



SPORT **HQ**

# Guide to diversity, equity and inclusion

**DELIVERING**  
FOR QUEENSLAND



**Queensland**  
Government

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### **The information presented in this guide:**

- is general in nature and does not consider your organisation's specific situation;
- is correct at time of publishing; and
- should not be considered as legal advice.

# Everyone has a place in sport

Sport and recreation organisations are the heart and soul of community sport. They transform a simple game into a vibrant community event, creating places where people can connect, grow and thrive. This guide is designed to help make your organisation a place where everyone feels they truly belong.

Creating an inclusive organisation is about more than being nice. It's one of the most powerful strategies for building a stronger, more successful organisation for the future. An organisation that is genuinely welcoming to all, is an organisation that will flourish.

There is a lot of information available to organisations to be able to learn and develop, and this guide provides an overview for organisations starting on their journey to be more inclusive and where to go to find more information.

## Benefits of an inclusive organisation

- A stronger, more meaningful connection to your local community
- A larger and more diverse pool of participants and volunteers
- A wider range of skills and perspectives to help your organisation thrive
- An enhanced reputation that attracts new sponsors and support

## What do we mean by diversity, equity and inclusion?

These terms are often used together, but they mean different things. Understanding them helps us take targeted action. The Australian Sports Commission defines them as!:

### Diversity

"All of the individual attributes and experiences that make us unique, including demographic diversity, cognitive diversity, background and lived experiences. Demographic diversity may or may not be visible and can include (but is not limited to) gender, marital or family status, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, disability, ethnicity, caring or family responsibilities, religious beliefs, cultural background and socio-economic background."

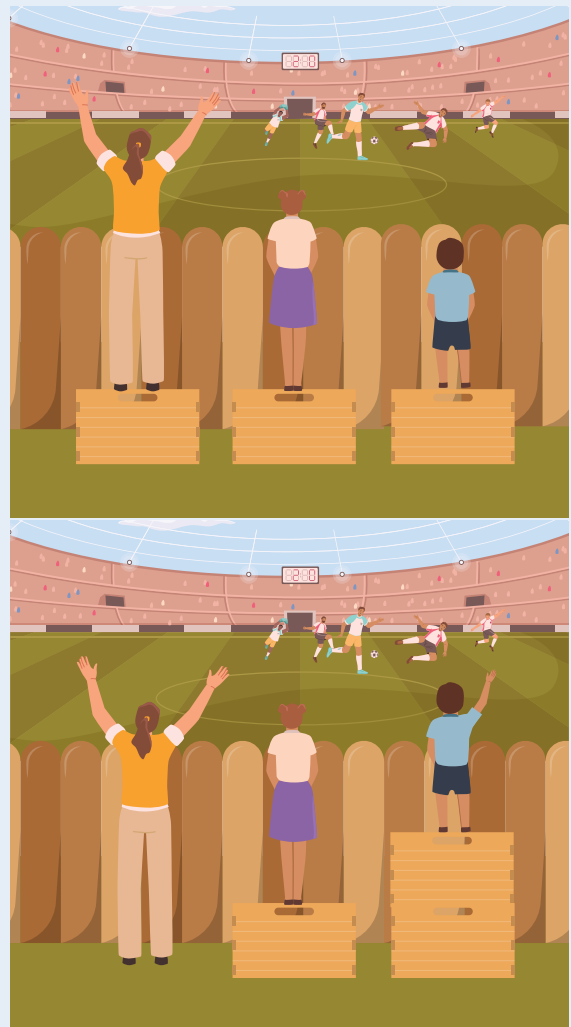
### Equity

"A process or adjustment, such as tailored support or distribution of resources, that considers an individual or group's unique needs to generate equal outcomes and provide fair access to opportunities."

### Inclusion

"Proactive and intentional behaviours that create safe and welcoming environments where people can fully contribute and feel a sense of wellbeing connection and belonging."

This illustration provides a visual explanation of the difference between equality and equity. While equality means giving everyone the same resources, equity means giving each person the specific resources they need to have a fair and equal outcome.



Creating a diverse, inclusive and equitable organisation can feel like a huge task, but it doesn't have to be. This guide is built on simple principles: **Start small. Listen first. Momentum beats perfection.**

# Where do we start?

The fact you are reading this guide says a lot about your commitment. It shows you are taking ownership of building a more inclusive organisation.



The best inclusion strategies don't start with assumptions. They start with understanding the real, lived experiences of your members and community.

