Club Open Day

11th/12th May 2024

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Background/ Rationale

Stakeholder Research

During 2021, the IBF commissioned an inaugural piece of research to determine the level of satisfaction amongst bowling clubs, with regard to existing support mechanisms, identifying key areas of concern and to help inform and shape the strategic vision for the future.

Overall, 124 completed responses were achieved, representing an excellent response rate of **73%.**

Club Engagement Survey 2021

Some of the key findings identified included:

An **under representation of females** (28%) compared to males (72%);

A focus on the **area of disability,** with 55% of clubs having no active playing members with a disability and 49% have no provision.

An **ageing demographic** is a major concern but not a surprise with the 55+ category representing 76% of the total playing membership and only 2% were under 18.

Feedback from clubs in terms of survival, club development and community engagement **proved to be ALARMING!**

Declining Membership

20% of clubs feel at risk of **CLOSURE!**

45% of clubs have a membership of 25 or less!

43% of clubs experienced a **decrease in membership** over a 3 year period!

40% of clubs have **no links with council or SDO!**

51% of **clubs do NOT promote!**

81% of clubs have **no partnerships** with local schools/ community groups!

A need to up-skill our clubs with regard to **social media,** was evident.

The Journey Begins

Our key findings provided a robust evidential base to target priority areas, provided a platform to make evidence led decisions and inform strategic direction.

A key outcome was the launch of the new Irish Bowls Federation strategy **'A Sport for All 2023-2027'** and plans have been developed to address all our priority areas.

Retention/ Recruitment

Focussing upon retaining and recruiting members is critical for many clubs especially on the back of COVID and a downward trend in membership. In terms of intervention, the **introduction of a NATIONAL BOWLS RECRUITMENT CAMPAIGN** received overwhelming support.

Open Day key steps/ timeline

Considering the 'Open Day' methodology has been reliably proven to work by our colleagues in the ILB, who achieved remarkable success, and has been delivered annually by our neighbours in England and Scotland, it seemed logical to implement a similar type of initiative to try and help address declining membership levels.

