



TOP 10 WAYS TO INCREASE PARTICIPATION

By John Ainsworth

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Thank you

Thanks for signing up for my free guide to how to increase participation.

It always amazed me how hard it was to find a summary of what works in increasing participation, so I read the top reports I could find and wrote up what they were.

Data for this presentation was taken from:

- National Social Marketing Centre's social marketing benchmark criteria
- Active Celebration (Department of Health)
- Foresight report (Sheffield Hallam University)
- Active People survey (Sport England)
- Be Active, Be Healthy (Department of Health)
- Health Survey for England 2008 Key findings (NHS Information Centre)
- It's Time (Women's Sports and Fitness Foundation)
- Project 'Experience of Sport' Understanding the Lapsed target (Sport England)
- LEAP report (Department of Health, Countryside Agency & Sport England)
- Behaviour Change at population, community and individual levels (National Institute of Clinical Excellence)
- Understanding the success factors in Sport Action Zones (Sport England)
- Monitoring Report (Travel Actively)

I wanted to share that information with everybody so I put the information in this report.

I've identified the most common recommendations from the top UK and international physical activity interventions. Details of each of the reports are at the end of this report.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'John Ainsworth'.

John Ainsworth
Make Sport Fun



Top 10 ways to increase participation

So, here are the 10 most important things to do to increase participation.

1. Empower local communities
2. Marketing campaigns and communication
3. Taster sessions and classes
4. Engagement with partner organisations
5. Coaches and professionals
6. Improve facilities
7. Social marketing approach
8. Strong leadership
9. Help people use their peer network
10. Workplace

These have been gathered from the top reports into how to increase participation. Reports put together by the top organisations in sport, activity and health. Sport England, Department of Health, British Heart Foundation, National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE) and many more. The ones at the top of the list were recommended by nearly every report, whereas the ones at the bottom of the list were recommended less often.

Over the following pages I will explain what each of them means in more depth, how others have used that principle to increase participation and how it can work for you. Then, later in this guide I will explain some of the systems and some of the free tools available to allow you to put this into practice yourself.

Of course, if you have any more questions, or need any help with this then please get in touch with me (john@makesportfun.com or 07776 103 785).



1. Empower local communities

The basic principle here is to empower local people through a bottom up approach. Listen to what local people want, use outreach to cascade training and help people help themselves. It's vital to create local capacity – promote and support volunteering by residents but expect turnover of volunteers and plan and manage for this.

By working with local communities you can make it last, and build a culture of sustainability and self help. This means putting community level interventions and programmes into place, investing in interventions and programmes that identify and build on strengths and weaknesses of individuals and communities and providing small grants, as part of a strategic vision, which helps build goodwill with local communities and stakeholders, and generates a climate of trust.

Case study – Love2 Campaign

The Love2 Campaign is an example of how this can work. This is a campaign run by Pro-Active South London aimed at 15-19 year old girls. They provide small grants and support for local organisations to put on a series of taster sessions for 15-19 year old girls to get started in sport. The goal is that the people who take part then continue to take part in activity afterwards.

<http://www.makesportfun.com/casestudy/case-study-love2-programme/>

Case study - Walking for Health

Walking for Health provide support, including training to people interested in leading walking groups. This then allows the walk for health leaders to run walking groups themselves.

<http://www.wfh.naturalengland.org.uk/>

Case study - Fit as a Fiddle

This is a project run by Age UK, where they help local groups to identify what activity they would like to do, then support them in putting that activity on.

<http://www.ageuk.org.uk/health-wellbeing/fit-as-a-fiddle/>



2. Marketing campaigns

In the past many sports, fitness and activity marketing campaigns have been focussed on showing people the health benefits of getting active. However most people know that activity is good for them, and many believe that they already do enough activity. The marketing campaigns which work best are focussed on driving people to do a specific activity rather than just talking about activity generically.

Ensure marketing and communications are tailored to target groups – many will immediately switch-off with references to sport.

