



Gender Equity at the Local Club Level

World Wheelchair Rugby Gender Equity Playbook
for the Club System

Photo credit:
Laurent Bagnis



Gender Equity at the Local Club Level



World Wheelchair Rugby has a goal to increase the participation of women+ at all levels of the sport. Local clubs have a major role in this work.

This Playbook provides tools and resources to clubs to support us in this goal. We encourage club organizers and community leaders to adapt this playbook to fit their local context.

This content was created through contributions from athletes, leaders and support volunteers, and sport experts across 29 countries. We thank everyone who has contributed and those who will use this valuable resource to help grow our sport.

Note: This Playbook presumes wheelchair rugby programs exist in your community and can be adapted. If you are new to the sport of wheelchair rugby and would like to start your own program or connect with an organizer, please contact World Wheelchair Rugby at:

office@worldwheelchair.rugby

Important note on language: To simplify the document and increase ease of reading, we are using the term women+ to include girls, women, and non-binary individuals, with the goal of inclusivity.

How to Understand and Implement this Playbook

Below are key details to guide your understanding and use of this Playbook.

Guiding Principles

PRIORITIZE COLLABORATION

We recommend connecting with fellow club organizers, your state or provincial sport organization, and community members. These groups can support your work to increase the number of women+ in your club. We also recognize the actions and recommendations contained in this Playbook will continue to evolve. Share your learnings with others. This will improve programming across the global membership and advance our gender equity work.

INCREMENTAL IMPLEMENTATION

This resource offers actions for every club, no matter their resources or abilities. Whether you implement every recommendation or start with some best practices you are part of positive progress. If your club and state or provincial sport organization can fully adopt the Playbook, that is ideal. However, we recognize that resources and capabilities vary across the global membership.

ADAPT TO FIT YOUR CLUB'S NEEDS

This resource was made with the understanding that there is no single way to increase participation in wheelchair rugby among women+. We have included best practices and examples that are meant to be adapted to your club's needs and context.

Key Terms

GENDER EQUITY

Equity and equality are often mistakenly used interchangeably. Equality means that everyone, regardless of who they are, gets access to the same resources and benefits. Equity means we distribute resources to meet the unique needs of individuals or groups. For this strategy, we are interested gender equity, meaning using tactics and recommendations that fit the needs women+. To learn more about gender equity, [click here](#).

BEST PRACTICES

This Playbook provides, among other resources, best practices to increase the number of women+ in your club's programs. Integrate these best practices into your existing club programming and into new programming targeted at women+.

PEER MENTORSHIP

This document uses "peer mentorship" to mean a woman+ who is already engaged in wheelchair rugby (or para sport). They support new participants of the same gender in learning the sport's basics and building social connections. These individuals encourage their fellow participants to continue growing in the sport.

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Best Practices for **Recruiting** & **Retaining Women+**

In consultation with athletes, leaders, and experts from across the globe, we created a list of best practice tactics for increasing the participation of women+ in your local club system. We have organized these best practices to cover the journey from discovery to trial and ongoing participation.

We remind readers that this Playbook is created to be adapted. The tactics we have collected should be applied to your existing programming or integrated into new events or programs. No matter your approach, these best practices will help us to achieve our goal.

Best practices



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Promoting Your Event or Program To Women+:

Engage with the community inside and outside of your club

Some women+ who are eligible to take part in wheelchair rugby do not receive support from a rehab centre or have limited access to one. New outreach channels may help you connect with these women+. As a starting point, try recruiting through other care providers such as physio clinics, amputee coalitions, orthotists and prosthetists and any other allied health professionals that may engage with potentially eligible participants.

Creating Curriculum for your Program or Event:

Prioritize community and connection on and off the court

We know a primary motivation for women+ joining the sport is to be a part of a community and a team. Create chances for participants to socialize and build community on and off the court. Examples include: organizing a dinner after the event, adding a self-care activity, or another fun, accessible activity.

Create opportunities to share lived experiences

Your program and events create opportunities for women+ to share their lived experiences outside of the court with one another. Consider creating safe spaces for social interactions to allow room for these vital conversations. If there is interest, you may consider inviting a qualified specialist to speak to participants. An

illustrative example could be an expert or an athlete with lived experience coming to share advice about travelling with a disability.

Requirements for your Event or Program:

Women+ coaches & mentors

It's vital to your program's success to have visible gender representation on your facilitation team. If you lack a qualified woman+ coach or mentor, find a willing volunteer to shadow your program facilitator and join their team. Note we have also included a checklist for recruiting and retaining women+ leaders in this Playbook.

