Sport Participant Data:
Best practice data collection

2022

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Introduction

Management guru Peter Drucker famously argued that If you can't measure it, you can't manage it. This credo applies to all organisations but is especially relevant in community sport. Sporting clubs, being almost solely dependent on membership registration income, require the trend and deep insight information about participation and retention in their sport that the Sport Participation Research Project (SPRP) provides.

Beyond community sport clubs benefitting from such data, it is used to inform strategic and policy planning in sport, where it is important to understand the trends in participation. The SPRP provides a reliable measure of organised sport participation in Victoria to inform planning, decision making and investments for State Sporting Associations, all levels of government, funding bodies, sport participation promoters, and all the way to the level of the community club.

The Sport Participation Research Project is funded by VicHealth and Sport, Recreation and Racing Victoria and is conducted by Professor Rochelle Eime, Ms Melanie Charity, Dr Aurelie Pankowiak, Dr Jack Harvey and Professor Hans Westerbeek from Victoria University and Federation University.

The Sport Participation Research Project has involved the analysis of data on organised sport participation in Victoria, and in 12 major sports annually since 2015. The State Sporting Associations involved with this research are: AFL Victoria, Australian Sailing (Victorian branch), Basketball Victoria, Bowls Victoria, Cricket Victoria, Football Victoria, Golf Victoria, Gymnastics Victoria, Hockey Victoria, Netball Victoria, Swimming Victoria, and Tennis Victoria. Rowing Victoria is being included from 2022.

The project reports on participation levels (numbers of registered participants and participation rates per head of population) and participation trends, for the Victorian population as a whole, and for various population segments.

Uniquely, this project integrates consistent census-based sport participant data across 12 major sports. The data routinely collected by sports includes sport specific information, including what competition or programs participants may play, and also demographic data such as date of birth, gender, and residential postcode. Some sports have started to collect more comprehensive data, however this has not been consistent across the sector. For sector level reporting, which is important for Government,

and organisations such as VicHealth and for broader advocacy for the sport sector, it is increasingly critical to have additional demographic data routinely and consistently reported across the sports sector. We would like to commend VicHealth and Sport, Recreation and Racing Victoria in particular, for providing global leadership in supporting the collection of data as outlined above. Not only is the current dataset (of 12 sports across 6 years) unique in the world, it also represents Best Practice in regard to strategic sport management and sport policy planning.

The aim of this resource is to provide details of best practice for those who collect data on sport participants. Further we provide recommendations for expanding what sport participant data is collected and so that it is consistent across the sector. It is recommended that sports engage their respective database management provider to discuss and implement best practice data collection processes.

Our recommendations are based on the following three key topics:

1. Sports data collection systems

2. Type of sport participant

    a. **Modified programs**
    b. **Competition**
    c. **Social play**

3. Demographics

    a. **Date of Birth**
    b. **Gender**
    c. **Residential postcode**
    d. **Culturally and Linguistically Diverse**
    e. **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander**
    f. **Disability**
    g. **LGBTI+**

Sport participation data

1. Sports data collection systems

The best quality data stems from online sport registration systems, and where each individual sport participant (or participants' parent) completes an online form.

Our experience indicates that gaps or flaws in the dataset can occur if one person, e.g. a team manager completes registrations for multiple players. In such cases, there are often missing values, most often these are date of birth and/or postcode. This data is very important for sports to understand their playing segments to offer age-appropriate playing opportunities and facilities, and in the right locations.

The collection systems with the best quality data are also those that require the individual participant to complete their information online when they register to play. Further, those systems with compulsory questions so that there aren't batches of default entries like date of birth of 1st January 2000, are preferred.

It is fair to say that in the age of digital transformation, sport organisations should move to full online registration database systems and not rely on club volunteers/administrators and coaches to complete player data. Such manual systems are likely to lead to entry errors and missing data such as date of birth and residential postcode.

It is also important that sport organisations (internally) agree on consistent use of player data categories for example competition, modified sport program, social program, and entries and to be using individual player IDs. A unique and uniform player ID over time and across player systems (eg. competition and social/recreational player) is important to be able to track people over time.

For non-numerical data such as country of birth or language other than English spoken at home it is important that the data systems have drop-down options rather than open text options. Open text delivers inconsistent entries with different spellings and abbreviations and requires laborious categorisation.

