

A large purple silhouette of a cyclist is the central focus, with a smaller purple silhouette of a runner to the left. A thick purple line runs horizontally across the page, passing behind the text.

# How to... 'choose between different facility settings when planning activities for young women'

## *Why it's important*

Sport and physical activity can take place almost anywhere from an empty meeting room to a purpose built sports facility. Project managers must understand some of the reasons for and against using particular facilities and settings when planning their activity for women and girls. Different facilities will create different environments - this is important too!



Us Girls Activity Programme,  
East Durham College

## *Factors to consider*

### **Female only sessions vs female exclusive environment**

When setting up a new activity for women and girls the environment you want to create is important and may impact on the participants that attend.

**Female only sessions** – We know that many women prefer to exercise alongside other females and not males. Setting up and advertising females only sessions will encourage more non-sporty females to attend. The quality of the session coach or leader however is more important than whether they are male or female but being able to guarantee a female coach or leader may make the session more attractive. Us Girls projects predominately deliver female only sessions.

**Female exclusive environments** – In addition to the sessions being female only participants from some cultural groups will need the coach or leader to be female in order for them to take part. They may also need the environment to be exclusively for females where there are no males present and the activity is out of sight of male spectators. Covering glass doors and windows with black paper and using simple signage can be an effective and easy way of achieving this.

Depending on the target group think about whether you need to deliver female only sessions, whether a female instructor is important and whether you need to create a female exclusive environment. Don't forget that female only sessions will be appealing for many young women and girls, not just those who face cultural barriers.



## Which facility to choose

**Local authority leisure centre** – Leisure centres are often seen as places where only sporty people go so can be intimidating for new participants. If you plan to use a leisure centre for your activities make sure it is a place that the participants are comfortable with – check with them in advance. You will often find that leisure centres have a wide range of activity spaces, facilities and equipment making them attractive venues for new activity. Very few leisure centres can offer female exclusive space where there are no viewing areas to bear this in mind.

Leisure centres are often used as an exit route to sessions that are taking place in the community. On completion of a community-based project participants can be signposted to leisure centre activities where they can continue to be active long-term.

**School, college or university** – School, college or university facilities are good to use with students as they are familiar to them. The majority of Us Girls projects reported good attendances for their sessions that take place on college sites. These sites can also be very attractive for evening activities. They are often not as busy as leisure centres and can often guarantee female exclusive sessions. Be mindful that some younger participants who felt disengaged with sport at school may not be attracted to a session taking place at their old school. Making it clear to them that the session will not be like their PE lessons is important.

**Indoor community venue** – There are many different types of indoor community venue such as church halls, community halls, youth and community centres, libraries and other cultural venues. The one thing they all have in common is that they are located at the heart of the community and are therefore often seen as more accessible and welcoming than leisure centres. The facilities and access to equipment may not be as good as a leisure centre or schools but they are often well suited to female exclusive environments.

Community venues will most certainly have other non-sporting activities taking place on a regular basis so use these groups to conduct your consultation and promote your activity.

**Outdoor community venue** – Outdoor community facilities such as multi-use games areas are becoming very popular places to deliver community activity. As with any outdoor facility bad weather can affect the number of participants that will attend. These facilities are usually free or relatively cheap to hire which will help keep the costs down. Be aware that some facilities will be for all public use so you may not be able to book in advance. There is also no guarantee of the facility providing a female exclusive environment and therefore spectators and onlookers may be present. Also think about somewhere safe for participants to leave their belongings while they are taking part.

**Outdoor public open space** – Outdoor public spaces such as parks and green open spaces are becoming more popular as places to deliver sport and physical activity sessions but again bad weather can have an impact on regular participant numbers. Parks or green open spaces are often free or cheap to use if delivering a community activity. Make sure you choose a suitable meeting point for the start of the activity and ensure people are aware that if they are late you will be leaving the meeting point at a certain time. Again think about somewhere for the participants to leave their belongings, can the instructor drive to the session so that participants can leave their belongings in the car?

**Sports club facility** – A number of sports clubs are starting to take on the ownership of their own facilities. Using a sports club owned facility may be a more cost-effective option especially at times when the club is not using it. You may be able to make some good links with other activities that are taking place at the club. Is there an activity that you can run for the mums while the children are taking part in the club activities?

