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SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH
AND COMMUNITY MEDICINE

A Partnership Approach to Developing Sports Safety Policy in NSW: Understanding the Contribution of Multi-agency Partnerships in Policy Formulation

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

NGO	Non-Government Organisation
NSWSR	Communities NSW Sport and Recreation
SSO	State Sporting Organisation
SSRG	Sports Safety Reference Group

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This project aimed to facilitate the formulation of a state-wide all of sport safety policy (the *NSW Sports Safety Framework*¹) and to investigate and evaluate the role of a multi-agency partnership (known as the *Sports Safety Reference Group* (SSRG)) in sports policy development. It also explored issues related to the future development, dissemination and implementation of evidence-based and best-practice informed sports safety guidance (the *NSW Sports Safety Guidelines* – hereafter *Guidelines*) for community sporting organisations.

Part 1: Multi-Agency Partnership

There was a high level of support and satisfaction with the partnership approach used to develop the *NSW Sports Safety Framework*. There was a willingness amongst participants to share resources, knowledge and experience and a general desire to continue to be involved in the policy and guideline development process. It was acknowledged that the stakeholder involvement in the policy development process promoted ownership of the policy outcome and change within the sector.

Opportunities to work in partnership across the sector to address common issues were reportedly not commonplace. Network analysis confirmed the central position of Communities NSW Sport and Recreation (NSWSR) within the sector, and identified potential opportunities to enhance networking between other key stakeholders.

Part 2: Sports Safety Guidelines

There was strong support from State Sporting Organisations (SSOs) for the development of the *Guidelines*. There was also a demonstrated willingness among SSOs to share resources developed within their sport with other sports. NSWSR was identified as the most appropriate organisation to lead and coordinate the development of the *Guidelines*.

SSOs wanted both issue-specific and process-oriented guidance. The process-oriented component of the *Guidelines* should include information about risk management planning, training opportunities, resources, templates and case studies. The issue-specific material should identify relevant sports safety issues and include evidence or best practice based approaches to addressing them. The SSOs wanted issue-specific material to be simple to understand and practical to use at the community level, by volunteers. They wanted the *Guidelines* to be a dynamic resource which is updated and modified as necessary. The guideline development process should be interactive, allowing the opportunity for SSOs to identify new issues (as they arise) for which guidance is required.

There was strong support from SSOs for the *Guidelines* to be Internet-based. However, there was also a significant need for other formats – hard copy and CD-ROM – to ensure access for all community level sports.

¹ Communities NSW Sport and Recreation (NSWSR) assumed responsibility for identifying key participants to be part of the *Sports Safety Reference Group* and for overseeing the development of the strategic vision document - the *NSW Sports Safety Framework* (later known as the *Sports Safety Plan 2012*).

SSOs play a significant role in the communication of information and educational material to their affiliated associations and community clubs. They have well developed and frequently used information dissemination channels. However, some SSOs report significant limitations in ensuring the uptake of distributed material at the grass roots level.

Part 3: A strategic approach to developing, disseminating and implementing the NSW Sports Safety Guidelines

Based on the outcomes of this research, and informed by the principle of the *Diffusion of Innovations Theory*,² the following steps are recommended to facilitate the development of the *Guidelines*:

1. NSWSR should:
 - a. Continue to convene the SSRG to oversee the development of the *Guidelines*. The main role of the SSRG should be to facilitate the exchange of information and ideas between the guideline developers (NSWSR) and users (community sport and recreation providers) to ensure that user-friendly and community sports-relevant *Guidelines* are developed.
 - b. Reduce the size of the SSRG to facilitate ease of meeting and consultation.
 - c. Include representatives from ‘end-users’ groups such as community sports clubs, schools and local councils on the SSRG.
 - d. Include representatives from sports for people with disabilities on the SSRG.
2. The SSRG should:
 - a. Agree upon the priority safety issues and risk management processes to include in the initial content of the *Guidelines*—see Table 4 in this report.
 - b. Develop a ‘rationale’ for the *Guidelines* that highlights the relative advantage, from the perspective of community sports providers, of the *Guidelines*.
 - c. Establish a *scientific sub-committee* to ensure the *Guidelines* have an acceptable scientific or best-practice evidence-base.
 - d. Access, and assess the scientific quality of, currently available evidence-based and best practice guidelines and standards on priority safety issues and risk management processes.
 - e. Establish a process for gaining meaningful input from representatives of potential *Guidelines* users and any ‘gatekeepers’ to ensure that the content and presentation of *Guidelines* meets their needs and is compatible with their values, beliefs, previous experience and expectations.
 - f. Establish a two-way communication process between the users of the *Guidelines* and the guideline producers to enable new risks to be identified and responded to.
 - g. Establish a process to regularly monitor, review and up-date the *Guidelines*.
3. NSWSR should develop and regularly up-date an easy to access and navigate web-page that:
 - a. Contains or provides links to:
 - i. High quality guidance on priority safety issues

