



Inclusive Physical Activity

What we've learned from evaluation

Explore the best ways to provide inclusive sport and physical activity that is welcoming, accessible and open to all.

Click on each circle to learn more...

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Inclusive physical activity

About this resource

We reviewed evaluation of over 25 Sport England programmes and campaigns as part of a rapid challenge to support Uniting the Movement.

This resource presents what we found about providing **inclusive** sport and physical activity that is welcoming, accessible and open to as many people as possible

It complements a separate resource about ways to help particular audiences who have typically faced **inequalities** in accessing sport and physical activity.

How to use this resource:

Click on a circle on the first page or navigate using the icons along the top.



Start with the audience

Effective community engagement comes before sport and physical activity.

Speak to your audience

Understand their world, lives, communities, culture, challenges, motivations. See things from their point of view.

Design the service for and with them

This is about more than just consultation, but genuine engagement and co-creation.

Start afresh each time

Don't assume models of inclusion can be lifted from one audience or place to another.

Example:

Our **Innovations Open Call** highlighted the need to consider cultural and religious calendars when designing and providing physical activity.



Put the person first

Every audience, community or group is made up of unique individuals

What feels inclusive to one may not to another. Tailor your service and personalise the benefits to appeal to individuals, not just a whole group.

Complementary services

like mental health support, opportunities to socialise or confidence-building can provide a more holistic person-centred offer.

Examples:

Our **Workforce** research talks of 'coaching the person, not (just) the sport'.

Our **Tackling Inactivity in Colleges** programme recommends promoting the benefits of physical activity to individual children, not students as a whole.



Trusted partners beyond sport

Work with partners who are familiar to and trusted by the audience for things beyond sport

Use this to connect with other settings (such as how **We Are Undefeatable** connected medical settings to leisure settings), or to use partners' insight, contacts and referral pathways.

Remove hierarchy and work as one team on a shared purpose – like our **Tackling Inequalities Fund** (now **Together Fund**) learned to do.

Work closely and support each other

As our **Local Delivery Pilots** reflect: 'positive outcomes are delivered by systems and interactions within them, not by particular interventions or organisations'



Tailored two-way comms

Tailor language, imagery and channels and keep it relatable

Beware of 'sporty' terms and pictures that can alienate – 'sport by another name' as our **Get Healthy Get Active** evaluation puts it.

Listening to your audience,

says our **Innovations Open Call**, is just as important as broadcasting a message to them. So too, inviting and responding to their feedback.

Use a range of communication methods

appropriate to the audience. Word of mouth and organic communication work well – such as through family, friends and other influencers like role models or carer.



Emotional, not just practical

Support and connect with people on an emotional level, not just a practical one

Consider their mental wellbeing and any emotional barriers they face to taking part. – such as feeling that activity is ‘not for me’ – and take steps to anticipate and relieve any anxieties (such as around Covid-19).

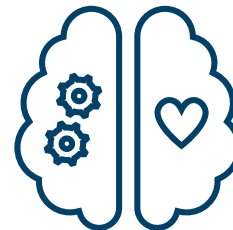
Mentors, peers and role models can help by providing emotional support; while providing social opportunities can help people feel included.

Small personal touches

can help too, like messaging absent participants to check they’re ok.

Example:

One idea from our **DfE Volunteer Leaders and Coaches** programme is to train staff in Mental Health First Aid as well as physical first aid and safeguarding.



A welcoming environment

'An environment where non-sporty people feel comfortable and welcoming'

That's how our **Tackling Inactivity in Colleges** programme puts it. This typically means somewhere safe, supportive, inviting and non-judgemental and activities that are fun, feelgood, rewarding and sociable.

Go all out at the start

To welcome, support and reassure participants. Share info, show them around the venue, introduce them to people.

A sociable and interactive environment

can help coaches, volunteers and participants alike to mix and get to know one another.



The complete experience

An experience that is rewarding and fun can hold broad appeal. Likewise, something friendly, sociable and inclusive.

Small things make a big difference

So think of the whole customer journey right down to the basics– things like signage, toilets, benches, parking, drinking water, lockers, equipment, the booking process and more.

Cost is important but not the only thing people look for and free or cheap doesn't overcome all barriers.

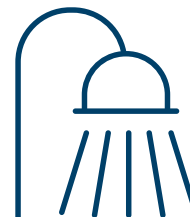
A good experience also means greater word of mouth for your service.