Before you plan a new initiative, the most powerful and effective first step you can take is simply to ask and listen. This will help you uncover the hidden barriers and opportunities that are unique to your organisation and your community.

## Your organisation's purpose

Before you ask 'what' to do, it's important to be clear on your 'why'. The most successful inclusion initiatives are deeply connected to a organisation's overall vision and values. This ensures your actions are authentic and sustainable, not just a one-off task.

For guidance on defining your organisation's purpose, see the Sport HQ resources on Strategic Planning.

## Make it meaningful

The following listening exercise is a powerful way to bring your organisation's vision and values to life. The feedback you gather will help you make real, meaningful decisions that shape the future of your organisation. It's about building an organisation that truly serves its community.

### The most common mistake

The biggest mistake organisations make is assuming they know what people need. You could spend a whole season planning an initiative that misses the mark, only to find the real barrier was that training clashed with local shift work.

Listening first saves you time and ensures your actions have real impact.

## Your two-question survey

You don't need a complex, formal survey to get started. A simple "pulse survey" can reveal incredible insights into what's working and what's getting in the way for your members or broader community.

### 1. Ask two simple questions

You can do this with a sticky-note wall at an event, a quick online poll or just by having informal chats with people. Ask them:

- "What makes you feel welcome and valued?"
- "What gets in the way of you (or others) participating more fully?"

### 2. Listen to everyone

Make an effort to ask a wide range of people, not just your usual contacts. Chat with new parents, long-time members, diverse volunteers, players from different teams, and members of your community. Their perspectives will be invaluable.

### 3. Look for themes

The goal is to find simple, recurring issues. You might discover that the real barrier isn't what you thought. Perhaps training times consistently clash with work hours, or the online registration process is confusing for new families. These are issues you can readily fix.

# Welcoming First Nations peoples

The guidance on this page is informed by extensive research from the Australian Sports Commission, including the *Qualitative research into Indigenous Australians' Participation in Sports*<sup>2,3</sup>. Practical examples and resources have been drawn from Clearinghouse for Sport<sup>4</sup>.

Your organisation plays a vital role in fostering community and cultural connections. To create a truly welcoming and culturally safe space for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, it is essential to involve the entire community and nurture strong, respectful relationships. Research confirms that First Nations peoples are more likely to participate in sport when programs are culturally safe, respectful and inclusive of their cultural identity and practices.

## Consult first

Listening to community and members' voices ensures that activities are tailored to meet the cultural needs of participants, fostering a sense of belonging and pride.

Before you plan anything, consider the following:

- Contacting your local Aboriginal Land Council or a local Indigenous organisation
- **Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS):** provides guidelines on ethical community engagement
- **Queensland Government's Deadly Choices Program:** A leading example of community-driven health and sport initiatives

In collaboration with your local indigenous organisation, consider translating key materials into local Indigenous languages if appropriate.

## Foundations of a respectful environment

There are simple, visible actions your organisation can take to show respect and create a culturally safe space.

### 1. Take a stand against racism

Racism is a significant barrier to participation. Acknowledge this openly and ensure you have a clear process for responding to incidents effectively (as detailed in the *Sport HQ safeguarding guide*).

### 2. Display the flags

A simple, powerful sign of welcome is to fly the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags alongside the Australian flag. It's important to do this respectfully by following the official protocol for the order and display of the flags. Reconciliation Australia provides an [easy-to-follow guide](#) to help.

### 3. Acknowledge Country

Start events and meetings with a genuine Acknowledgement of Country.

For guidance on how to Acknowledge Country, visit [indigenous.gov.au](http://indigenous.gov.au)

### 4. Use an events calendar

Acknowledge and celebrate key dates, like NAIDOC Week and National Reconciliation Week, with a social media post or a notice in the clubhouse. Or even better, collaborate with a local Indigenous organisation to host an event at your organisation.

## Meaningful action and program design

True inclusion comes from actions that foster trust and show you are listening to the needs of the community.

### 1. Develop local leaders

The most powerful role models are often local coaches, umpires and committee members. Actively support and create pathways for First Nations people, especially women, to take on these leadership roles.

### 2. Be culturally sensitive and flexible

Recognise that family and community obligations are deeply important by appreciating personal circumstances and accommodating individual needs. A player might miss a game for 'Sad News' (Torres Strait Islander term that refers to the passing of a person), 'Sorry Business' (Aboriginal term that refers to the passing of a person) or other cultural commitments<sup>5</sup>. Your organisation's flexibility and understanding in these moments is a powerful sign of respect.