² Rogers, E., *Diffusion of Innovations*. 2003, New York: Free Press

- ii. Information about appropriate risk management processes, training and resources.
 - b. Enables users of the *Guidelines* to provide feedback.
 - c. Is linked to all relevant SSOs, government department and non-government organisation websites.
4. NSWSR should develop, make available for widespread dissemination, and regularly up-date an easy to use hard copy and or CD-ROM version of the *Guidelines*.

Evidence-based guidelines and best practice risk management processes, no matter how well developed, will have little impact if no one knows about them, decides to use them, uses them in the way they are intended, or continues to use them over a long period of time. Therefore, for the *Guidelines* to make a real difference to the safety policies and practices of community sports providers, it is important that the key stakeholders in sports safety in NSW develop, implement and monitor effective strategies to raise awareness about and facilitate the adoption, implementation and maintenance of the *Guidelines* at the community level.

Based on the Diffusion of Innovations Theory, a strategic approach to the diffusion of the *Guidelines* requires action in four phases. These phases are listed below and expanded upon in the report:

- Phase 1: Raising awareness—ensuring that community sport providers are aware of the *Guidelines*, know how to access them, and develop a positive attitude toward them.
- Phase 2: Encouraging adoption—encouraging community sports providers to use the *Guidelines* facilitated through change agents and opinion leaders
- Phase 3: Supporting implementation—providing appropriate funding, resources, staff and time to assist community sports providers to use the *Guidelines* as intended.
- Phase 4: Ensuring maintenance—supporting those who initially adopt and implement the *Guidelines* to continue to use them into the future.

Developing the *Guidelines* and facilitating their widespread adoption and sustained implementation is one of the key injury prevention challenges facing the sport sector in NSW. The findings of this research project and the principles underpinning the Diffusion of Innovations theory have been combined in this report to provide a guide to a strategic approach to the development, dissemination and implementation of the evidence-based, best-practice informed and community-sport-relevant *NSW Sports Safety Guidelines*.

BACKGROUND

Sports injuries are a significant public health issue, yet in many regions, including Australia, there are no current national or provincial/state level government or all-of-sport policies to inform, promote or coordinate sports safety action.

This has prompted a recent call for the development of a global sports safety policy to ensure significant safety gains are made for all.¹ This call has highlighted the need to better integrate the efforts of governments and sporting organisations, and to improve the sports safety “science to policy” interface.

Policy-related interventions can contribute significantly to successful public health action.² However, inadequate policy can lead to poor stakeholder engagement, division of responsibility across government, short-term funding and unsustainable programs, haphazard resource development and distribution, the dissemination of mixed messages, overload of information, and a lack of standardized guidelines.³

While the need for safety policy in sport is recognized, there are surprisingly few examples of national and state/provincial overarching sports safety policies, regulations or strategic plans. In Quebec (Canada),⁴ New Zealand⁵ and Singapore⁶⁻⁷ governments have taken a lead role in developing sports safety policy and similar schemes have been advocated for in Australia.⁸ While sports injury prevention has been on the Australian national health policy agenda to varying degrees since 1994,⁹ and a national sports safety framework was published in 1997,¹⁰ national and state sports safety policy progress has been limited.

Therefore, in 2007/08, in a research project funded by the NSW Sporting Injuries Committee we explored the climate for a state-wide sports safety policy for NSW. We undertook extensive consultative work with State Sporting Organisations (SSOs), and representatives of relevant government departments and non-government organisations (NGOs) to gain an understanding of current sports injury prevention activities and issues relevant to policy development. The barriers, enablers and motivators to the development of sports safety policy for NSW were identified, and stakeholder consultations led to an agreed strategic plan to progress a coordinated, strategic, evidence-based approach to sports safety.¹¹

