



SUPPORTING INFORMAL SPORT PARTICIPATION: A checklist for State Sporting Associations



What is informal sport?

The popularity of informal sport - sport played outside of traditional club-based activities - is increasing. Participation statistics show that this more flexible, informal style of sport is gaining momentum while club-based participation is plateauing in some sports and declining in others.

Why is it important?

Informal sport represents a significant proportion of overall sports participation, particularly from teenage years onwards. Informal sport delivers significant health and economic benefits to communities. Research illustrates that for every 10,000 people involved in informal sport, there is an annual health saving of over AUD\$3.24 million¹. In addition to the important physical health contribution informal sport makes within communities, it also supports similar levels of social connection for participants resulting in further mental and social health benefits. Informal sport is also attractive to communities who have traditionally been marginalized by formal sport structures.

How can SSA's support it?

While informal sport groups are usually enthusiastic and committed participants, they often face challenges accessing spaces and facilities to play regularly and may not feel welcome at sporting clubs. The following checklist for State Sporting Association staff is to ensure informal sport is considered, supported and included in planning so that we are enabling and growing informal sport participation.

Project Partners



Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries



1. <https://academic.oup.com/heapro/article/39/3/daae048/7684659>

POLICIES	YES	IN PROGRESS	NO	NOT SURE
Is informal sport recognised within policies and strategies aiming to increase participation in your sport?				
Do your offer membership options for participants who wish to play informally? Does this membership provide access to insurance?				
Do you have policies on clothing and equipment and do these allow for adjustments in clothing and types of equipment that can be used by groups playing informally?				
Do you consult with informal groups, as well as formal sporting groups, to progress contemporary policy and planning developments for your sport?				
Do policies recognise that formal sport regulations need not apply to informal use of spaces? For example: Informal sport occurs without the need to meet official regulatory standards regarding lighting, pitch sizes etc.				
Do you collect data or use existing data regarding informal sport participation to inform policies and planning?				

PROCESSES	YES	IN PROGRESS	NO	NOT SURE
Do you promote the use of facilities outside of formal playing seasons to allow access all year round?				
Do you provide guidance for clubs that supports them to consider, establish and support informal sport as a key element of club participation? For example: approaches clubs can use to establish additional volunteer roles and support networks for informal sport.				
Do you dedicate funding and resources for clubs to use in the promotion and support of informal sport?				
Do you have a sport participation pathway that extends modified or small-sided formats into adulthood with less emphasis on competition (avoiding fixed teams, rigid schedule, official rules) and greater focus on social connection and challenge?				
Do you support clubs to provide equipment for use by informal participants to encourage more people to your sport?				
Do you communicate the benefits of supporting informal sport participation?				
Does coach education and leadership development include content that promotes and supports informal sport?				
Have you explored the use of digital/smart technologies to support expansion in informal participation in your sport? (e.g. Tennis book a court system)				

FACILITIES	YES	IN PROGRESS	NO	NOT SURE
<p>Are informal sport participants considered in decisions regarding new facilities that you have influence over?</p> <p>Do you promote open access or encourage your clubs to offer access to changing rooms/toilets?</p> <p>Do you encourage your clubs to only book facilities when and as required to maximise potential usage?</p>				
<p>Do you advocate for facilities to be updated with sensor lighting suitable for informal sport participation?</p> <p>Can new developments or retrofitting accommodate multi-use (different sports and varied formats)?</p> <p>Can new facilities provide smaller sized facilities or spaces that are divided by additional line markings allowing multiple games?</p> <p>Full size pitches and facilities are not required by most informal sport groups.</p>				
<p>Can sites for informal participation be added alongside or within the development of facilities for formal sport than can support formal and informal participation to co-exist?</p> <p>For example, small soccer pitches alongside main pitches _____</p>				
<p>Are water fountains and toilets readily available at sites of informal sport participation?</p>				
<p>Are you advocating for and supporting clubs to develop use of digital/smart technologies for informal use of facilities (including bookings, lighting, equipment and toilets and access to supporting infrastructure)?</p> <p>For example: Sensor-linked access systems, automated sensor lighting, digital monitoring of use linked to maintenance, CCTV for security etc.</p>				
<p>Do you advocate for co-sharing facilities between schools and clubs that can promote your sport to a wider audience?</p>				

SUPPORTING INFORMAL GROUPS	YES	IN PROGRESS	NO	NOT SURE
<p>Are funding and resources directed at increasing sport participation accessible for informal groups?</p> <p>While groups need relatively little support, small grants to purchase equipment would be valued.</p>				
<p>Are informal sport groups celebrated and given the same profile as sporting clubs within SSA social media and news?</p>				
<p>Is there a platform that helps potential participants connect to local informal groups?</p> <p>This could be through highlighting groups on social media, more interactive platforms similar to the 'meet up' platform where potential participants can search for and connect with informal groups, or signage at facilities where groups regularly meet.</p>				
<p>Are SSA staff accessible for informal groups to connect with to gain advice on how they might start an informal group and what resources may be available to them through the SSA?</p>				
<p>Do you offer opportunities for formal and informal groups to come together and potentially foster some closer links between them?</p> <p>Some informal participants may welcome opportunities to occasionally play in formal competitions.</p> <p>Some formal participants may welcome opportunities to maintain their participation out of season via informal groups.</p>				

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