



How to... 'ensure sport and physical activity sessions for young women are affordable'

Why it's important

For many young women, cost is one of the main barriers to participating in sport and physical activity. A lack of cash flow can have a significant influence on whether or not a young woman is active. When taking into consideration the cost of taking part in an activity as well as any associated costs such as travel, childcare or equipment, the financial implications can often be fairly significant. For young women from disadvantaged communities, cost as a barrier to participation in sport and physical activity is even more of an issue. One of the factors that is most likely to encourage young women to take part in regular sport and physical activity is the affordability of sessions. By making sport and physical activity cheaper to do, young women are more likely to take part. Young women from disadvantaged communities have to prioritise what they spend their money on and for many, sport and physical activity is not a priority. They are therefore unlikely to spend their money on something without first knowing what they are getting for it.

Factors to consider

Are free activity sessions a good idea?

Offering free activity sessions does work as an incentive for young women to participate. However, if sessions are offered for free as a result of funding then you run the risk that you'll have to stop delivering them when the funding runs out.

People look at value in different ways and while it might seem best to make sure something's free it may not be taken as seriously or valued as much as a session that costs a few pounds. Recent research with 16–19 year old girls has also shown that there is an expectation that they will have to pay and that something that is offered 'for free' raises suspicion.

Introducing a small charge from the start (eg £1–£2) also means that if you do need to start charging later in the programme you are less likely to get drop off. Many Us Girls projects have successfully introduced small fees in order to build sustainability into the project.

Research suggests that most young women will pay a reasonable amount for an activity (up to £3 per session) but it is a good marketing idea to make the first session free so they can try it with no risk. If you decide to do this, you must be very clear that it is only the first session that is free and that a small charge will apply in the future. A good way to do this is rather than simply offering the first session for free you tell people it costs £3 (or whatever you normally charge), but that with a voucher they can get in for free the first time. This simple tactic has been shown to increase the percentage of people who come back after the initial session.

Providing low cost activities

Many people believe that the only way to exercise is to join a gym, which can be very expensive. There are in fact hundreds of ways women can exercise for little or no cost. Think about what low cost activities you can provide – for example setting up a jogging group, doing activity in a park or open space. By eliminating the need for facility hire you reduce the cost of running the session and thus the cost to the participant. Where facilities are required, shop around and negotiate for the best price – non-traditional sports facilities such as community halls are often cheaper than hiring space in a leisure centre.

Pricing strategies – Girls love a bargain!

Everyone considers the cost of what they're about to do and weighs it against the value they will take from it. When developing your activity programme, think about

the pricing structure and make sure it represents value for money. Here are some ideas:

- Loyalty schemes/cards full of discount vouchers and rewards – eg first session free, fifth session free, free T-shirt after attending 10 sessions.

“It motivates you to keep going.”

- Offers/deals – ‘Two for one’ deals, or ‘bring a friend for free’, or ‘£3 for one person or £4 for two’

“It means you can go with your mate.”

- Prizes/incentives – Offer a free prize to anyone who brings a friend along. This could be a cheap class for them, some equipment or something non-sport related.
- Student and group discounts

“Makes you go and have a look.”

- Combine activity and childcare costs – Explore the possibility of offering low cost crèche facilities alongside your activity programmes.

“Our Zumba class was £2.50 per session, which included crèche for the hour.”

Other incentives which can help engage and retain participants include free branded items such as T-shirts or water bottles, shopping vouchers or trips. Providing Us Girls kit at the initial session or as a reward for attending a certain number of sessions has been successful and can help combat some of the cost issues relating to kit. It also provides girls with a sense of belonging.

Provide pay and play opportunities

Our research has shown that most young women prefer to pay per session or per hour rather than an upfront payment. Having to pay upfront often acts as a barrier – young women are reluctant to commit to monthly payments. The ideal solution would be to offer both options so those who prefer to pay upfront – especially if it means they can go as much as they want/unlimited sessions – have the option to do so.



Case studies

Pay and play opportunities

The Us Girls project in Brent supported participants to exercise independently by offering a one-month health and fitness membership to girls who complete the six-week programme of sessions. As a result a number of girls have become monthly members or pay as you go users and some also bring female relatives with them to female only sessions.

Offering free taster sessions

The Hounslow Us Girls project offered free taster sessions initially which was crucial in developing such a high attendance.

“A lot of the people who joined the classes wouldn’t have attended if they had to pay, but now they are involved in sport and activity again and are keeping on with it, which is the exactly the result we were looking for.”

Ensuring sustainability

North East Music Factory – Their break-even cost is £2.50 per person per session.

“Our goal is to charge that much for every session by the time we withdraw from funding it. We didn’t charge for sessions initially, but after a while we gradually increased the cost of the sessions to £1.50 and will gradually increase it until by the time we withdraw it will be £2.50 so that it’s sustainable.”

Loyalty cards and discount vouchers

A number of Us Girls projects have introduced loyalty cards and voucher booklets. Trafford Us Girls offer an ‘Exercise Compact’ as a way for participants to save money. This includes vouchers for £1 classes, £1 swim, £1 gym and ‘bring a friend for free’.

Wigan Us Girls have also developed a loyalty card which rewards participants for attending a certain amount of sessions – eg six sessions – free kit bag and drinks bottle, 12th session – Us Girls T-shirt, 20th session – Us Girls hoody, 30th session – gift vouchers. Participants get a stamp on their loyalty card every time they attend.





Incentives/freebies

The 'Badders in the City' project gave away a free badminton racquet to anyone who brought a friend. They started off by planning a maximum of 70 racquets to give away, but have found it works so well that they're continuing with the offer.

Offers/deals

The Tameside Us Girls project offered a discounted monthly membership deal (£15) for use of all of their leisure centres through the internet site Groupon. The deal sold over 310 vouchers and included usage of gym, pool and spa facilities. A large proportion of people redeeming vouchers are female and many of these bought vouchers with friends or family members.

The Salford Us Girls project is considering introducing a possible credit system in which participants build credits each time they visit the pool which they can accumulate to pay for a free spa day.

Top tips

- Don't be afraid to charge a small fee – this puts a value on the programme but keep costs low – and offer concessions.
- Offer an initial free taster session followed by low cost (£1–£3) pay and play activity sessions.
- Consider introducing a loyalty card to earn free sessions and goodies.
- Offer group discount schemes and incentives for bringing friends/family.
- Think about low cost activities – for example setting up a jogging group, doing activity in a park or open space.
- Hire/use of any equipment should be included in the price of the session.

Further information

www.usgirls.org.uk



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