Quest for Facilities A3 – Driving Participation

Guidance Notes

Focus:	The module focuses on increasing participation among inactive and underrepresented groups by delivering inclusive, innovative programmes, integrating targeted audiences into mainstream activities, building strategic partnerships, aligning with Sport England priorities, and fostering an inclusive, well-led, and sustainable organisational culture.

Key elements:

- Outreach to inactive or underrepresented groups
- Inclusive programmes for people with long-term health conditions and disabilities
- Integration of targeted audiences into mainstream activities and programming
- Strategic partnerships with communities, health bodies, and NGBs
- Programme innovation to boost access and tackle inequalities
- Alignment with Sport England priorities and local insight
- Inclusive culture and safeguarding
- Leadership visibility and communication
- Succession planning

Best Practice Examples

- Strategic Approach to Participation: Leading facilities have a clear, written plan for increasing participation that is based on local insight, community demographics, and participation data. The plan includes measurable targets for reaching underrepresented and inactive groups, such as older adults, people with disabilities, women and girls, people from lower-income areas, and ethnic minority communities. Participation planning is aligned with wider organisational, local authority, and Sport England priorities.
- Inclusive and Community-Focused Programming: Programmes are designed around community needs, ensuring everyone can find an activity that suits them. Inclusive and accessible sessions are available for people with long-term health conditions, disabilities, or other barriers to activity. Sessions are co-designed with participants, ensuring they reflect lived experiences and local priorities. Venues and timetables are accessible, flexible, and affordable, with adjustments made to remove barriers.
- Building Trust and Engaging Underrepresented Groups: Facilities actively reach out to underrepresented or inactive communities through trusted local partners such as schools, health providers, community leaders, and voluntary groups. Staff and instructors are trained in inclusive practice,

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Best Practice Examples (continued…)

cultural awareness, and communication to build trust and confidence. Outreach is consistent and focused on building lasting relationships rather than one-off projects.

- Supporting Transitions into Mainstream Programmes: There is a clear pathway for participants from targeted programmes to move into wider mainstream activities where appropriate. Staff and partners support these transitions through mentoring, introductions, or buddy systems. Examples include disability-specific programmes leading to integrated sessions, or health referral participants joining general fitness classes. These transitions are tracked and celebrated.
- Effective Staff Training and Development: All staff, including coaches, volunteers, and instructors, are trained in equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) principles, safeguarding, and community engagement. They are supported through ongoing professional development, including sharing best practice from Moving Communities and Activity Alliance. Leadership actively promotes an inclusive culture and recognises staff contributions to participation growth.
- Partnership and Collaboration: Strong relationships are built with local partners — including health and wellbeing boards, Active Partnerships, community groups, schools, and national governing bodies (NGBs). These partnerships help share resources, coordinate programmes, and target interventions where they are most needed. Collaborative initiatives demonstrate measurable community benefits, such as increased participation and improved health outcomes.
- Data-Driven Insight and Measurement: Participation data is routinely collected and analysed to identify trends, monitor progress, and highlight areas of inequality. This includes demographic breakdowns, attendance figures, and feedback from participants and partners. Insight is used to shape programming, staff training, and investment decisions. Systems such as Moving Communities dashboards are used to benchmark performance and evidence impact.
- Continuous Improvement and Impact Reporting: Regular reviews ensure participation plans remain relevant and effective. Learning from data, feedback, and evaluations is used to adapt programmes and improve inclusion. Impact is demonstrated through clear outcomes — such as increased participation among target groups, improved retention, and stronger community connections. Facilities share their results through reports, social media, and local networks to celebrate success and inspire others.
- Creating a Culture of Inclusion and Belonging: Inclusion is part of everyday practice. Leadership champions equity, and all staff understand their role in creating welcoming, inclusive spaces. Facilities celebrate diversity through events, communications, and recognition of achievements. Customers and communities feel seen, heard, and valued, contributing to higher satisfaction and retention.

