

Returning to play: hints and tips for organisations as Covid-19 restrictions are lifted

The ending of legal restrictions linked to the Covid-19 pandemic doesn't necessarily mean all clubs, groups and organisations will want to immediately return to how they used to do things before the pandemic.

Covid-19 hasn't gone away so it's important to continue to understand how your people are feeling before you lift all the restrictions you had in place. For example, a recent YouGov survey found 51% of 18–24 year olds and 75% of those aged 65+ will continue to use social distancing where they can.

Grassroots organisations and their volunteers are now able to make their own decisions based on people's needs, local circumstances and sector guidance. We've consulted with some national governing bodies (NGBs), sport for development partners and clubs and groups to provide some hints and tips to help you.

1

Listen to how people are feeling

Actively listening to participants and volunteers remains vital and will ensure the decisions you make about returning to activity reflect your people's needs. Ask open questions about how people are feeling, this will encourage more in-depth responses instead of one-word answers. For example:

- How are you feeling about the current club environment?
- Do you feel comfortable about the way we're running training and competitions?
- Is there anything we can do to make you feel safer and more included?

To demonstrate that you are listening, share summaries of what you're hearing and what you'll be doing as a result.



2

Respect different opinions

Some people, such as those who are vulnerable, living with long-term health conditions or have caring responsibilities, may be feeling more nervous than others about the restrictions lifting. To avoid conflict, encourage respectful debate. Give people the opportunity to explain why they hold their views and ensure the organisation continues to share the reasons behind any decisions it makes.



3

Consider your local context

Keep an eye on the measures being retained by other local organisations e.g. supermarkets, gyms and offices, as these are likely to influence the attitudes and behaviours of your people. In all cases, communicating with visitors in advance is key. Explain what's expected, why it's important and why it may be different to what's happening elsewhere.



4

Work with other local organisations

Where you can, try to work closely with other local organisations to provide opportunities for your participants to be active in a variety of different ways. This will help to ensure that they can remain active even if they are not yet ready to return to your organisation. Forming these partnerships will also provide the opportunity to learn from each other and share ideas/solutions to any similar challenges or issues faced.



5

Provide a blended offer

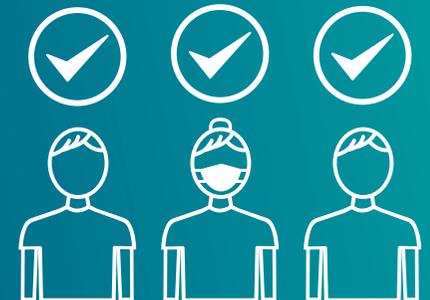
While some clubs and groups are seeing a surge in membership, not everyone is ready or able to return, yet. To keep everyone involved, it's good to provide a blended offer of in-person and virtual activities. Keep up your communications, so that those who can't or won't attend in person still feel engaged and connected to you, their fellow participants and/or volunteers. Also consider how your offer may need to vary for different age groups. For example, older age groups may prefer more distancing or less equipment sharing than younger age groups.



6

Break up traditional volunteer roles into tasks

Many volunteers will have seen their workload and responsibilities increase during the pandemic as a result of new protocols and needing to cover others who are isolating. Try and help ease the burden by dividing up roles and responsibilities traditionally done by one person. Creating smaller tasks also makes it easier to attract new volunteers. Remember – the smaller the ask, the better! Check out our ['Breaking Volunteer Roles into Tasks'](#) guidance document for more information.



7 Ensure communications are clear and consistent

Creating simple messages is key to ensuring everyone is aware of what's happening within your organisation. Use a variety of channels that reflect where your people go for information and how they communicate with each other. Signage, floor markings and posters remain important visual prompts. Support these with regular, positive messages in any existing email, WhatsApp, social media and other groups. For more information on communications, check out our ['Keeping in touch with people' website section](#).



8 Show people what to expect

Despite all the changes over the last 18 months, one thing hasn't changed. Organisations are still striving to create safe, inclusive and welcoming environments for everyone. Personal safety remains important to many people, while trust in others has not yet fully returned. Show people the inclusive, blended environment your organisation is creating. Use images, video and stories to show how you're welcoming people back in a safe, flexible way that meets their needs.



9 Look for funding opportunities to overcome new challenges

The pandemic has hit organisations in many different ways. For example, for some, equipment sharing has become a health and safety concern. In response, organisations may need to buy additional equipment or adapt sessions. In situations like this, there may be funding opportunities available to help, like Sport England's Return to Play: Small Grants Fund. For bigger projects, Return to Play: Active Together and the Tackling Inequalities Fund may be able to help your organisation to progress.

For more information on Sport England funds, click here.

NGBs may also have funding available to help community groups recover from the pandemic.



10 Start developing medium-term plans

Now is a good time to start looking ahead and to think about how your organisation will operate and what your offer will look like in the future. As a committee/decision-making body you could discuss:

- What will your offer and activities look like in 6-12 months' time?
- How can your organisation adapt to meet the evolving expectations of both participants and your workforce?
- Are there any fund-raising activities that you could run across the autumn/winter months?
- Are there any development opportunities for your workforce (volunteers/paid)?

It may also make sense to review/update any operating procedures to include any measures which you will continue with in order to provide a safe environment (e.g. providing sanitisation stations).