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*“Holding a class at a sixth form college works well as you have a captive audience.”*

**Us Girls Islington**



**Workplace** – Many workplaces will have a large meeting room or unused space where light physical activity such as Zumba, yoga or table tennis can be delivered. By delivering sessions in the workplace it will be easier for the staff to take part before work, at lunchtime or after work. With a ready-made target group, consultation to find out what activities the participants want should be relatively easy. It is important that the employer is supportive of the programme; most employers will be because active people have fewer days off sick than those that are inactive. It can however be hard to engage with organisations to set up workplace initiatives so be prepared to sell the benefits of your project or activity to them.

### **Commercial gym/fitness centre**

Commercial gyms and fitness centres will often have nice facilities and can provide access to a range of equipment, there will however be a higher cost associated with this. Some commercial gyms may not support community activity well as they will often be driven by profits made from selling memberships. Like leisure centres many participants may consider that commercial gyms are for sporty people and may not be comfortable or confident using this type of facility.



Us Girls Active Newcastle

## **Other things to think about**

**Travel and transport links** – Make sure the venue you choose has parking available or good transport links so that those using public transport can get there easily by bus or metro/tube. Consider whether the venue is near a bus stop and whether the walk from the stop to the facility is well lit along footpaths. Try and think about whether any of these factors put women and girls off coming to the facility.

**Cost** – Facility hire can be a significant cost for sport or physical activity programmes. Consider whether you can partner with a facility provider to ensure the costs are kept as low as possible. If you are looking to sustain an activity make sure the cost of the facility can be covered by the participants paying to attend the session without making the cost a barrier. (See 'How to ensure sport and activity sessions for young women are affordable'.)

**Equipment** – Make sure the venue you choose will provide access to the required equipment. If you are required to purchase new equipment remember to include this in the project costs. If you are purchasing equipment consider whether the venue can provide suitable and safe storage.

**Health and safety** – As with any sport or physical activity session the welfare of the participants is very important. When choosing a venue you will need to be aware of who is responsible for health and safety procedures and who is responsible for public liability. At a leisure centre it is likely to be the facility provider but at an indoor or outdoor community facility the activity provider may be responsible and will therefore need to have suitable procedures in place, including insurance cover, risk assessments, emergency action plans and suitable access to first aid. Coaches, instructors or leaders will need to be aware of these procedures.

**Venue availability** – Once a suitable venue has been chosen it is then important to make sure the correct day and time is available for the activity. Don't compromise on day and time if it may have an impact on the number of participants that are likely to attend. Make sure the booking is made in advance for enough weeks – find out when the renewal date is to ensure the facility doesn't get booked if you want to continue with the sessions. (See 'How to deliver activity for young women at the right time'.)



## *Case studies*

### **Newham Netball**

The Newham Netball project is working well because the women and girls are provided with a female only, safe and non-threatening environment. The sessions take place in the early evening at Lister Community School; a time and venue which suits the participants.

### **Derby College**

The Derby College Us Girls project is providing female only martial arts/self-defence and badminton sessions on the college site during lunchtimes and after college. This is attracting a large number of participants as it is taking place at a venue that is familiar to them and at a convenient time.

### **Us Girls Active Newcastle**

Us Girls Active Newcastle has chosen to use the Walker Activity Dome for several of its female only activity sessions. The 'Dome' as it is affectionately known has a long and positive history in the east of Newcastle and is well known within the local community. The venue is modern and attractive with a range of facilities and impressive social areas for the women to use before and after activities.

### **Us Girls Redbridge**

Us Girls Redbridge are delivering a weekly Return to Running session in Valentines Park. There is an agreed meeting point for the start of the activity which is at a café inside the park; this is mentioned on all promotional materials so that new participants know where to meet. The activity is cost effective to deliver because the park management only charge a small fee for community use.

## *Top tips*

- Choose a venue that participants are happy to use. Think about familiarity, safety and ease of access.
- Understand that non-sporty people will often not use leisure centres or private gyms – do you need to organise a visit or tour to make them comfortable with the venue?
- Consider providing female only sessions with female instructors. Try and choose a facility where viewing areas can be restricted in order to create a female exclusive environment.
- Does the venue also offer other activities that your Us Girls participants may enjoy? Are there venues where lots of women and girls already attend to access other services? Can you link Us Girls activity to these?

## *Further information*

[www.usgirls.org.uk](http://www.usgirls.org.uk)

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