and effective.

Anytown Fencing Club.

AIM: To get more playing participant's into the club within the next 12 months (September to August)

Objective	Method	Who will do this	Timescale	Costs
Attract new players to the club aged 8-10	Deliver a weekly winter fun activity session from October	L2 Coach and GO/FENCE Leader (Sessions) Admin: Arrange community venue identify and book facility for 10 weeks	Identify Venue: August Book Facility: Sept Arrange with coaches: August Marketing of sessions: Sept Take bookings Sept/Oct	Venue: 10 weeks at £40 =£400 Equipment: £500 Coaches fees 10 weeks at £30= £300 Total: £1200

			Start Activity Oct	
Stage open day 'come and try' event for adults.	Stage an open activity day and fitness session aimed at adults local employers	Committee will set date and contact employers via secretary. Coach: Bookings	Employers contacted by: Jan Event in Feb Invited to beginners' course starting in Mar	Food: £400

Step Three: where do your sessions take place - the time and the venue.

Sometimes people in your own community, even a few hundred feet from where the club operates, won't feel like they can access it, or feel there is no connection to them. You have a unique opportunity presented to you if you are based in such a community, as you can sometimes offer much that others, with no connection to sport cannot.

Here are some ideas of summer venues you can access:

- Local schools, day time access can be there, but also bear in mind repairs ETC whilst the children are on holiday!
- Community centres and village halls
- School Playgrounds
- Community multi use games areas, usually ball courts ETC
- Parks and open spaces may be worth checking with the land owner though if you are staging activity.
- Local leisure centres
- National Trust Centres

In the winter obviously light and cold/bad weather come into play so it's important to ensure the venue is conducive to the target groups you work with and at the very least have the discussion in your club or think about how you operate.

Other considerations:

- There may be cultural issues that need to be addressed, which can impact on dress code, changing facilities and mixed gender sessions.
- What time your sessions take place – if you want to attract more young children between the ages of say 6-8, is it really going to work to have them training late at night 8-9pm?
- Are there transportation or parking problems at your venue
- Coaches and volunteer time
 - The players, what suits/is more appropriate for them
 - The costs of the venues
 - Any potential discounts for block bookings
 - Funding support for facility hire, often worth trying to secure funds to support this.

Step Four: Marketing and Promoting your sessions

You have now decided your project based on the need, you have created your plan of what it is you will do and more importantly how you will do this to increase participation. Now it's time to get the word out there, to make sure it works.

When you are advertising your activity there are three golden rules to abide by:

- **What it is:** Make sure you explain clearly without making an essay! Let people know what's so good about your project.
- **Where it is:** Appreciate that not all people will be aware of a facility so make sure it's clear.
- **When it is:** Ensure that this is clear; also if it's a regular slot think how you market this.

Depending on your target audience, decide on the most appropriate method of communication, this may include:

- **Website:** if you don't have one speak to your local community, there are many people that will help you for example your local parish council perhaps.
- **E-mail shot:** even if you don't have personal contact details of the people you want to reach, ask other organisations (local authority sports development officers, county sports partnerships and volunteer centres, to forward it to their audiences)
- **Direct letter/poster's/ leaflets to hand out or post:** think about where your audience goes and advertise there. This could include hairdressers, cafes, shopping malls, leisure centres, libraries, churches, etc.
- **Local newspaper:** Speak direct if you can to your local editor, it's also a good idea to ask them to add it in the news section and not always the sport section! Think that not everyone reads the sport section but most people look at the local news or noticeboard in your local paper.
- **Local community radio station:** These are being developed in communities up and down the country; many are run by volunteers with a real community angle so understand the importance.
- **Local BBC or commercial radio station:** These tend to be more difficult to get coverage, but have a wider target audience and if your project is innovative and exciting, they do tend to like a

story, especially if it links to a news agenda they are covering: e.g. the 2012 Olympics and other major events have the opportunity for the community to link.

- **Parish and Town Council Newsletters:** Usually always on the hunt for articles and again get in touch.
- **Social media:** More and more people use this method to communicate activity.
- **Direct invitation's:** Perhaps you already have a database of past players etc.; see if they would get involved again.
- **Pictures and Photographs:** Images that people can relate to are really powerful. When you pick up a newspaper next time with a marketing angle to get involved in sport etc., ask yourself why they are using that image.
- **Utilise all your local contacts:** Word of mouth and reputation are possibly one of the best ways to market your activity
- **Speak to your local authority sports development unit or NGB:** If your project can combine with work they are doing you may benefit from a more professional marketing and promotion service, working in partnership can pay real rewards and help save you lots of time, effort and money. Many clubs will have benefited from working together in projects such as Sport Unlimited, Sportivate and other local projects.

(Top Tip: It is really important to try to align your marketing and promotion to the correct target group. Think about the language, the layout the publications you may need to consider.)

Step Five: What equipment is needed to make the activity happen?