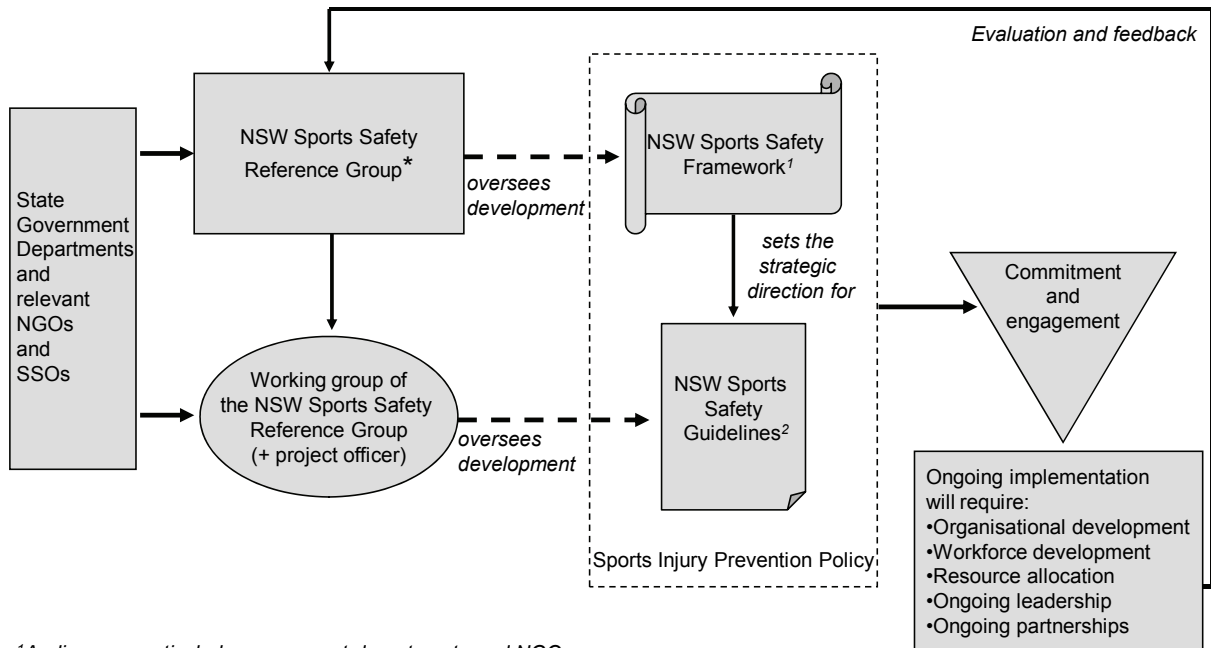
Identified barriers to developing and implementing sports safety policy included the: apparent low priority of sports safety as an issue; lack of a policy champion; limited policy development capacity within the sports sector; and the nature of community sport. On the other hand, potential motivators included: leadership by a credible organisation; widespread peak body support; and capacity building. SSOs wanted practical guidance (*Sports Safety Guidelines*) to help them adopt a best-practice, strategic, sustainable approach to safety. In addition, government departments and non-government organisations needed an agreed ‘strategic vision’ documenting the necessity for action, ways of working together, proposed outcomes, and links with other related strategies.

At the end of the consultation process, stakeholders supported a staged approach to policy development, with an initial focus on the development of a strategic vision document (the *Sports*

Safety Framework) followed by the development of a practical resource (the *Sports Safety Guidelines*) to assist sporting organisations adopt a strategic approach to safety. This research also identified that, as in other injury areas, a key to the policy development process is a multi-agency partnership of key stakeholders (the *Sports Safety Reference Group*) to develop the strategic vision (*Framework*) and eventually oversee the development of the *Guidelines*.^{12 13}

A diagrammatic representation of the process is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Diagrammatic representation of the development and implementation of a sports injury prevention policy for NSW. Source: Poulos, Donaldson, Elkington, Finch (2008).¹¹



¹Audience – particularly government departments and NGOs

²Audience – particularly SSOs, associations, clubs

* Lead agency – NSW Department of Sport and Recreation. Proposed representatives from the government, non-government & sporting sectors (including health, sports medicine, local government, education, product safety, child/youth advocacy, sports insurance industry, and SSOs) .

OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT

This project followed directly on from the 2007/08 research, and took the next logical steps in researching and progressing sports safety policy development in NSW.

The project aimed to facilitate the formulation of the *NSW Sports Safety Framework* and to investigate and evaluate the role of a multi-agency partnership in sports policy development. The research also explored issues relevant to the future development, implementation and dissemination of the *NSW Sports Safety Guidelines*.