2. Type of sport participant

a) Modified programs- existing data is excellent

Many sports have modified sport programs, and these are mainly entry-level programs for young children. Examples of such programs including NAB AFL Auskick (Australian Football), ANZ Tennis Hot Shots (tennis), and MiniRoos (soccer). The majority of sports routinely collect data (annually) on these participants in the same way they do for club-competition players. This includes a unique player ID and demographic data. This data is usually of high quality.

b) Competition- existing data is excellent

For sports, the highest quality and most comprehensive data is captured from their competition players. That is any individual who is registered to play in a club-based competition. It is important that unique individuals have the same playing ID across playing clubs, associations and competitions.

c) Social play- existing data is poor

Many sports have or are developing social/recreational based programs for adolescents and adults. Examples of these types of programs include Rock Up Netball, JBall Social Hockey and Bowling with Babies. However, to date most sports do not routinely collect data on these participants.

There are increasing societal trends towards these social and recreational based programs and this is likely to continue to increase over the next decade. It is important for sport organisations to also have comprehensive insight information on recreational players. It is recommended that sports develop similar online player database systems as they currently do for their competition players. When a player attends a social or recreational program they must register their details and be provided with a player ID in the same way as the competition players. This can be done through a weblink, a computer or iPad entry at the program site or even QR code scan systems.

3. Demographics

a) Date of Birth

It is important to collect date of birth data so that sports can understand the age demographics of their players and develop and implement age-appropriate playing and club participation opportunities. These playing formats range from modified sport offerings for the very young, to sport activities that also facilitate social connection between players and volunteers.

> **Recommended data collection format:**
>
> dd/mm/yyyy

b) Gender identity

The gender data collected by sports is generally complete. Most sports predominantly collected data by offering male and female categories only. We recommend expanding the number of available categories. We also recommend collecting data using language that captures gender (women, girls, men, boys) rather than sex (male, female).

> **Recommended data collection format:**
>
> How do you identify?
>
> - Man or boy
> - Woman or girl
> - Non-binary
> - Self-described (please specify)
> - Choose not to respond

c) Residential postcode

The player postcode data is generally valid and complete. The player database systems need to ensure that only numerical data can be inputted. Some examples of entries are "Vic". Some sports have an issue with incomplete data. It is therefore suggested that the postcode, like other demographic data, is made compulsory to complete and that allowed entries can only be numerical.

> **Recommended data collection format:**
>
> What is your residential postcode?
> (please enter 4 numbers only)

d) Culturally and Linguistically Diverse

The player data regarding Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (communities) is not consistently collected by sports. Further, some sports collect such information but fail to consistently do this across all age groups and player formats/programs. Some sports collect data on country of birth whilst others on languages other than English spoken at home.

In 2020, there were over 7.6 million migrants living in Australia, and 30% of the population were born overseas [1].

> **Recommended data collection format:**
>
> - Do you speak a language other than English at home?
>   (yes/no/ prefer not to say)
>
> What language other than English do you speak at home?
> *(Provide a list of languages)*. If yes:
>
> | | |
> |---|---|
> | Mandarin | Greek |
> | Arabic | Hindi |
> | Cantonese | Spanish |
> | Vietnamese | Punjabi |
> | Italian | (other) |

e) Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander

The player data regarding Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander is not routinely collected by sports.

Recommended data collection format:

- Are you of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin? (yes/no/ prefer not to say)

f)   Disability

The player data regarding disability status is not routinely collected by sports. Asking questions about people's disability status will assist sports and Government in making sport as inclusive as possible, for all Australians.

Reference: [3, 4]

Recommended data collection format:

- Do you have a disability or long-term health condition? (yes/no/ prefer not to say)

If yes, what do you regard as your main disability or dimension of restricted access? (select one appropriate response)

- Physical - Mobility- requiring the use of a power wheelchair or scooter
- Physical - Mobility- requiring the use of a manual wheelchair
- Physical - Mobility- requiring the use of other mobility aids
- Physical - Mobility- no aid required but able to cover a limited distance or cannot manipulate objects
- Physical- not affecting mobility or dexterity
- Sensory - Blind or vision
- Sensory - Deaf or hearing
- Sensory & Developmental – Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Intellectual - involving issues of speech, understanding, learning or retaining information
- Mental health
- Other (please specify)

g) LGBTIQ+ (sexual orientation)

Sports do not generally collect data on sexual orientation. Asking questions like sexual orientation will assist sports and Government in making sport as inclusive as possible, for all Australians.

It is recommended that this question only be asked of adults (18+).

Recommended data collection format:

What is your sexual orientation?

- Straight (Heterosexual)
- Gay
- Lesbian
- Bisexual
- I use a different term (please specify)
- Prefer not to say

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