

Supporting women and girls to get active

This is a summary of learning from the Women and Girls Fund projects. It is for anyone who wants to engage more women and girls in physical activity.

Engaging women and girls

Make it easy to sign-up

Women and girls told us they felt cautious about trying a new activity. Our learning suggests confidence and engagement can be increased by:

- offering free taster sessions;
 - keeping the cost as low as possible;
 - minimising the need for any special equipment or clothing;
 - encouraging participants to bring a friend;
 - reassuring them they are not the only person who is new to the activity;
 - keep the focus on having fun; and
 - choosing a venue or meeting place that is familiar and welcoming.
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Build relationships

Before focusing on physical activity, projects found it helped to spend time building open, honest and friendly relationships. This approach helped them engage women and girls and keep them engaged for longer. Some found it helped to:

- Ensure the people delivering activity have time and capacity to build relationships in the community.
 - Identify champions for the activity that the target group can relate to, in terms of age and ability.
 - Encourage experienced participants to support new participants as buddies or peer mentors.
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Be flexible

Some projects found although they may have worked with women and girls before, mainstream approaches did not always work with target groups. Findings from the evaluation suggested it was useful to consider:

- the length of the opportunity you are offering
 - is the course over several weeks; can people drop in and out and, how flexible can the opportunity be?
- the duration of physical activity sessions
 - are they long enough for people to move at their own pace, are there enough breaks?
- when does the activity take place:
 - is this best for the people you want to reach, does it coincide with any other community activities?

Where projects worked with vulnerable groups or disabled women and girls, it was helpful to:

- keep the groups small and offer one-to-one supported activity;
- work at a pace to suit the participants; and
- use communication methods that suit the audience. For example visual and graphic methods.

Projects found that some women had to fit physical activity around caring responsibilities. Providing opportunities that did not require women to make special arrangements was a successful approach. For example:

- whole-family activities; or
- parent sessions that run alongside children's activities.

It can also help to ask women and girls what would work best for them, for example, using a 'Doodle' poll.

Create the right environment

Our evaluation found it was important to establish a welcoming atmosphere. Learning from the Women and Girls Fund projects showed it is helpful to consider:

Female-only activity: Women said mixed-gender activity can feel more competitive. Some women said that they would be less comfortable in a mixed-gender space, particularly if the sport required clothes that were closely fitted to the body, or which showed a lot of skin.

Grouping by age or ability: Some women said that being in a group with people that were a similar age or ability felt less intimidating than joining experienced players.

Balancing fun and fitness: Including time for socialising or less physically intensive activity can help to keep the activity fun and accessible, particularly for newcomers.

Work with partners

Partnership working can help:

- promote the activity
- reach the target group
- engage more people
- offer more opportunities for physical activity
- support participants beyond physical activity, and
- fund the activity.

Some partner organisations to enhance community activities such as youth work or employability.

Branding and marketing

Creating a recognisable brand helped projects create an identity women and girls could connect with - supporting a feeling of being part of a team. Some projects used simple tools such as a team colours or a logo that participants could identify with.

Projects also encouraged participants to share their experiences and tell their friends. A few projects found that word of mouth (in person or via social media) was the most persuasive tool for engaging new participants.

Delivering your project

A dedicated role

People delivering the activity found that setting up a new project, building relationships and reaching a new audience required a significant amount of work. Projects are more successful where there is a team member dedicated to engaging women and girls or dedicated time allocated to focus on this strand of work.

Monitoring and evaluation

For some projects, monitoring and evaluation requirements felt like a lot of additional work. Staff training for members who will be responsible for gathering this information would be supportive. It is important for staff to understand:

- what information needs to be gathered;
- why it is important to gather this information; and
- how the information will be used.

Staff told us that building in monitoring from the beginning of the programme, helped to embed the process of gathering this information, so it was part of the activity and not an additional piece of work.

Weather

A few projects found that poor weather restricted outdoor activities. It helped to have an alternative, complementary indoor activity. For example, bicycle maintenance sessions worked well on days when it was too wet or windy to go cycling.

Sustainability

Some projects were able sustain project activity beyond the available funding by training participants to become volunteer leaders. As a planned approach, this involved building in leadership development from the start. For example this could start with encouraging participants to lead activities such as the warm-up or cool-down.

Some projects have tested out the use of digital platforms to maintain their engagement with participants. Some projects have delivered regular e-classes, live-streamed activity or shared pre-recorded sessions.

To reduce barriers to participation, these activities have substituted any equipment with common household items.
