



Increasing Participation

A club guide to growing weekly attendance



INTRODUCTION

The increasing cost of sport, changes in lifestyle and society in general means clubs must adopt new ways of not just attracting but retaining members in order to just survive. There are common barriers to taking part in sport and these may include transportation, financial costs, physical access, staff and volunteer skills, lack of information and limited promotion.

Addressing these will make your club more welcoming and more adapt at catering for your member's needs. The potential benefits of having more members attend practice sessions outweigh the negatives, and they have a knock on effect on the other benefits. These are, among others:

- Increased membership (through retention or new members); would lead to.....
- Increased funds from club fees; which leads to...
- Potential to attract new sponsors or funding; which can lead to....
- Decrease in members leaving the sport; which can lead to....
- Less time spent running taster sessions/have-a-gos; which can lead to...
- Increased coaching at the club for existing members; which then may open up.....
- Opportunities to improve or gain additional facilities; and can lead to....
- Opportunities to increase volunteer/coach numbers.

Like many sports clubs, archery clubs wish to own a facility. This comes with a unique set of challenges however, and unless a club has a large enough membership to sustain the costs involved, it will never work in many cases. The adage of “build it and they will come” is never a sound principle on which to base your hopes and dreams.

Club Pilots

Archery GB is seeking ways in which to support an increase regular and sustained participation at club level. By undertaking a pilot project with a small group of clubs across the country, we hope that the results from these will confirm, and hopefully add to, the case studies of successful solutions contained within this document.

INCREASING PARTICIPATION

How can you increase participation of existing members at club practice sessions?

The first challenge that many clubs will have is to reconcile the total number of members in the club with the numbers that actually attend club practice sessions on a regular basis. The implications of the two measures being quite different will vary from club to club, depending on the way a club is structured it may have financial implications, it is likely to affect club spirit, communication, organisation and general development of the club and its members.

Likewise the reasons for members not regularly attending practice sessions will also vary, so the best way forward is to conduct some sort of survey to determine the most effective plan of action.

- The survey could be a more formal questionnaire, structured verbal discussions, or simply send an email to all members that do not regularly attend and ask why?
- What could the club do to make attendance more likely, is the key question. It is also important to understand the characteristics and motives for those that do attend regularly, this may influence what action you take and could certainly influence future recruitment drives.
- Some member's attendances may be limited by lifestyle and there is nothing the club can do, however it is more likely that taking positive actions will produce results!

There are a number of themes or areas that clubs can focus on, that may lead to an increase in regular participation. Of course, as the pilot projects develop we may find that there are additional themes that have been missed.



How to use this guide

The following pages outline several “problems” that may happen within an archery club. These have been developed based on real-life issues within archery clubs from Gloucestershire. The solutions are examples of how clubs overcame these “problems” and therefore are examples that you could adapt, adopt and try in your club.

1. IMPROVING COMPETITIVE OPPORTUNITIES

PROBLEM Practice sessions were boring, nothing really happened, they were always the same. The same few faces turned up!

SOLUTIONS Without exception surveys confirmed that members did want some form of competition and things they could try to achieve, most were not motivated to just turn up and just shoot arrows. They wanted something that was more structured, fun to do and that was organised for them.

- A couple of members were appointed to organise some competitions and inform all members what was happening.
- Various in-house formats were tried, including:
 - Single session Round Robin competition (Apps available to work out fixtures). Structure agreed to facilitate a range of bow types competing together.
 - Single session 'Olympic' Style Qualification Round and then H2H Ranked Elimination Format. (App available to facilitate this). Those eliminated carry on shooting practice.
 - Monthly Leagues formed with Round Robin Fixtures, promotion/relegation. Participants organise their own matches and submit scores.
 - Organise some fun rounds, ladies versus gents, adults versus juniors.
 - Similar to the above 3 examples but in 'pairs/team' formats.
 - Club Target days arranged, score sheets printed, competition conditions, different rounds, targeted weak County Records!
- Various external formats were tried, including:
 - Entering winter monthly postal leagues (County &/or Region)
 - Entering one-off Archery GB Competitions, July Nationals, November Challenge etc.
 - Taking part in the ontarget Club Competition
 - Organising an inter-club team shoot with different formats – such as 'Ryder Cup' or mirroring Olympic competition
 - A Competitions Officer was appointed, charged with circulating details of local competitions and encouraging members to enter. This had a dramatic effect on practice session attendance.



