



Department of  
Local Government, Sport  
and Cultural Industries

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# Youth sport

## Junior sport policy



To ensure sport is attractive to young people, clubs and organisations must fully understand why young people participate in, and drop out of sport.

This resource provides some simple guidelines for making sport more youth-friendly, as well as showcasing initiatives that have successfully addressed youth participation.

In 2013 the Australian Sports Commission released a report “Children: Market Segmentation for Sport Participation”.

The market segmentation study provided key insights outlining how the sport sector can influence motivations and behaviours that children have towards sport and physical activity.

These include:

- Providing sport delivery that focuses on fun and enjoyment rather than competition
- Providing products and services that are inclusive, promote equal treatment, and focus on fun and participation regardless of skill level and ability
- Providing a variety of pricing packages and different types of membership that allow for flexibility of attendance and time commitment
- Identifying the potential for growth opportunities with regards to sport club membership by understanding the needs of different segments and the products they may be attracted to.

Some key comments made in the study highlight the importance that sport plays in the lives of children and the challenges faced by clubs:

- “Across all the children’s segments, the underlying motivation for participating in sport is to have fun and socialise. Providing some sport delivery that focuses on fun and enjoyment rather than competition is important.”
- “How people engage with sport changes over time. For children, the research found that the incidence of competitive sport increases with age.”

Activity	5-7 year olds	8-10 year olds	11-13 year olds
Interest in sport activities (overall)	33%	45%	40%
Competitive sport	9%	24%	24%
Recreational sport	30%	36%	32%

- “While competitive sport increases with age, so does other non-sport activities which reflect higher levels of independence and expanding lifestyles as children get older. Among older children aged 11-13 years old, sport also competes with activities such as socialising with friends, going to the movies, or surfing the net, as well as increasing homework. These activities all indicate higher commitment as children reach their pre-high school years.”
- “Clubs face a particular challenge in the post-school years. The qualitative research found that there was a large pool of club members in the school ages with attrition over time as people get older. The most significant drop out occurs in the post-school years and was confirmed in the quantitative research where club membership was:
  - Highest among school aged children:
    - 52% for children aged 5-13
    - 44% for 14-17 year olds.

- Dwindled after leaving school:
  - 22% for 18-29 year olds
  - between 13%-17% for those aged 30-65.

However, there was a strong indication from the research that the perceived focus of clubs' on fostering and resourcing the more talented athletes, along with a perceived emphasis on performance exacerbated the funneling effect. There is evidence of this occurring even among children in their early teens (11-13 years old).

### Why do young people play sport?

- Fun and socialisation – many are drawn to organised club sport through friends and value the sense of belonging associated with the club
- Physical, emotional and mental benefits (e.g. enhanced physical fitness and ability to deal with stress)
- Learning new skills
- Being part of a team and working together
- An escape; sport can be the one place that youth can feel safe and gain a sense of self, have fun etc.

### Why do they drop out?

- Time clash with other activities (i.e. leisure, social or work)
- The sport becomes boring
- Conflict with study and work commitments
- Over-emphasis on winning by coaches or parents
- Change to another sport
- Transport difficulties, costs
- Young person experiences, witnesses bias or discrimination.

### Listening is the key

To continue the success of your junior sporting club it is important that you listen to what youth are telling you and adapt your programs so that they are relevant to the youth market. It is not always easy to move away from tradition, but there are a number of simple changes that you can make to your club that will make it more youth-friendly.

### Checklist

(Adapted from Team Vol 4, Issue 5, Nov 2002).

### Ask participants what they want from sport

- Be flexible
- Be prepared to change
- Length and timing of season
- Times of training and games
- Length of games

- Rules
- Clothing requirements
- Consider young people's study and work commitments
- Consider working parents and their schedules
- Consider how you can include all young people from different cultures and with disabilities.

### **Reduce the competitive element and enhance the fun aspect of your sport**

- Discuss with the club, coaches and parents the positives of focusing on participation rather than the result
- Develop and promote policies of equality – equal field time for all
- Focus on developing each individual to achieve his/her best
- Ignore premiership points and fairest and best trophies for primary-aged competitors
- Improve professionalism by providing coaching courses to all junior coaches.

### **Provide a welcoming environment**

- Use a young, existing member to welcome all new youth members
- Provide for, support and engage parents.

### **Revitalise the social aspect**

- Provide opportunities for members to bring friends to the club.
- Gear social functions to the youth age group – get their input.

### **Provide learning opportunities for all volunteers**

- Provide opportunities for young members and parent volunteers to acquire and practice coaching, officiating and administrative skills. This will build individual confidence and enhance the quality of the program you're delivering.

### **Facilitate transport**

- Organise car-pooling between members and parents
- Check and provide information regarding what public transport is available.