Case study – Get Active Chichester

At Make Sport Fun we've been running a targeted physical activity programme for Chichester District council to increase participation amongst over 65s from areas of deprivation. The Get Active Chichester programme has had fantastic results and we wanted to share with you what's working for us, to help you increase participation in your area.

Here are some of the highlights so far:

- 100% of participants are over 65
- 93% of participants are from areas of deprivation
- 90% of people who've tried an activity are still active at 3 months
- 94% of participants have reported an improvement in wellbeing using the WHO5 rating scale

[Download full case study here.](#)



3. Taster sessions and classes

According to our research approximately 80% of sports development teams already run taster sessions and classes and classes, which is fantastic. One reason this works so well for increasing participation is because it makes it easier for people to get started. People feel comfortable knowing that they won't be the only beginner there.

There are 3 main things to focus on when running taster sessions and classes – making them fun, free and friendly. However, if you simply make the classes free then some people will stop coming once they have to start paying. The Get Back Into programme found out that if you instead offer people a voucher which gets them the free session then they assign value to the classes and are more likely to keep coming.

Another important factor to keep people coming back is to make sure that the taster sessions are on the same day and time and at the same place as the regular sessions. People are free on specific days at specific times and if they need to change at the end of the taster sessions then it will increase your drop out rate.

Case study - Get Back Into

Get Back Into are 6-12 week taster session courses run by County Sports Partnerships (Regional Sport England) and their Partners to bring a choice of activities. The classes are fun and friendly, with qualified coaches. People can simply search for an activity via the post code search and click on the activity for further information.

<http://www.getbackinto.co.uk/>

Case study - Go Play Rugby

Go Play Rugby was a campaign from the Rugby Football Union in 2007 while the Rugby World Cup was going on. It was aimed at 18-30 year old men who'd played rugby before. They ran mass-media advertising driving people to register their details online or by text and they then sent details of where someone could play rugby. They ran a series of taster sessions and classes at rugby clubs up and down the country and got 9,000 new people to play rugby.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EnRfiN-d7cs>

Case study - Stride

<http://www.traffordleisure.co.uk/sporttrafford/physical-activity/stride.html>

Case study - Love2

<http://www.makesportfun.com/casestudy/case-study-love2-programme/>



4. Engagement with partners

Sport has to work closely not only with other sport bodies (e.g. NGBs, NHS Council), but also with non-sports organisations and departments (e.g. social services, housing, GPs). The more partnerships and the more diverse the partnerships the better – have ‘a foot in both camps’ by working closely with people from a number of different organisations.

The most important factor in driving up participation in sport and active recreation is being able to consult and then connect with non-participants in the general population – the more partners you have, the more access you have to local residents, and the more opportunities there are to access sources of funding.

Fit as a Fiddle

Fit as a Fiddle work with organisations who have their own networks -
<http://www.ageuk.org.uk/health-wellbeing/fit-as-a-fiddle/>



5. Coaches and professionals

It's probably no surprise that coaches and professionals are on this list. What might be surprising is that they're only at number 5. I think this might be because providing high-quality coaching is something that this country is already quite good at, so there are other things which are now more important to get right.

I've identified some good examples of where coaches and professionals have been taken into a less formal environment to help get people started in sport or activity, instead of just catering to those who are already active.

Case study - Streetgames

Streetgames coaches run unstructured sessions for young people. They provide enough structure that people know a session will be happening and where it will be, but then allow people to get on and play the game, instead of focussing on drills and training. This provides a positive environment for those who don't want to make the commitment to training, but do enjoy playing.

www.streetgames.org

Case study - No strings Badminton

No strings Badminton removes many of the barriers to playing badminton. You can just turn up and play, without booking a court and without finding someone to play against. The coach will simply match you up with someone of a similar level.

<http://www.nostringsbadminton.co.uk/>

Case study - Back to Netball

Back to Netball is aimed at getting 18-30 year old women back into playing Netball. There are a lot of women who played netball at school, and then don't play again after that. They don't want to play in the competitive environment of a netball club, but they would like to have a game. So a professional netball coach sets up a weekly game in a community centre or other non-threatening environment, and then once the group is running they help one of the people train to become a coach herself.