- Various 'badge/award/achievement' practice sessions were organised:
 - Progress Awards
 - FITA Feathers
 - Organised Club Awards Programmes.
- Coordinate a club 'mass entry' into a formal competition and organise some specific practice dates for everyone to get ready for the competition.
- Organised Club competitions, simulating competition conditions.

**COMMON
ISSUES**

All of these actions produced increased attendances, all had several things in common. *Someone was responsible for organising them, members were communicated to and they were fun to do!* They also resulted in improved membership retention, improved membership integration and more members entering competitions.

2. ESTABLISHING REGULAR COACHING

PROBLEM Practice did not seem to improve members shooting, there was not enough support to help members develop.

SOLUTIONS Whilst the concern is a common one, the scale of the clubs, number of coaches in the clubs, types of members and facilities etc varied enormously, so solutions may be long term and certainly very varied, however there have been some notable successes! These examples do not include increasing the numbers and quality of Coaches they are focused on what can be organised now.

- Organise workshops using experienced members:
 - Clubs discovered that 'mini-workshops' worked very well during practice sessions, 15 minutes on 'using a pressure button effectively,' choosing the right string material' etc where members also get to shoot.
 - Hold separate 'equipment maintenance' or 'tuning' workshops.
 - Organise separate bow type 'surgeries' or coaching sessions.
 - Appoint some experienced members as 'buddies' to those less experienced, run a one off introduction session where you get buddy and archer to work/shoot together.
- Organise workshops using external speakers/coaches:
 - Invite respected coaches from other clubs to attend practice sessions or get the County to organise some coaching sessions.
 - Run a 'skills & drills' session at the start of some of the standard practice sessions.
 - Likewise for topics such as fitness & conditioning, sports psychology find out local providers and get them in to run a session(s).
- Put a process in place to support the development of members to help them achieve their potential:
 - Improvers course immediately after completing the beginners course.
 - Allocation of coaches to specific individuals and if required get an external coach in to work with both of them.
 - Conduct an annual 'coaching' survey. What are members looking for? If returns suggest apathy, do not accept this, you will perpetuate the situation, make some decisions and put something in place.
 - Run 4 week focused small group coaching sessions in addition to general practice sessions.
 - Review members handicaps, have they improved, do they want to?
 - Deliver workshops to support competition entry, 'preparing for a competition', 'dealing with pressure', provide practical 'Head to Head' sessions. Identify areas for development and support members to achieve them.



- Creating a learning environment is probably the most important step.
 - Find some members that want to improve, use an iPad (Coaches Eye app etc) to do some video analysis. Get them to talk to each other. Identify common areas for development and get groups to work together.
 - Have a 'development area of the month' topic and deliver a number of short (5 mins) inputs at practice sessions to all the members attending.
 - Take some video with member's consent and get coaches & those that support coaching to review the videos. Share ideas on areas for development.
 - Recognise member's achievements by presenting awards, classification badges etc at club practice sessions. Have an Improver of the month Award.

COMMON ISSUES

These action gave a purpose to the practice sessions, often brought club success at competitions, always resulted in a better club culture of support for each other and members could feel the 'value added' by attending practice sessions.

Importantly the number of members wanting to do a coaching course increased dramatically and Gloucestershire has one of the highest concentrations of coaches in the UK! The actions taken also improved the retention and development of existing coaches.

3. CREATING SOCIAL OPPORTUNITIES

PROBLEM We do not seem to know many people when we come along. Nothing seems to happen socially. Bow types stick together. Nobody mixes. It does not feel like a club just a group of people that shoot arrows!

SOLUTIONS Common comments across many clubs but with a little effort these can become a thing of the past and the rewards can be amazing! Shared success, friendships, more volunteers, increased club funds, lower loss rates, more members, the list is endless. Again some members will need to be responsible for organising them, they will not just happen. Whilst committee members can certainly take the lead this could be an opportunity to get other members involved in helping and has proved to be an excellent way of getting non-shooting volunteers involved. Some clubs have conducted a 'skills & interest' audit and found all sorts of talents they can use to help develop the social side. A number of Sport England Surveys have highlighted 'social involvement' as the most important factor in individuals engaging with a club.