Provide opportunities for participants to try equipment, including a game chair

Making equipment available to participants to try is vital to helping them feel comfortable with the sport. We recognize that every club will have

different access to equipment, but providing gloves, game ball (standard volleyball) and a game chair is a great starting point. If your club does have access to game chairs built for women+'s bodies, we recommend providing access for participants to try these game chairs.

Prioritize inclusion education

As a club leader or organizer, it is important that you model the desire to learn about inclusion practices for your wider team. To support you and your team, we have created a list of free online resources. Immerse yourself and your team in these resources to help create an inclusive culture and environment in your club. Use this learning and your follow-up feedback to improve your understanding of gender inclusion in the sport.

Best practices

Requirements for your Event or Program (continued):

Leverage the power of peer mentorship

Pairing new participants with existing women+ club players is a great way to help newcomers connect to your community and continue participating in the sport. Some clubs may not have any women+ in their community. In this case, we recommend reaching out to your state or provincial sport organization, asking them to connect you to leaders in other clubs.

Create a culture of safe sport

Review and discuss the current policies on safe sport practices, reporting, and implementation. These policies will help you and your team create the environment to include and keep more women+.

Acknowledge the role of the participant's broader community (family, care givers, friends, etc.)

Finding ways to involve a woman+'s community can encourage their participation. You may decide to allow participants to bring a friend or family member to your event or program. Through this, your club may gain an extra new player or a volunteer.

Offer childcare or open the event up to families

Some women+ do not participate because of competing family responsibilities. To reduce the chances of this happening, consider offering childcare. If not, inform participants before the event, giving them time to make arrangements. Another option is to open the event to participants' families, who may be able to watch the kids during the event.

Funding for sustained programming

A recurring event or program will have a greater impact than a one-off. We know that funding is vital to sustaining your events or programs. Building relationships with your community opens new funding opportunities. Consider community organizations or local businesses that could partner with your club.

Building Bridges to Retain Event or Program Participants:

Follow up with participants

Regardless of your event or program format, following up with participants is a powerful way to keep them engaged and gather feedback to improve your program. Try asking mentors to reach out to participants after the program to get feedback that can be applied to future programs and keep the connection active.

Communicate the development pathway

It is important for participants to understand the opportunities for growth in the sport and the steps to achieve their goals. Take time during your event or program to share the athlete development pathway. Make sure to explain the success criteria and performance benchmarks at each level. Having these conversations early and often will increase the chances of retention and advancement to high-performance competition.

How to Measure the Success of your Program:

Have a succession plan

Your program's success should be measured by more than just new participants. It should also include actions taken to ensure your program's long-term sustainability. Plan for who will replace you and your team. This will ensure you seek out and mentor new leaders to continue your program's goals.

Sentiment & Recommendation Metrics

Along with your follow-up, you can share a survey to understand participants' satisfaction with your event. It could be short (3-5 questions) and use a free online tool (e.g. Google Forms, SurveyMonkey). Ask questions like: (1) Did the participant have fun? (2) Did they feel welcomed? (3) Would they recommend the event or program to a friend? (4) Do they plan on continuing to play the sport? Use the responses to measure your success over time and improve your event or program.



Creating New 'Try' Event Programming

We recommend creating new targeted events or programs if you have available resources. This should be in addition to integrating the best practices into your current events and programming. We created two illustrative formats: a single-day try event and a multi-day program. These formats create a low-barrier entry for girls, women, and non-binary individuals into your club community.

A key goal of these events and programs is to encourage community among women+. With this goal in mind, we encourage you to consider the age of participants. You may run events for girls to try wheelchair rugby. You may also decide to run a mixed-age event or program to include girls, their family members, and friends. Whatever your decision, please consider age-appropriate activities when planning.

Two formats to progress gender equity

Please remember to adapt these formats to your local club context.

Single Day Try Events

Focus is on fun, and community with some sport.

Participants meet peers, participate in beginner drills, and learn some of the basics of playing wheelchair rugby. Participants should also leave with an understanding of the opportunities available to them in the sport.

All of this in a fun environment where the focus is on play, not performance.

PROS:

- ✓ Less funding required
- ✓ Lighter on logistics

CONS:

- ✗ Less time for deep community building
- ✗ Less time to explore gender-specific health and the basics of the sport
- ✗ Less likely to get commitments from out-of-market participants

Multi-Day Programs

Everything in the single-day try event, but more depth on the community, health and wellness, and the sport.