<http://www.englandnetball.co.uk/Back-to-Netball/>



6. Facilities – including parks, open spaces, etc.

For a long time the attitude to increasing participation in this country has been “build it and they will come”, and it hasn’t led to an increase in participation. Improving a facility clearly gives a good experience to someone doing activity, but it does less to drive new people to take part in activity. On top of that building and improving facilities is very expensive (about £7 million for a new swimming pool and £12 million for a new leisure centre I believe).

Here I’ve therefore focussed on some examples of how people have improved facilities for taking part in activity without spending a huge amount of money.

Case study – Swiss Cottage tai chi sessions

Camden Sports Development team talked to their colleagues in the Swiss Cottage library and put on a Tai Chi session in the foyer of the library. It’s a great new library and has a open, airy foyer. In order to get into the library people had to go past the Tai Chi sessions, so the only marketing they had to do for these sessions was to put up a poster explaining how to join in. Quite quickly the session became full and they have now put on a second session on another day.

Case study – shopping centre walking group

Walking groups in Hull would lose members every winter to the cold conditions. So someone decided to take the group to walk around the inside of the local shopping centre instead. They even got sponsored by the Costa Coffee. This meant a lot less people dropped out over the winter, and when spring came they moved back outside, with lots more members.

Case study - Get more people cycling

The Get More People Cycling project challenges teams, departments and companies to compete against each other – to see who can get the most people to cycle for 10 minutes or more. The idea being that people who give cycling a go are more likely to start doing it regularly. They found that without any central funding companies started improving their facilities for cycling (adding access to showers in gyms or on site and adding cycle racks) because so many of their staff were travelling to work that way.

<http://www.makesportfun.com/casestudy/get-more-people-cycling/>



7. Social marketing – tailor to the groups

The lapsed participants research from Sport England found that overwhelmingly, the ultimate cues for lapsing come from big shifts in participants' lives: life-stage-driven lack of TIME and ENERGY and the sense of having different priorities. We therefore need to understand where people are, what their situation is, and work from there. Luckily we have help with this in the form of a segmentation model from Sport England and one from Department of Health. We also have further insight work which we have done. This is all available on www.promotingactivity.com.

Case study – Girls get going in Brent

The Brent Sports Development Team has recently been able to launch four new sport programmes for young women with the help of funding from Play Sport London (funding originates from the London Development Agency). The funding process, which was managed by PRO-ACTIVE West London, has helped the team set up four activities – hip-hop skipping, aerobics, badminton, and girls' football.

The activities were decided upon after using the strategic planning tool available on [promotingactivity.com](http://www.promotingactivity.com), which helped the team identify the 'Leanne' demographic as its target market – females aged 18 to 25, often with children, who have little time to exercise.

<http://www.makesportfun.com/casestudy/girls-get-going-in-brent/>

Case study – Hounslow helps women back in to exercise

With the help of funding from the London Development Agency's Play Sport London programme, a Fusion Lifestyle team working on behalf of Hounslow Borough Council has recently been able to set up a series of programmes aimed at encouraging women within the borough back into exercise. The funding process was managed by PRO-ACTIVE West London.

The team used the market segmentation toolkits on [promotingactivity.com](http://www.promotingactivity.com) to identify the two most prevalent female demographics in the borough – in this case 'Leannes' and 'Chloes', young women who may not be doing as much exercise as they could or should be.

<http://www.makesportfun.com/casestudy/hounslow-helps-women-back-into-exercise/>



8. Leadership

Having a full time SAZ Manager was seen as vital to the success of the SAZ initiative in Liverpool – he was the main driving force behind the SAZ. The role encompassed forging strong relationships with the community, providing a strategic overview of the SAZ initiative, engaging with other agencies working in similar fields and providing funding advice. In Liverpool, the same manager was in place since the start of the initiative and this continuity provided stability to the team and the wider community. It is definitely seen as a full time position, and the charismatic leadership Gary provided was one of the keys to the success of the SAZ initiative in Liverpool, and he is well regarded by his colleagues.