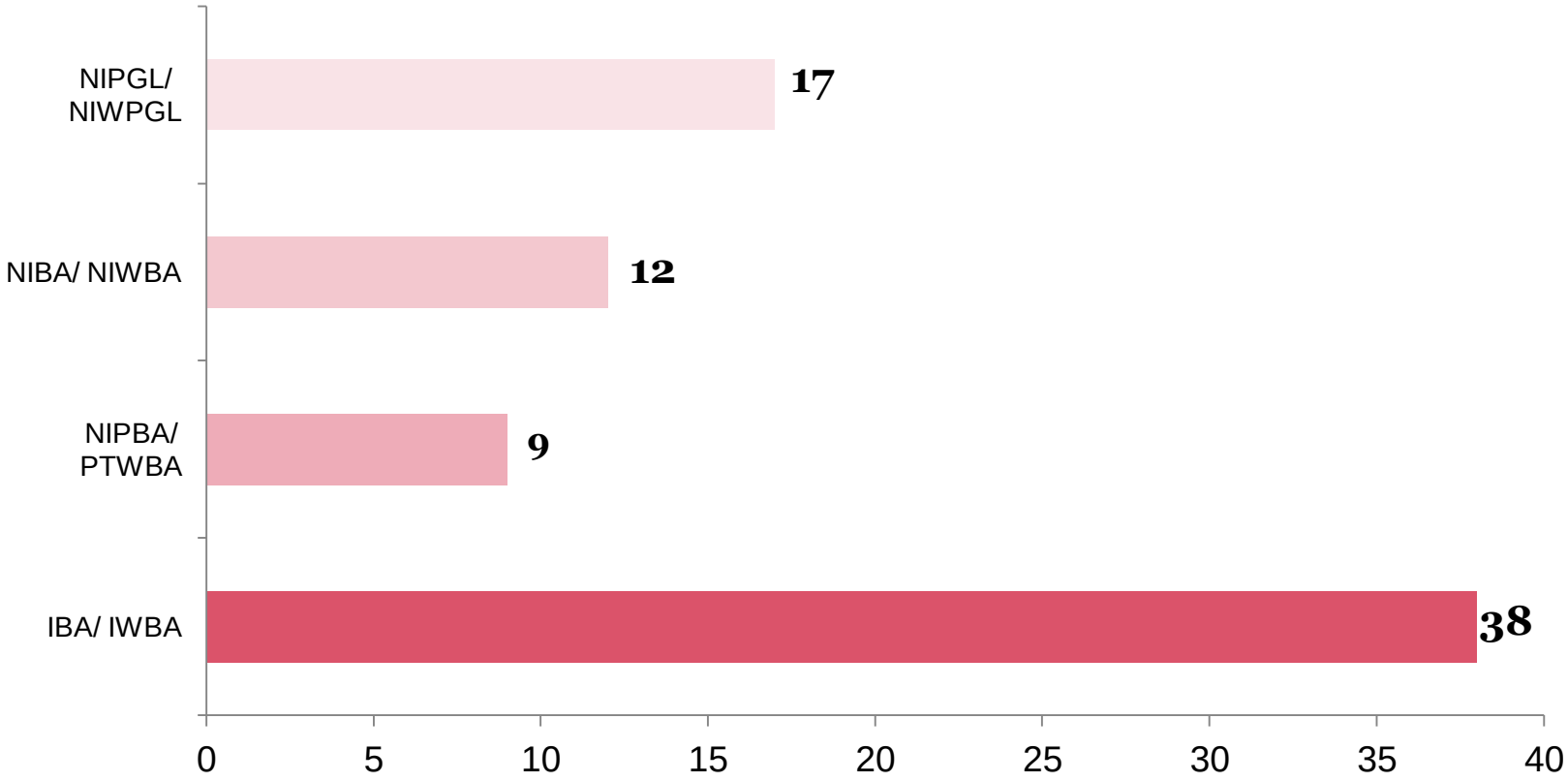
- Intervention discussed with NGB's and buy in achieved;
- **'FREE DATE'** agreed with NGB's in our busy bowls calendar (**11th May 2024**);
- Advertisement of the club open day – **ALL** clubs invited to take part;
- Recruitment of clubs/sign up;
- Key communications to participating clubs;
- Knowledge sharing– liaison with Ian Wilson ILB/ Lucy Smith - Marketing Consultant;

Framework of club support offered:

- Provision of marketing materials, eg, club specific posters/ FB guides;
- Clarification of roles and responsibilities;
- Best practice support and advice;
- How best to structure your 'Open Day' and follow up sessions;
- Social media hints and tips:
- Open Day workshop 28th March via Zoom.

Club Participation

Overall, 38 clubs took part in our inaugural 'Open day'!



**NB. Clubs were encouraged to organise this event as a joined enterprise, incorporating both Men's and Women's clubs/ sections as relevant.*

Measuring Success

Encouragingly, our inaugural 'OPEN DAY' events attracted approx. 472 attendees, across 38 clubs with potentially 110 NEW MEMBERS!

Association	Open Day Attendees	Potential new members (APPROX)
NIPGL/ NIWPGL	220	39
NIBA/ NIWBA	128	23
NIPBA/ PTWBA	124	48
OVERALL	**472**	**110**

**NB. The figures used in the table are based on information provided by our clubs.*

How did you advertise and promote your event?

Undoubtedly clubs that utilised social media and followed the best practice advice provided by our marketing consultant, in terms of sharing social media posts with non bowling local community groups had more successful events. Encouraging friends and family to try our sport is also a valuable and proven method of attracting new recruits. It is important that our clubs have the necessary support to help them embrace and understand the opportunities provided by social media platforms and e-communications.

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We had a strong online promotion (using your professional posters and our own) via our own face book page and sharing with local community groups. Word of mouth and 'pressganging friends' is also a good avenue!

We reached out to local shortmat clubs and leagues and this worked well!

Advertised using the designated Facebook marketing campaign and this was shared by our members and created a positive buzz online.

Posters in local shops and local radio were utilised.

Club facebook page, local press and association websites. We also created our own online advertising posters for online.