Clubs have successfully used a number of social activities to achieve increased levels of participation at practice sessions:

- Organising some members to lay on refreshments at some/all practice sessions. Tea, coffee, cold drinks and biscuits create a 'watering hole', sends a message that the club cares and its members matter! If the club cannot afford it then ask for a donation, minimal effort lots of benefit. Get volunteers/parents involved and they also get to try the refreshments.
- Organise special themed shoots and involve the family, Easter Egg Shoot with hunt for the younger members and their siblings, Firework night, Christmas shoot etc.
- Skittles or tenpin bowling evening but ensure volunteers and family are invited.
- If there are a lot of members shooting at a competition, get together at lunch time, share a drink or a Pizza afterwards, encourage sharing of lifts etc.
- Hold an end of year awards evening but ensure there is something for all the family, beetle drive, quiz etc.
- Hold a 'family and friends' have-a-go.
- At practice sessions, move bosses or get people to shoot on different ones to avoid 'cliques' forming.
- Run some 'have-a-goes' at some local fetes, council events and get members to help.
- Get members to try using a different bow type by pairing up and teaching each other. More popular is organising a 'multi skills' day, doing rounds with other bow types (normally club bows) and doing field and clout. Combining this with a BBQ.
- A particularly effective way is to arrange a number of fundraising events that gives all members a chance to help. Sponsored teams at the local 'Swimathon,' a jumble or car boot sale, quiz etc.
- A junior disco with a side room for parents to socialize has proved to be very successful.

- A club meal out and watch a film, easy to organise, fun and excellent to develop that social factor. The key is working at getting those that may not have attended to take those first steps and then facilitate their 'integration' at the event.

**COMMON
ISSUES**

Again lots of benefits from better attendance levels, member's car sharing or taking in turns to bring the juniors, generates useful funds but key is the improved club identity and spirit!

4. TOO MANY ARCHERS, NOT ENOUGH SPACE

Every archery club has probably said something similar to this - "If everyone turned up then we'd have a problem indoors!" Well if every archer turned up, then every club could probably afford a bigger venue. Finding venues is hard but it doesn't always have to be that way. Large club can afford large venues or even their own facility, but growing clubs need to adapt and see the opportunity in every facility offered if that what it takes.

PROBLEM Facilities not great, access is limited, field is too small, summer is fine but we just do not seem to meet very often during the winter.

SOLUTION There is no doubt that regularly available and good facilities help with attendance levels, so if these are factors we need to either get more out of what we have or find new affordable venues.

Find a new venue, ask members if they, or family and friends can help, do they have contacts? Contact local schools, local council, recreation centres, contact your local Community Sports Partnership (CSP) and local cricket, golf, rugby clubs etc.

- Schools have the land and often an indoor venue, offer some free have-a-goes to staff or pupils, start an after-school club. Often that link will give you access to school facilities and many offer reduced rates to recognize the work being carried out at the after-school club!
- The local Community Sports Partnership has a responsibility to help local sports clubs, speak to them and ask for their help to identify a suitable venue. It is often more effective to invite them to a club evening or offer to run a session for their staff or an event they are running. Establish a relationship with them and develop their understanding of our sport and you may be surprised at what facilities are out there!
- Contact your local council, they will have a department that looks after property, explain what you are looking for and work with them to identify possible venues. Many will also have a Community or Sports Development organiser/department again make the contact, ask for their help.

Using the current venue better is often an option, can you organise the evening to shoot more arrows by starting earlier, appointing a Field Captain to move things along, fit an extra target in, extend the session duration and split into 2 sessions, book one off venues?

- Training one or more members/volunteers to be Field Captains to run the practice sessions more efficiently not only results in a more professional, safer environment, but facilitates a lot more arrows being shot. This is a good opportunity to develop a group of non shooting volunteers to get involved!

Cont.