It's down to us to provide this leadership, or it's down to us to find people willing to take on these leadership roles.

Case study - parkrun

parkrun organise free, weekly, 5km timed runs around the world. They are open to everyone, free, and are safe and easy to take part in. These events take place in pleasant parkland surroundings and they encourage people of every ability to take part; from those taking their first steps in running to Olympians; from juniors to those with more experience.

parkrun relies heavily on volunteers, but they don't just expect people to help out. They work hard to find the right kind of people to get involved and then provided them with the right kind of equipment and support to be able to organise the runs.

<http://parkrun.com/home.aspx>

Case study - Walking for Health

Walking for Health also depends heavily on volunteers, so they provide training, support and an infrastructure so that those people can take on the leadership role locally and make the walking groups a success.

<https://www.walkingforhealth.org.uk>



9. Peer-to-peer

The idea here is that if you use regular people to help others get started in activity then it will have more of an impact than if a health professional tries to get them involved.

Case study - LEAP

One of the projects that brought this idea to our attention was the LEAP project which put a peer mentor programme in place. Training included a detailed local knowledge of local community services and barriers which helped, engage and raise awareness in participants. They helped their peer mentors make links with local services to help direct participants into exit routes and they also provided links with specialists offering motivational interviewing helped to keep people in physical activity.

<http://www.library.nhs.uk/publichealth/ViewResource.aspx?resID=306573>



10. Workplace

If you work with businesses to support people getting active then employers can support corporate membership to gyms, provide showers in the work place and consider flexible hours. As a major employer local government will need to address this area as well.

One of the key things which works for getting workplaces active is to have workplace champions. It seems that having someone in the workplace to get their colleagues excited about an activity you're running dramatically increases the amount of people who get and stay involved.

Case study - Climb Mount Everest project

Someone decided to enrol their London office employees in a fitness challenge; to collectively climb the height of Mount Everest in four weeks by climbing the stairs at work.

In order to complete the climb in four weeks (20 working days) they needed to complete a total of 388 climbs – an average of 19.4 times a day. There are around 40 people in the office on a typical day which means that each individual needs to climb the stairs every other day. By Day 2 they had already reached the height of Ben Nevis, and by day 10 they had reached top of Mount Everest in half the time.



Putting it into practice

So how do you put these ideas into action? We have developed a system which allows you to use 5 of these principles as part of a concerted campaign.

- **Empower local communities**
- **Marketing campaigns and communication**
- **Taster sessions and classes**
- **Engagement with partner organisations**
- **Social marketing approach**

This system is the 6 stages of an effective activity marketing campaign.

- **Plan**
- **Set up**
- **Promotion**
- **Behaviour change intervention**
- **Active participation**
- **Follow up.**

Plan

We work with you to identify what segments you should be targeting, how to reach them and what budget you'll need.

Set up

We set up ways for people to register; the right offer to engage them; a CRM system to track who's registered and when they need following up with; an activity database; and (if appropriate) a campaign website.

Promotion

We run initial promotion to find people who want to get active and get them to register their interest. We tailor the messages so the target audience will respond and use marketing techniques that will engage them. Techniques we use include direct mail, Google Ads and Facebook Ads.

Behaviour change intervention

We follow up with people who've registered by phone, email and post, and find them somewhere to do an activity of their choice on a day and at a time that suits them within 20 minutes of where they live or work. We use a motivational interviewing approach, and provide a voucher so they can try the activity free the first time. This means the people we've engaged will actually try the activity.

Active participation

People then go off and try their new activity. Ideally their first experience will be fun, free and friendly.

Follow up

We stay in touch with people via phone, email, text message and direct mail, address any barriers and issues and offer further motivation and support to keep them active. This lasts for 12 months to ensure long term increases in participation.

To learn more about this take the [Make Sport Fun email course – Introduction to marketing sport and activity.](#)