The multi-day format allows more time to go deeper into components such as equipment, transferring, gender-specific health and wellness. Participants are equipped with a deeper understanding of the sport through a gamified learning approach.

PROS:

- ✓ More time for social/community building opportunities
- ✓ Time for gender-specific health component
- ✓ Time for building a greater understanding of the basics of the sport
- ✓ More likely to attract out-of-city participants (ex. making the trip for a weekend)

CONS:

- ✗ Higher cost (more venue time booked, food costs, staff hours)
- ✗ More complex logistically (transportation considerations, hotel considerations, staff and volunteer requirements).

Note: The structure of your multi-day program should be adapted to fit your participants' and clubs' needs. Depending on your location, you can choose to run your program over a weekend or break it into sessions over several weeks.

Try Event Program Checklist

We recommend spending 50% of your planning time on the first three steps in this checklist. These steps are vital to getting women+ to start their wheelchair rugby journey.

1 Promotion

- Reach out to places where women+ with a disability may engage. For example, local care providers, like physio clinics, amputee coalitions, orthotists, prosthetists, rehab centres and any other allied health professionals that may engage with potentially eligible participants.
- The images, videos, and materials to promote the event or program:
 - Include real women+ athletes both on and off the court.
 - Emphasize the fun, fitness, and social elements of the sport over contact and physicality.
 - Show the broad range of disabilities that an athlete can live with and still be eligible to take part in the sport.
- Explicitly address communications to women+.

2 Sign-up

- Sign-up for the program can be completed by using an accessible, online registration form which is created using gender neutral language (see the requirements for a sign-up form on page 18).
- Where registrants are asked to identify themselves, allow them to self-identify by gender, sexuality, and race/ethnicity.
- Registration form includes a step for participants to share any accommodation needs they have ahead of the event.
- Included a space in on registration form for registrants to share their motivations, goals and ambitions in wheelchair rugby.
- To help prepare for the social component of the program, ask participants to share their interests, hobbies, etc.
- Include a prompt for participants to share who they may bring with them to the event or program (family members, friends, etc.)
- Include a field that asks participant's consent to take images during the event or program and use those images in future promotion.
- Include a prompt for the registrant to share their t-shirt size for their welcome package (if applicable).

3 Pre-event

Share a message from the organizer or the club's women+ mentors with registered participants at least one week in advance. The message should express excitement to meet participants and outlines what to expect on the event day(s). The pre-event message includes:

- Who will be facilitating the event, their profiles and description of their role in wheelchair rugby.
- What equipment will be available on the day of the event.
- What they should wear/bring with them.
- When to arrive and how long the event will last.
- Information about the venue including accessibility, parking, gender neutral changing facilities, etc.
- Information about childcare (if included, details about what that will look like and if not offering, advanced warning so registrants can make the necessary arrangements).
- An overview of the event or program agenda (including expected outcomes, food and social offerings).
- A key contact that can be reached with questions before and on the day of the event.

4 Event or Program

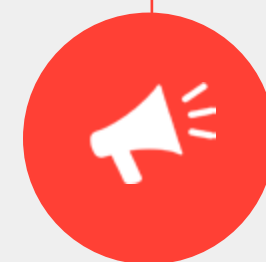
- Who will be facilitating the event, their profiles and Peer mentors have been briefed and arrive early to greet participants as they arrive.
- Hand out the participant welcome packages which include their t-shirt and print informational documents (if applicable).
- Facilitators have been briefed and have their program plans.
- Facilitators begin the event or program with a fun icebreaker to introduce all the participants, mentors and volunteers.
- Facilitators present a code of conduct that ensures a safe, welcoming environment for all participants. The facilitators also review the event plan, emphasizing fun and progress over performance.
- During drills and lessons, the facilitators remind participants of the code as outlined in their program plans.
- Facilitators have set up the social component of the event or program which has been created based on the information shared by participants in the sign-up (e.g. a pop quiz with a prize, sharing a meal, mini spa hour, etc.)
- Closing out the event or program, the facilitators have presented and answered questions about the athlete development pathway and where/how to access next steps.

5 Follow-up

- Contact participants, sharing opportunities to join future club activities. This message also includes relevant information such as the accessibility of the facility, if childcare is provided, and what equipment will be available.
- As part of the follow-up outreach to participants, ask participants if they enjoyed the event and for any feedback to improve.
- Share participant feedback with state or provincial sport organization and fellow club organizers so everyone can apply the learnings to their programs and events.

Single Day Try Event

What could your program look like?