### **Offer different pathways for competition and participation**

- Twilight, mid-week or shortened competitions.

### **Provide a link between junior and senior club**

When working with schools:

- Coincide school clinics with the school physical education program
- Shorten seasons to coincide with school terms
- Run shortened programs in schools prior to registration dates.

## How local governments are assisting junior sport

### Easy access to facilities for youth sports

- Some local governments have introduced a policy that ensure junior sporting teams have use of the council buildings or active recreation areas free of charge
- Recognition and support of junior athletes and sporting clubs
- Annual sports club awards that recognise both individual achievement and junior club management
- Provision of scholarships to young athletes of free access to local government's recreation facilities
- Provision of small grants to sporting organisations wishing to develop new youth initiatives
- Provision of small grants to individual athletes who are selected in state or national teams
- Establish a community fund to provide one-off grants for equipment and start- up costs for junior sport groups.

### Program development

- Some council recreation officers may be able to assist clubs and/or schools within the area to design, access and conduct junior sport programs.

### Further information and resources

Youth sport organisations offer valuable opportunities for the youth of WA. They are generally run by hard-working, committed volunteers with the goal of providing the same life enriching experiences that they themselves were given in their youth. However it must be acknowledged that the lifestyles and pressures on youth today have changed and that these changes must be reflected in the programs our industry delivers.

By understanding the varied issues accompanying youth participation in sport and by sharing information and ideas, Youth sport organisations can successfully modify their programs and provide relevant and vibrant sport programs for the youth of today.

Listed here are further resources and websites where you can get more ideas and assistance to deliver successful Youth sport programs.

**Australian Sports Commission** [www.ausport.gov.au](http://www.ausport.gov.au)

**WA Disabled Sports Association** [www.wadsa.org.au](http://www.wadsa.org.au)

[www.wadsa.org.au/operations/sport-and-recreation-advice](http://www.wadsa.org.au/operations/sport-and-recreation-advice)

**Sports Medicine Australia** [www.sma.org.au](http://www.sma.org.au)

**Play By the Rules** [www.playbytherules.net.au](http://www.playbytherules.net.au)

## What can you do?

As a proactive member of your club you can take on board the ideas and programs relevant to your organisation and adapt them to suit your specific needs. Clubs are only as vibrant as the people they have on board!

## References

**Children: Market Segmentation for Sport Participation:**

[www.clearinghouseforsport.gov.au/research/smi/market\\_seg/market\\_segmentation\\_-\\_children](http://www.clearinghouseforsport.gov.au/research/smi/market_seg/market_segmentation_-_children)

and [www.clearinghouseforsport.gov.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0011/564068/14066\\_ASC\\_Market\\_Segmentation\\_Children\\_FA\\_WEB.pdf](http://www.clearinghouseforsport.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/564068/14066_ASC_Market_Segmentation_Children_FA_WEB.pdf)

**Top 10 Tips for Parents:** [www.ausport.gov.au/supporting/top\\_10\\_tips\\_for\\_parents](http://www.ausport.gov.au/supporting/top_10_tips_for_parents)

**Play Sport Australia:** [www.ausport.gov.au/participating/playsportaustralia](http://www.ausport.gov.au/participating/playsportaustralia)

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## Other resources

This resource is part of a series which provides assistance to Western Australian sport and recreation clubs and organisations to become better managed, more sustainable and to provide good quality services to members and participants.

Other resources in the series include:

1. Starting a new club
2. Planning for your club – the future is in your hands
3. Taking the lead! A guide for club presidents
4. The club secretary – the key to efficiency
5. Show me the money – a guide for the club treasurer
6. Effective club meetings – a guide for the chairperson
7. Making meetings effective – a short guide
8. Delegation – help for the overworked committee member
9. Problem solving – a guide for clubs
10. Promoting your club
11. Seeking and servicing a sponsor
12. Establishing your club rules
13. Risky business – a club guide to risk management
14. Clubs' guide to volunteer management
15. Member protection for clubs
16. How to be an inclusive club
17. Passport into schools – linking sports with schools
18. Youth sport – junior sport policy
19. Long-term involvement – junior sport policy
20. Physical growth and maturation – junior sport policy
21. Sport pathways – junior sport policy
22. Forming links – junior sport policy
23. People making it happen – junior sport policy
24. Quality coaching – junior sport policy
25. Making sport safe – junior sport policy
26. The law and sport – junior sport policy
27. Top 20 tips for officials
28. Top 20 tips for successful coaching

You will find the full series of the booklets on Sport and Recreation (WA)'s website:

[www.dsr.wa.gov.au/clubs](http://www.dsr.wa.gov.au/clubs)