### 3. Encourage family and group participation

Design events and 'come-and-try' days that allow families and friends to participate together.

### 4. Incorporate traditional Indigenous games

The Australian Sports Commission has a free resource called 'Yulunga'<sup>6</sup> with over 100 traditional games. Including these games in a training session, a 'come-and-try' day, or a NAIDOC Week event is a fantastic way to celebrate culture and create a fun, welcoming environment for everyone.

## Taking the next step: A Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP)

For organisations ready to make a deeper, more strategic commitment, the next step is to explore developing a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP).

A RAP is a formal statement of commitment to reconciliation that provides a framework for taking meaningful action. A great starting point is to check if your state or national sporting body has its own RAP and align your organisation's efforts with their goals.

To learn more and see which sporting organisations already have a RAP, visit [Reconciliation Australia](#).

# Creating an organisation for everyone

The practical advice on these pages is guided by the Australian Sports Commission's *Understanding Our Diverse Audiences* resources<sup>6</sup>. The ASC resources also provide further strategies that can be used to guide your inclusion practices.

Your local community is a vibrant mix of different cultures, backgrounds and identities. Making a conscious effort to welcome everyone strengthens your organisation and makes it a true community hub where people feel they belong.



## Welcoming people from all cultures

For new arrivals or individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds, joining a sports team can be intimidating. Here are a few ways you can make it easier.

### 1. Use simple, clear language

Avoid using slang, acronyms or jargon in your communications, as it can be confusing for new members or those for whom English is a second language.

### 2. Offer help with registration

The process might be unfamiliar, so having someone available to assist can make a huge difference.

### 3. Create a 'buddy' system

Pair new members or families with an existing member who can show them around, introduce them to others and answer any questions. A friendly face can make all the difference in helping someone feel like they belong.

### 4. Showcase your diversity

Make sure the photos on your website and social media reflect the true diversity of your members, including people of all ages and cultures participating together.

## Supporting LGBTIQ+ people

A few simple but powerful actions can create an organisation where lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ+) people feel safe and respected and that they can be their authentic selves. Examples include:

### 1. Offering flexible uniform options

Where possible, avoid rigidly gendered designs. For example, offering shorts and singlets as separate items allows people to choose what feels most comfortable.

### 2. Using inclusive language

Using a person's correct name and pronouns is a fundamental sign of respect. Encourage a culture where it's normal to ask about this politely.

### 3. Showing visible support

Acknowledge days like Pride Month or Wear it Purple Day on your social media to show you are a safe and welcoming space.

### 4. Reviewing your registration forms

Can you add a 'non-binary/self-described' option or a space for gender? This small change signals a big welcome.

# Creating an organisation for everyone

## Including people with disability

Beyond making your facilities physically accessible, true inclusion is about communication and creating opportunities for participation. This could include:

### 1. Communicating your accessibility

Clearly state on your website what level of accessibility your organisation has. You could also include a simple 'Accessibility Map' to show where compliant footpaths, parking, facilities and pedestrian connections exist on and around your site. This helps people plan their visit with confidence.

### 2. Adapting your activities and programs

The best way to ensure everyone can participate is to be flexible. By working with a person with a disability, you can make simple adaptations to your activities. This could include using different equipment like softer balls, modifying the playing area, or focusing on skills-based drills to build confidence and ensure everyone can have fun.

### 3. Promoting your inclusive options

Use your website and social media to let people know about the accessible features of your organisation and any modified programs you offer. Make sure people know you're welcoming and ready for them.

### 4. Building your organisation's knowledge

Support a volunteer to become an 'Accessibility Champion' by completing the [free online course](#) from Disability Sports Australia. This gives you an in-house expert to help guide your inclusion efforts.

#### A note on language:

To create a respectful and inclusive environment, always put the person first<sup>7</sup>. For example, use the term 'a person with disability' rather than 'a disabled person'.

## Engaging women and girls

Keeping women and girls engaged requires a targeted and considered approach. A few practical examples are:

### 1. Ask what is needed

Don't assume, create simple ways to ask, e.g. a survey for female members about their preferred training times, program types (social vs. competitive) and uniform styles, and what barriers may exist to participate in all areas such as a player, official or committee member.

### 2. Foster social connection and fun

For many women and girls, the social aspect of sport is a key motivator. Encourage a team culture that values connection and fun.

### 3. Promote female leaders

Actively recruiting women for coaching and committee roles provides visible role models and can lead to greater positive participation changes through the organisation.