Participants know the event is for them after seeing your promotion with real women+ athletes and register because your promotion highlights the fun and community that they can experience.



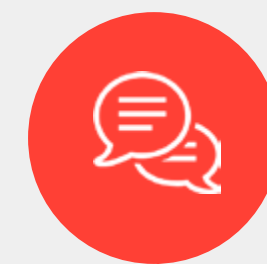
Participants arrive with their friend or family member and are welcomed by a peer mentor from the club who will help them throughout the program.



Participants receive welcome packages (t-shirts, information material including development pathway and where/how to access equipment).



Programming starts with an ice breaker and basic drills (supported by the participant's peer mentor).



A week after the event, peer mentors reach out to share upcoming club events and check-in for feedback.



Wrap up includes sharing the athlete development pathway, the growth opportunities they have available, and where to go to take that next step.

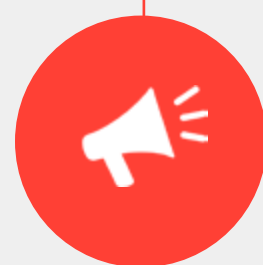


After participants complete the program curriculum, the organizers serve refreshments and snacks and they encourage participants to mingle and socialize.

Multi-Day Event

What could your program look like?

Note: The multi-day event programming would include everything from the Single Day Try Event plus these additional elements.



Participants have signed up seeing your program promoted using images and videos of women+ athletes from all levels of play both on and off the court.



Participants have been assigned a peer mentor from the local club for the duration of the program. This peer mentor has already reached out to the participant letting them know what to expect on the first day.



Over the next number of days (two+) participants, their peer mentors and facilitators complete curriculum which includes a component on women+'s health and wellness (e.g. nutrition, mental health, menstrual health). The ABCs of wheelchair rugby (e.g. chair transfer, picking up the ball, how to wheel, handling skills, passing/forward/side volley, etc.). Social and community building elements like prizes and games have been used to keep it fun while reinforcing learnings.



At wrap up materials are distributed to share information on development pathways, participation opportunities, requirements along the pathway and key contacts to get more involved in the sport.



During this program, participants family and/or care givers are engaged to learn about the ways that they can be involved in the sport.



Increasing your Volunteers in Numbers & Diversity

To grow the number of women+ playing in clubs across the globe, we must also increase both the number and diversity of our volunteers in vital support roles. We have captured some best practices and considerations which can be adapted for your recruitment efforts.

Note that the pathways, requirements, and advancement opportunities for volunteer support and leadership roles can differ between countries, their states, and provinces. We recommend working with your state or provincial sport organization to ensure your volunteers understand these opportunities and requirements.

Women+ in Volunteer Support Roles

Regardless of the role, these are best practices identified to help you recruit and retain women+ volunteers:

Promoting Roles:

- Appeal to individuals already in volunteer roles to recruit women+ peers in their networks.
- Take advantage of out-of-sport partnerships and opportunities:
 - Many schools in have mandatory internship/volunteer requirements.
 - Consider post-secondary kinesiology, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, and recreational therapy departments.
- Communicate the benefits for women+ in these volunteer support roles; alignment with personal purpose, a chance to share their expertise, opportunities to learn and develop.
- Share the opportunities for fun, building social and professional networks, and the thrill of the sport in your promotion.

Recruiting for Roles:

- Have a process and policy in place that when an individual inquires about a role, they receive a timely response with clear next steps. Try to reply within 72 hours.
- In communications with new volunteers, make them aware of the opportunities for development and growth in the sport. Note: You will need to ask your PSO for details of the development pathways for the many roles in wheelchair rugby (e.g. coaching pathway and certifications).

Development in Roles:

- Connect new participants to a peer mentor (Note: If you currently do not have any women+ individuals volunteering in your club, consider reaching out to another para sport for support from one of their women+ leaders).
- Whenever possible, encourage volunteers to connect, creating formal or informal networks.

Retaining Volunteer Leaders:

- Give out awards or other forms of recognition to acknowledge volunteers and show appreciation.
- Collect qualitative data highlighting volunteer's perspectives across all roles.
- Encourage women+ volunteers to explore the many different roles within the sport. If they show interest in specializing in a role, support their growth and progression along the development pathway. professional networks, and the thrill of the sport in your promotion.



Thank you

Gender Equity at the Local Club Level

The Playbook in its entirety has been endorsed by **World Wheelchair Rugby** for use across all its global membership.

For questions about the gender equity strategy,
please contact World Wheelchair Rugby at:

office@worldwheelchair.rugby



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Laurent_Bagnis