Notices placed near our entrance and contacting local residents associations worked well for us!

Undoubtedly the success of our event and 15 new members was due to following the best practice advice of not only sharing via FB but sharing with local community groups!

Liaising with local Sports Development Officers had little benefit on this occasion.

Word of mouth, family and friends.

"

What worked well? What could be improved?

Lessons learned is a key part of our inaugural 'Open Day' events in terms planning for the future .

In terms of improvement, engaging more fully with schools would be a great addition to our day.

We held a BBQ throughout the day and this helped with the social side of things and this worked a treat!

Utilising some of our International stars to help promote these events across the province may prove beneficial.

The open day was a great success with gorgeous weather!

Tea and sandwiches never misses! The introduction of a few fun activities helps!

More rigorous community engagement is required to promote the event next year!

Our club ignored the advice provided and now the feeling is we could have had a far better event!

The event actually helped us come together as a club and meet socially. We will do this again!

More council support!

We need more support with social media!

The event exceeded our expectations in terms of the public interest and the follow up sessions is the key to signing up new members!

North West 200 day is not ideal!

General Feedback

Some other feedback comments from our participating clubs!

Follow up sessions are essential and our club runs coaching every Saturday morning for 6 weeks.

We would welcome some help and support in addressing the stereotypical perception of our sport!

Our club made a last minute decision to hold an open day event and it worked really well linking with a local residents association.

In order for the event to be successful, firstly it MUST be fun and enjoyable!

Went well for a first go!

General club hesitancy to begin with!

Our club needs to more active online.

Supportive of the exercise!

We were disappointed and some clubs don't have a FB page.

Opportunities to promote and raise our club profile and the very existence of our club.

Thanks to Chris and Ian for their on going help, tips, guidance and support.

Appreciate the support!

Nothing really worked for us as only 7 turned up! {however 3 new potential members were recruited]

The NW 200 definitely had an impact and a local rugby event.

1 new member is better than none!

Lessons learned/conclusions

With potentially **110 NEW MEMBERS** from our inaugural 'Open Day' events and almost 500 attendees, this represents a positive addition to the Irish Bowls calendar. **The 'OPEN DAY MODEL WORKS**! However, improvements can be made. Developing a positive community footprint creates new membership opportunities.!

Planning

- **A free calendar date** across all associations is paramount, for example, 4 NIBA clubs who originally had signed up to participate, did not go ahead with their plans due to concerns around rearranging a league match;
- Seeking early agreement across all associations on the **best possible date**, to help avoid major events in NI, for example, the North West 200.

Marketing/ Promotion

- **Advertising via social media is essential**, along with the more traditional approach of encouraging family and friends and using posters;
- Feedback suggests promoting via your own FB page is not enough!
- **Success stories** indicate that reaching a wider non bowls audience via FB sharing to local community group pages can be a **game changer!**

On the day Delivery

- Make it **fun, enjoyable** and ensure there is a welcoming atmosphere;
- Don't over coach;
- Have **volunteers in place** with designated roles and responsibilities;
- Have scheduled '**follow up sessions'** already planned.

Review

- Undertaking a review of each event will allow for the identification of **strengths/ areas of improvement**;
- Obtain **feedback** from participants;
- **Engage with council/ community groups** (club invitation) well in advance;
- Access any **support** available.

Appendix 1 – Participating Clubs

NIPGL/ NIWPGL		NIBA/ NIWBA		NIPBA/ PTWBA
Ballywalter	Hilden	Antrim Lawn	North Down	Ballymoney
Balmoral	NICS	Ballyholme	Sydenham	City of Derry
Belfast	Old Bleach	Bessbrook	Warrenpoint	Cookstown
Belmont	PSNI	Castle		Dungiven
Cavehill	Sailsbury	Divis		Letterkenny
CI Knock	Sainfield	Dungannon		Limavady
Comber	Shaftsbury	Lisnagarvey		Magherafelt
Dunbarton	Willowfield	Lurgan		Omagh
Ewarts		Markethill		Portrush

THANK YOU

to all participating clubs and their members for volunteering their time and resources to help make this inaugural event a success!