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PLAN	
Challenge: What plans are in place to drive participation?	
Unsatisfactory	• No clear plans exist to increase participation • Participation initiatives are ad hoc and uncoordinated.
Satisfactory	• A basic plan exists for some activities or target groups • Some participation initiatives are scheduled, but coverage is inconsistent • Early consideration of local community needs or underrepresented groups is included.
Good	• A structured plan covers all key target groups and activities • Staff understand their roles, and targets and timelines are clear • The plan considers local insight and Sport England priorities.
Very Good	• A comprehensive plan covers all participation objectives, target groups, and activities • Goals, responsibilities, and timelines are clearly documented • Progress is reviewed regularly and adjustments are made based on data and feedback • Partnerships with communities, health bodies, and NGBs inform the plan.
Excellent	• Participation planning is fully embedded in organisational strategy • Goals, responsibilities, and timelines are SMART • The plan is evidence-based, informed by local insight, national priorities, and stakeholder consultation • Continuous monitoring and evaluation ensure ongoing improvements • The plan drives inclusion, innovation, and measurable increases in participation.

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DO	
Challenge: Is the general program inclusive and meet the needs of the community?	
Unsatisfactory	• Programs are not inclusive and do not meet community needs.
Satisfactory	• Some programmes are inclusive • Community needs are partially considered • Efforts to reach underrepresented groups are inconsistent.
Good	• Programmes are broadly inclusive and reflect identified community needs • Feedback from participants is used occasionally to make improvements • Accessibility considerations for people with disabilities or long-term health conditions are included.
Very Good	• Programmes are fully inclusive, covering a wide range of participants, abilities, and needs • Feedback, participation data, and insight from local communities are used to adjust delivery • Inclusion is consistently promoted across all mainstream activities.
Excellent	• All programmes are intentionally inclusive and designed to meet the needs of the full diversity of the community • Programmes proactively reduce barriers to participation and integrate underrepresented groups into mainstream services • Continuous feedback and insight drive improvements and innovation

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DO	
Challenge: How do you deliver inclusive and accessible programs for people with long-term health conditions, disabilities, or other barriers to activity?	
Unsatisfactory	• No targeted programmes exist • Barriers to participation are not addressed.
Satisfactory	• Some programmes target specific groups • Barriers are identified but only partially addressed.
Good	• Programmes are designed for specific groups and address most barriers • Staff are trained to support participants in targeted activities • Early pathways into mainstream programmes are considered.
Very Good	• Inclusive and accessible programmes are consistently delivered • Barriers are proactively addressed • Clear pathways exist to support participants moving into mainstream activities • Staff have specialist training for inclusive delivery.
Excellent	• Programmes fully embed inclusive practice • Barriers are systematically removed • Structured pathways ensure participants can transition into mainstream programmes successfully • Measurable outcomes show sustained engagement and improved access.

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DO	
Challenge: How do you engage and build trust with underrepresented or inactive groups and individuals?	
Unsatisfactory	• There is little or no engagement with underrepresented or inactive groups or individuals. • The facility does not seek to understand their different needs, experiences or barriers to participation. • Relationships are absent or transactional, and there is little evidence of trust.
Satisfactory	• Some engagement takes place with selected groups or individuals, but it is irregular, short-term or mainly focused on promoting existing activities. • Feedback is gathered occasionally, although individual needs and barriers are not consistently explored or acted upon. • Trust depends on isolated relationships rather than a planned approach.
Good	• The facility uses local insight to identify underrepresented and inactive groups and individuals, then engages them through appropriate channels and trusted community partners. • Staff listen to collective and individual experiences, respond respectfully to identified barriers, and adapt communication or support where practical. • Ongoing contact and visible follow-through are beginning to build trust and participation.
Very Good	• Engagement with underrepresented and inactive groups and individuals is planned, inclusive and sustained. • A range of methods, including outreach, one-to-one conversations, accessible consultation and work with trusted partners, enable people to participate in ways that suit their needs. • Individuals and communities help shape solutions, staff consistently act on feedback, and relationship quality and participation outcomes are reviewed.
Excellent	• Trust is deeply embedded through long-term, authentic and mutually beneficial relationships with underrepresented and inactive groups, communities and individuals. • People with diverse lived experiences are equal partners in identifying barriers, co-designing and evaluating opportunities, with personalised support provided where needed to enable participation. • The facility demonstrates that feedback leads to action, addresses power and accessibility barriers, evaluates trust and outcomes across different groups and individuals, and continually adapts its approach based on evidence and learning.