It's highly likely that you will need to provide the equipment for the activity. Obviously make sure that you make new potential participants to your activity or club aware what they need to bring.

Here are some other key considerations in terms of equipment:

- State from the start what is needed by the individual.
- Ensure if you have this equipment already that it is in good working order, safe and has been risk assessed.
- If your store cupboard is hoarding old equipment ask if it's really any use to you or if it can be recycled.
- Can you borrow some equipment from another club if you don't have enough? However plan what to do if it is lost or damaged, and who would be responsible. If you borrow some equipment from a local school, fellow club, or other provider most should ask you to sign a disclaimer etc.
- Try to use the best equipment you can that is also the most appropriate. E.g. don't be using oversized weapons or jackets for a younger group of children, think that if they have a negative experience, they are less likely to come back.
- Always ensure that you adopt any safety aspects of use, NEVER cut corners here!
- Remember to check it over at the end of each session.

- The equipment at the venue can make a big difference to the session(s) being a real enthusing experience for your participants etc., so don't underestimate that fact.

Step six: How do we fund this activity and what to charge?

It makes good practice and sense to at some stage make the activity as sustainable as possible. One big failure when developing more informal community based activity is that this is neglected. When activity is funded wholly or substantially although it may seem great a first, it can be a real problem when the funding dries out!

First issue is what needs funding:

This could range from the following.

- Venues cost
- Equipment, this could be fixed equipment or could be mobile equipment.
- Coach's fees. Ensure that coaches are eligible to be employed and have proof in terms of being tax registered if you're paying them etc.
- Transport. You may need to transport people or equipment
- Maintenance and refurbishment of equipment or facility if your activity has a higher risk of damage
- Marketing and promotion. This can be low cost or quite expensive depending on what is your plan. Again try to identify what you need at the start.

What you need to remember here is to try and ascertain as near as possible an accurate budget. Don't go for a lump sum, thinking it will be fine, it's not good practice its far better to cost things out and if you can get quotes etc. that will be honoured, then that's a great way to stick to it. Also don't forget VAT costs etc.

Where will we find the money from? Here are some ways you may find some local community funding:

- Local authority sports development officer / county sports partnership
- Local police authorities can fund and support community projects from time to time, especially if your project is tackling anti-social activity, or offering positive activity for young people.
- Local Councillor's, they can advise you on small grants schemes that council's release in particular to Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector Groups (VCF)
- Regional Hub may be able to help you put together a funding application, and act as a referee!

Again help is always at hand in your community, you will be surprised what skills are out there if you are struggling and remember "if you don't ask, you don't get!"

Step Seven: Making sure the standards are high (Practice and delivery)

As with any activity that your club does, be it a training day, beginners session, fundraising event or charity auction, the principles are the same.

Here are the ABC's that you should always adhere to and ensure that they are part and parcel of what you planning to do

- **Coaches/Qualifications:** Ensure they are adequately qualified, experienced and also really important have the right personality for working with whatever particular target group you are targeting, if you are placing someone into a situation they are not used to or prepared for, it can have a damaging effect. Make sure that you discuss this prior to the start with any one you identify to deliver activity on your behalf. Not everyone can deal with challenging behaviour for example. It sometimes takes the right person to engage with a group of young people, not engaging in regular activity for example. (*TIP: if you are working in area's you are not normally used to, get some advice prior and speak to leaders in the community*).
- **DBS checks:** All staff and volunteers who will have regular unsupervised access to children, young people and vulnerable adults should be checked. Check our BF website for latest information.
- **Insurance:** Ensure that your club, volunteers and coaches you appoint are adequately insured and can provide you clear evidence to back this up; this comes in the form of many ways of cover public liability, personal indemnity etc.
- **Health and Safety:** As with all walks of life safety is really important and good practice will only help you to offer a really good and organised session or event. Make sure you *complete risk assessments on a regular basis*

Step eight: Have fun!

Probably the one issue at times that those who are tasked with planning and responsible for increasing the participation in their community don't always think of. Remember most of you will be volunteering your time. Its precious and your most important commodity, so make sure you have some fun along the way. You will no doubt do this by building a great contact base, lots of potentially new participants, setting a real bench mark that others can follow in community sport and being able to sit back once your work is done with the knowledge that you have made a real positive difference to your community.

Do not underestimate the power and the worth of what your sport, club and you can create in your area.

And the help is always there so make sure you use it!

Step Nine: Evaluate your progress:

Tools/methods you can use:

- Survey / feedback customer satisfaction
- Registers. Log trends and attendances
- Gain feedback written from partners, letters of support.
- Development forums and committee meets
- Case study, worth looking at to help tell story to a potential funder.
- Social media.
- Photographs/videos. Ensure you have consent and always adopt good practice as within your child protection guidelines if working with young people. The Child Protection in Sport Unit, set up by the NSPCC is a great source of advice and information.
- 1-1 meetings with a sample of service users.
- Student support to research can help gather information and help them as well.