Examples:

One of our **Families Fund** projects used an 'equipment library loan' service to help participants access the equipment they needed.

Our **Swim Local** pilot highlighted the big importance of small things – poolside pegs and seating, accessible steps, privacy blinds, individual showers and more.

Our **Volunteer Fund** evaluation shows how a positive experience helps retain a more diverse range of volunteers and contributes to greater outcomes.



Choice, variety and flexibility

Life is unpredictable

Circumstances, health, routines and lifestyles can all change. Whether it's unpredictable medical conditions, major life changes like pregnancy, retirement or disability, or external forces like the Covid-19 pandemic, staying active can be difficult.

Provide a flexible service

that allows people to drop in and out and attend as they can based on life's ebb and flow. Offer a choice of options and be prepared to change based on fluctuating demand.

Many services offered more flexible approaches during the pandemic, such as blended online/offline activities, which they are now keeping as they worked well.

Example:

Our **Life Changes Fund** evaluation identifies ways to support people to stay active during major life changes such as pregnancy and retirement, while **We Are Undefeatable** is designed to help people stay active while managing unpredictable medical conditions.



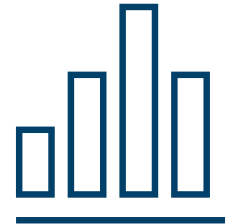
Monitor diversity at all levels

Monitor who you are, and aren't, reaching

Promote and monitor diversity at all levels – not just participants but volunteers, coaches and other frontline workforce as well as the people involved in managing and governing a service too.

Diversity at all levels improves a service

by providing a wider range of experience, ideas and representation – meaning everyone can see 'people like me' involved.



Evaluate inclusively

Use engaging, positive and accessible evaluation methods

Evaluate in a way that engages your audience, adds to the experience and demonstrates value for everyone.

Set evaluation objectives that support your inclusive ambitions

Act on what you learn to improve your service, and share your insight with others.

Example:

Our [Accessible Evaluation guidance](#) provides advice on designing inclusive evaluation that puts the person first.



Diverse and inclusive workforce

Coaches, volunteers and other staff

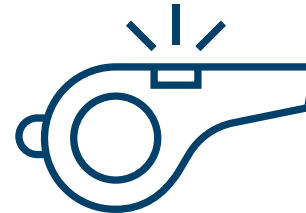
can serve as friendly, supportive, relatable role models. Seeing 'people like me' in the workforce inspires would-be participants, volunteers and coaches to get involved.

And it works both ways – many in the workforce say that empowering a community and supporting people like them is a bigger motivation than gaining a qualification.

Many of the principles in this guide apply to recruiting a diverse workforce, too.

Example:

Our **Volunteer Fund** evaluation created an inclusive volunteer framework called ADAPT, based around offering diverse and inclusive volunteering opportunities.



Reimagine how it's done

Old models haven't worked for many audiences

Helping more people be active requires us to rethink many things. The way we engage and communicate, the activities we provide and how we deliver them.

Anyone can take part, coach or volunteer if it's provided in the right way

Innovate, experiment, be curious. New audience, new partners, new approach.

Example

Our **Satellite Clubs** programme recommends we reimagine what a sports club is or can be, by thinking differently about how and where sport and physical activity can be delivered.



Invest more where it's needed most

Providing truly inclusive physical activity

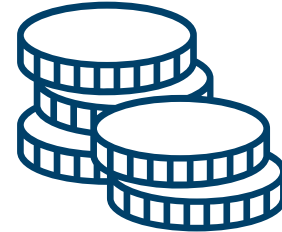
and eliminating inequalities isn't easy and we must all be prepared to invest more in the people and places who need it the most.

This means balancing broad universal provision with more targeted efforts in a way that's proportionate to the level of need.

The right thing to do is ensure we all have what we need to be active, regardless of who we are.

For some this needs relatively little, but for others far more work, time, energy and investment is needed.

We must not shy away from this



Review and share your own insight

This summary came from a pragmatic rapid review of Sport England evaluation.

It only scratches the surface of the available evidence

Project evaluations, local and national datasets, audience research, personal experience and much more can all contribute to a greater, deeper understanding of how to provide more inclusive physical activity and reduce inequalities.

What insight do you hold about inclusive physical activity and reducing inequalities?

How can you use it, and who can you share it with, to make a difference?



Find out more:

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