

## **SPO159**

# **RTS VOLUNTEERS PERCEPTIONS OF SUPPORT - A CASE STUDY OF ACTIVE SPORTS**

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### **Context**

Support for sport volunteers is seen as fundamental to the well being of sport in the UK and given that there are approximately 110,000 amateur sport clubs run by 1.5 million volunteers, it is not surprising that the Strategy Unit/DCMS' document *Game Plan* stated "it is therefore crucial that the role of volunteers in sport is fully supported, with an emphasis on better capacity building"(Cabinet Office, 2002:166).

Volunteers are fundamental to the success of both regular and non-regular sport activities, participation and events and serve in many positions as coaches, administrators, fund-raisers, and committee members within sports clubs (Shibli et al, 1999, Nichols et al, 1998). In marked contrast to formal sports volunteering which is linked to the instrumental deployment of individuals, the informal variation tends to be characterised by its location, which is often within a mutual aid organisation with a distinct tendency for autonomy which necessitates an avoidance for being 'managed' or controlled (Nichols & Garrett, 2001). These organisations (community sports clubs) usually recruit their volunteers from 'within' and often they are either former active participants (players) or parents of current young active participants (players). Thus for informal sports volunteers they are likely to desire a support network (if any) that is loose, ad hoc and not process-driven, so they can remain in control, with ownership of the activity in question.

The purpose of this paper is to evaluate the types of volunteers in community sports clubs and identify whether the nature of support they both perceive they need and receive, correlates to that provided locally and nationally. In particular, it is about evaluating the perceptions of volunteers from the Active Sports(AS) programme.

### **Methods**

The community sports clubs were selected from two regions, the West Midlands and Hampshire and from the ten Active Sports. Using a stratified sampling technique, 200 clubs were surveyed employing a semi-structured questionnaire administered over 3 months. Individual subjects were volunteers actively engaged in non-performance roles, i.e. acting in committee type roles in the clubs. Postulating that most local, amateur, grass roots clubs have similar organisational structures, we were able to estimate that there would be about 4-6 individuals associated with each club in those roles.

### **Results**

The results were analysed using SPSS, and indicated that:

1. Each of the 10 sports differed in the level of support volunteers received
2. Sports with modernised infrastructures proved able to offer more support to volunteers
3. Sports volunteers from Governing Bodies with a strong regional/county structure perceived they received more support from their sports
4. The overwhelming majority of sports volunteers felt that local authorities should play a pivotal role in providing them with generic support such as training in recruiting, retaining and recognising volunteers
5. Community sports club volunteers (CSCVs) were from the older age groups and of a white, middle class background
6. The same volunteers were carrying out the same role year in, year out
7. Most volunteers were not aware of the opportunities for support that existed
8. The majority of CSCVs matched the 'informal profile' and were members of 'dense' social and support networks
9. CSCVs under-represented young people and minority ethnic groups

10. The support that CSCVs requested were in: training, information, identifying sources of and applying for funding, best practice, sharing resources
11. Strategic formalisation was a key issue, and only large sports clubs took advantage of national and regional support opportunities because often they were strategically linked to wider sport development strategies.

### **Discussions/Implications**

Our findings showed that CSCVs were not satisfied with the level of support they were offered in terms of its nature and direction. In particular, they were unhappy with the manoeuvrings and strategic management of support that was offered by agencies such as Sport England, local authorities, and the governing bodies of sport (NSOs).

The sports with modernised infrastructure, not surprisingly, were those who were considered to have supported their volunteers more effectively than the less modernised sports. Sports such as Rugby Union, which has a Volunteer Coordinator, were recognised by their volunteers as having invested significant time and resources in volunteers. Sports with a regional/county structure were again seen by their volunteers as being more supportive.

Government and local authorities in Britain are increasingly trying to change the traditional way community sports clubs and their volunteers have operated for over 100 years by trying to move them from self-sufficient entities able to manage and control their own destinies, to organisations that have to rely on formal support for their future survival and growth Houlihan (2002). It is within this wider context that the symbiotic relationship of the larger clubs, in terms of contributing to delivering local authority sports development targets, can be understood, since they were the ones engaged in receiving formal forms of support and in requesting assistance with grant applications. This research showed that the majority of community sports clubs, often with a small membership, objected to the intervention of any outside agency with the operation of their club.

### **References**

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