- Look at the arrival & departure times at the practice sessions, often you will find that there is only part of the session that is fully utilising your facilities, consider increasing the duration of the session and splitting it into 2, with a booking system. A number of clubs in Gloucestershire have successfully done this, resulting in more attending and no reduction in arrows being shot!
- Look at your membership and target fees, can they be structured to encourage members to attend practice sessions? Are your seniors and juniors integrated, so parents/juniors can shoot at the same time, all the evidence shows that if you can get family units involved that you are more likely that they will all attend and remain with the club. Why not organise a beginners course for parents and other siblings?

Can the club raise funds to subsidise practice session costs, therefore making it more attractive to attend for larger family groups.

COMMON FACTORS

The recent facilities audit undertaken by Archery GB highlighted that the better facilities were always those shared by archery clubs with other sports. The fascination by archery clubs to own their clubhouse, outdoor and indoor range sometimes has an overriding influence on the decision of clubs to adapt and change.

5. COMMUNICATING TO YOUR MEMBERS

ISSUES Nobody seems to be in charge, nothing seems to be organised. Communication is poor.

SOLUTIONS An important part of being a club is to get members to feel they are part of it, that they know what is happening and that there is a club identity. Research shows that in any given group of people, 20% will naturally give to the cause, 20% are primarily 'takers' and 60% will become 'givers' if encouraged to do so!

Some simple actions can dramatically improve the dynamics of the club:

- Appoint someone to issue a newsletter
- Improve the club website
- Use a blog and start a Facebook group
- Have a 'good news' notice board'.
- Ask some members to take photos, appoint a 'Club Photographer'.
- Appoint a social advisor on the committee and give time to the subject
- Appoint a competitions officer to circulate & encourage competitions and report on successes.
- Detail someone to coordinate club entries to postal leagues, AGB Competitions
- Form a junior committee.

COMMON FACTORS The old adage of 'What you put in is what you will get out' is very true. Also having a strategy to develop volunteers (they do not grow on trees, you will need to create an environment to grow them!) will be an important factor in having capacity and capability to organise the club in this way. However the rewards are well worth the effort.

6. WHEN MEMBERS DON'T TURN UP

PROBLEM **The survey indicated that 30% of our members' practice 4 or less times a month and some members had not been for several months!**

SOLUTIONS It is easy to get out of the routine of attending club sessions to a point where you almost feel that 'things have moved on, nobody is missing you etc' and it becomes almost embarrassing to just turn up again! So for this to change we need to take some action.

- All those members that fell into this category were emailed, asking how things were and informing them that the club was planning to run a 'welcome back' programme. They were being missed and we wanted to understand what we can do to get them involved again.
- Dates were fixed for the session, some thought was given to inviting some of the other members to 'buddy' them during the session.
- Some effort was made to lay on some refreshments and everyone was asked for ideas on what could be done to get them motivated to attend more regularly. In every case a follow up action was agreed and a date when they were next attending was fixed.
- In one club 70% of those contacted by email responded, with most of those signing up for the programme and have subsequently continued to attend on a regular basis. The 30% that did not respond were contacted by phone and the majority of those also signed up to attend. The issue in their case was that they did not read emails!

COMMON FACTORS Several clubs have appointed a member to be responsible for monitoring attendance and taking action to contact those members, this simple action has been very effective in increasing regular attendance and it has proved to be the best way of monitoring how the club is doing!

Declining attendance is a good indicator of something not being quite right and those that vote with their feet are the ones that will give you a message that needs to be responded to!

The Next Step

In conclusion, there could be numerous reasons for poor attendance at club practice sessions, but there are many potential solutions and huge rewards if we can increase attendance – both at club level and nationally.

The starting point is recognising there is an issue, through talking to members identifying the causes and then determining the best plan of action.

All the indicators suggest that clubs and their members that address these issues will prosper and not just survive!

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Acknowledgements: The examples and possible solutions have been kindly collated by Roger Crang, Deer Park Archers, and from other clubs in Gloucestershire. Between them the clubs have implemented these solutions, which have not only resulted in increased attendance at club practice sessions but produced many additional benefits including more volunteers, increased membership, better facilities and increased competition entries! The clubs involved varied in size from 20 to 200+.



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