### 4. Celebrate achievements equally

Give the same level of promotion and recognition to your women's and girls' teams as you do to the men's and boys' teams.



# Creating places for everyone

The core concepts on this page are adapted from the comprehensive resource, *A universal design guide for creating inclusive sport in Australia*, by Paralympics Australia<sup>8</sup>. See their complete guide for more detailed information.

When we talk about facilities, it's crucial to understand the difference between two key ideas. **Accessibility** is the minimum requirement (things like ramps and wide doorways that ensure people living with disability can use a space). **Inclusivity** is our ultimate goal. It's about creating a welcoming place where the entire experience, from the car park to the canteen, is felt the same by everyone. Achieving this starts with an inclusive mindset and a commitment to universal design.

## What is universal design?

Universal design is the design of environments, programs and services to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialised design<sup>9</sup>. It's the practical way we turn the goal of inclusivity into a reality.

Refer to the *Sport HQ best practice design principles fact sheet* for more information on universal design.



## Design with, not for

The only way to truly understand what's needed is to partner with those who have lived experience. This is more than just asking for feedback. It's a process of **co-design**, where you invite people to come on the journey with you from the very beginning. Importantly, this includes:

### 1. Listening first

Before you plan anything, ask a wide range of people what they would like to see from your organisation and venue. It's important that this includes people living with disability, people from different cultural and gender backgrounds, parents and older people.

### 2. Looking after your members

A key part of creating a welcoming organisation is making sure it's safe for everyone. This means taking a look around to spot and fix any potential hazards that could affect any of your members.

### 3. Linking inclusion to facility decisions

At key moments, such as planning, budgeting or applying for a grant, broaden the conversation. Ask: "How can we use this opportunity to make our grounds and clubhouse safer and more welcoming for everyone?"

Refer to the *Sport HQ facility planning guide* for more advice on planning infrastructure projects.

## Co-design process

1.

### Co-design

Invite people with diverse lived experiences to be your partners. Walk through your facility to identify the key barriers.

2.

### Plan

Use their feedback to create a simple, staged master plan. Refer to best practice documents, such as your sport's or Council's facility guidelines, and Paralympics Australia's universal design guide for creating inclusive sport in Australia. Prioritise safety and low-cost fixes first.

3.

### Improve

A clear plan showing how your improvements will create a more inclusive experience is a powerful tool when seeking funding.

# Thinking beyond the boxes: understanding intersectionality

The concepts on these pages are adapted from the Australian Sports Commission's foundational documents, *Roadmap: An all inclusive approach to governance and leadership in Australian sport*<sup>10</sup>. See their complete guide for more detailed information.

If your organisation is already working hard to welcome people of all ages, backgrounds, genders and abilities, intersectionality is the next step. It helps us understand that people don't fit into a single box and that their experiences are shaped by how these different parts of their identity overlap.

## What intersectionality is and why it matters

Intersectionality recognises that we all have multiple identities. It's a tool for understanding how these identities intersect to create unique experiences of advantage or disadvantage for people within our organisation.

Without this deeper understanding, our best efforts to be inclusive can sometimes fall short. It helps us see the hidden barriers that affect real people in our community.

For example, a 'Women in Sport' program is a great start, but an intersectional lens prompts us to ask: does this program also meet the needs of women with a disability, women from different cultural backgrounds or gender-diverse people?

## Putting intersectionality into practice

Intersectionality can be addressed by asking better, more inclusive questions at key moments.

Here are three types questions you can start with:

### 1. Our leadership

When we look for new committee members or coaches, are we only asking our usual contacts? How can we actively reach out to different groups within our organisation to ensure their voices and experiences help shape our decisions?

### 2. Our communications

When we post on social media or update our website, do our photos show the full diversity of our organisation (e.g. older members, people from different cultures, women in leadership roles and people with a disability) all participating together?

### 3. Our programs and events

When planning social events or programs, who might be unintentionally left out? For example, consider the combined barriers of cost, timing, transport and cultural comfort that might affect a single parent, a new migrant family or a member with disability.

The aim is to make this way of thinking a natural part of all decisions. It's a perspective that helps build a organisation where everyone feels a sense of belonging, courage and connection.

## Intersectionality

### IS...

about understanding the complexity of people's lives.

And...

about looking at systems and structures to see who might be unintentionally excluded.

### IS NOT...

about creating more boxes or labels for people.

And is not...

about comparing who is more disadvantaged.

## Endnotes

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