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DO	
Challenge: How do you support participants from targeted groups to access and transition into mainstream services where appropriate?	
Unsatisfactory	• There is no process to help participants from targeted or specialised programmes move into mainstream activities • Participants often drop out after initial engagement • Staff have limited awareness or skills to support transition
Satisfactory	• Some informal support is offered to help participants continue activity, but this is inconsistent • Limited signposting or basic advice is provided to participants about mainstream opportunities • Staff awareness of pathways is improving but not embedded.
Good	• Clear pathways exist to support participants moving from targeted or introductory programmes into mainstream sessions • Staff encourage participants to progress and can explain available opportunities • Adjustments or flexible options are offered to make transition easier (e.g., beginner sessions, buddy systems, flexible pricing) • Early monitoring of progression and retention is taking place.
Very Good	• Transition pathways are planned and communicated clearly to participants and partners • Staff are confident and trained to support participants through change, addressing barriers such as confidence, cost, or accessibility • Support methods include mentoring, peer support, or referral follow-ups • Data is collected on transition and retention to improve future delivery • Partnerships (e.g., with health, community, or inclusion organisations) help sustain participation.
Excellent	• Structured and well-resourced pathways enable participants from targeted groups to confidently move into and sustain mainstream participation • Transition is supported through staff mentoring, community champions, and inclusive programme design • Barriers (financial, social, or physical) are systematically identified and removed • Evidence shows strong retention, sustained participation, and increased confidence among previously inactive or underrepresented groups • Insights from transition success are shared across the organisation and partners to shape future inclusion strategies.

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MEASURE AND REVIEW	
Challenge: How do you measure and review the success of your program and initiatives?	
Unsatisfactory	• There are no systems in place to measure or review the success of participation programmes • Data such as attendance or participant feedback is not collected or reviewed • There is no evidence that programmes have made a difference.
Satisfactory	• Basic data (such as attendance, participation numbers, or general feedback) is collected occasionally • Some informal reviews take place, but there is limited analysis or action taken • Improvements are not clearly linked to evidence or outcomes.
Good	• Participation is measured regularly using attendance, retention, and basic satisfaction data • Simple tools such as surveys, feedback forms, or Moving Communities reports are used to track performance • Results show some positive change in engagement or satisfaction • Data is shared with staff and used to make small improvements to programmes.
Very Good	• A consistent measurement and review system is in place for all participation programmes • Multiple sources of data are used (e.g., attendance, NPS, feedback, retention, equality data, and insight from partners) • Results are reviewed throughout the year and used to shape delivery and planning • Evidence shows clear improvements in participation rates, inclusion, and customer satisfaction • Findings are shared with staff, partners, and stakeholders.
Excellent	• A robust performance and insight framework measures participation, inclusion, retention, and satisfaction across all programmes • Data is collected, analysed, and benchmarked using national tools such as Moving Communities or Sport England insight • Measurable improvements are demonstrated across all target groups, with sustained increases in participation and inclusion • Results directly inform strategic planning, resource allocation, and innovation • Outcomes and success stories are communicated widely to celebrate impact and encourage continuous improvement.

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IMPACT	
Challenge: How have your programmes and initiatives had a positive impact in the last year?	
Unsatisfactory	• No evidence that programmes or initiatives have made a difference • Participation levels have stayed the same or declined • There are no measures in place to assess impact or outcomes • Feedback from participants or partners is not collected or used.
Satisfactory	• Some evidence of positive change, such as increased attendance or engagement in a few programmes • Impact is assessed informally, often through basic participation numbers or anecdotal feedback • There is limited analysis of who is benefiting or whether outcomes are sustained • Improvements are not clearly linked to specific actions or plans.
Good	• Clear evidence shows that programmes are having a positive impact on participation and engagement • Participation data and feedback are collected and reviewed to identify what works • Examples show improved inclusion of targeted or underrepresented groups • Changes have been made to programmes based on learning and insights.
Very Good	• Strong evidence demonstrates measurable positive outcomes, such as increased participation among targeted groups, improved retention, or enhanced wellbeing. • Data, insight, and partner feedback are routinely used to evaluate and refine programmes • Impact reports are shared with staff and stakeholders to show progress and inform decisions • There is a clear link between planning, delivery, and improved outcomes.
Excellent	• The facility demonstrates significant, sustained positive impact on participation, inclusion, and community wellbeing • Robust evaluation processes track both quantitative and qualitative outcomes (e.g., participation growth, confidence, health improvements) • Impact is independently verified or benchmarked using tools such as Moving Communities or Activity Alliance frameworks • Learning from impact evaluation directly shapes future plans and funding bids • Evidence shows long-term improvements in access, equality, and sustained participation across all groups.