Specifically, the aims of this project were to:

1. Facilitate the formation of a multi-agency sports safety reference group;
2. Undertake qualitative research around the impact of a partnership approach to sports policy development to inform both current and future sport-related inter-agency policy work;
3. Undertake extensive consultation with SSOs to understand, in detail, the desired content, design, dissemination and uptake of the *Sports Safety Guidelines*; and
4. Develop a strategic approach to the future development, dissemination and implementation of the *Guidelines*.

Our previous research clearly identified that Communities NSW Sport and Recreation (NSWSR)³ was the most credible organisation to establish, lead and administratively support a *Sports Safety Reference Group* which would shape and formulate a *NSW Sports Safety Framework*. Therefore, this project was undertaken in partnership with NSWSR.

Communities NSW Sport and Recreation assumed responsibility for:

- Identifying key participants to be part of the *Sports Safety Reference Group* based on their knowledge of the sports industry
- Setting a timetable to ensure the timely development of the *NSW Sports Safety Framework*.
- Forming the *Sports Safety Reference Group*, creating the meeting agendas, appointing a meeting facilitator, and disseminating relevant material.
- Ensuring that the barriers, motivators and enablers to policy development and uptake identified in our previous research were brought to the attention of the *Sports Safety Reference Group* for consideration.
- Overseeing the development of the *NSW Sports Safety Framework*.
- Inviting all SSOs registered with NSWSR to participate in an on-line survey to inform the *Sports Safety Guidelines* research.

Audience for this report

This report draws together the findings of the research project and is written for key stakeholders in sports safety in NSW (government departments, NGOs and SSOs).

³ Previously known as NSW Sport and Recreation

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The project comprised three research activities undertaken between August and December⁴, 2009. The timeline of research activities, against those of the activities of the *Sports Safety Reference Group* is displayed in Figure 2.

Activity 1: Understanding the multi-agency partnership through qualitative research

- Telephone interviews were conducted with all invited participants (SSOs, relevant government and NGOs) before the first *Sports Safety Reference Group* (SSRG) meeting to explore participant understanding of the purpose of the partnership and to identify: why each participant was or was not interested in participating in the policy formulation process; the contribution each believed they could make to the policy formulation process; and any potential barriers or facilitators they perceived to the policy formulation process.
- The nature and strength of the relationships between participants in the SSRG was documented using a modified version of the *VicHealth Partnership Analysis Tool*⁵. Participants mapped the relationship of their organisation with other organisations represented in the SSRG before the first SSRG meeting. Members of the SSRG also completed a checklist at the end of the first SSRG meeting to assess their perception of the quality of the partnership.
- After the development of the *Sports Safety Framework*, each SSRG participant's satisfaction with: the formation of the SSRG; the policy formulation process; the level of support for the policy outcome and its impact on their activity; and potential future roles in the policy dissemination and implementation process was ascertained through telephone interviews.
- A qualitative analysis of the partnership approach to policy development through observation and documentary analysis was undertaken. Observation of the two SSRG meetings was made by the research team to document the policy formulation process and identify barriers to, and opportunities for, a partnership approach to policy development. The NSWSR Partnership Project Manager maintained an unstructured written diary of activities, strategies, thoughts, and plans related to the SSRG or the *Framework*. This diary, along with the agendas and letters of invitation to the SSRG, provided documentary material to allow an assessment of the formal and informal processes necessary to support the establishment and functioning of the partnership.

To facilitate an *action research* approach to this project, data gathered prior to the first SSRG meeting was de-identified, summarised and provided to NSWSR, and the SSRG facilitator, to assist in planning the first meeting, and to ensure that any concerns were addressed at the commencement of the partnership.

⁴ Except for two interviews which were undertaken in February, 2010 as participants were unavailable in 2009.

⁵ This tool has been used previously in Victoria to assess health promotion partnerships (e.g. Kelaher M, Dunt D, Feldman P, Nolan A, Raban B. The effect of an area-based intervention on breastfeeding rates in Victoria, Australia. *Health Policy* (2008), doi:10.1016/j.healthpol.2008.08.004)

Activity 2: Exploring the potential content of the *Sports Safety Guidelines* and the barriers, enablers and motivators to their dissemination and implementation.

An online survey, based on the safety issues identified in the *National Sports Safety Framework*¹⁰ and the *Sports Safety Audit Tool*,¹⁴ sought information from all NSW SSOs about:

- The safety issues that were particularly relevant to their sport
- The practical sports safety-related tools, templates and resources that would be most useful to them
- Their preferred format for the *Sports Safety Guidelines*

This survey was followed by a telephone interview with a purposive sample of SSOs to identify:

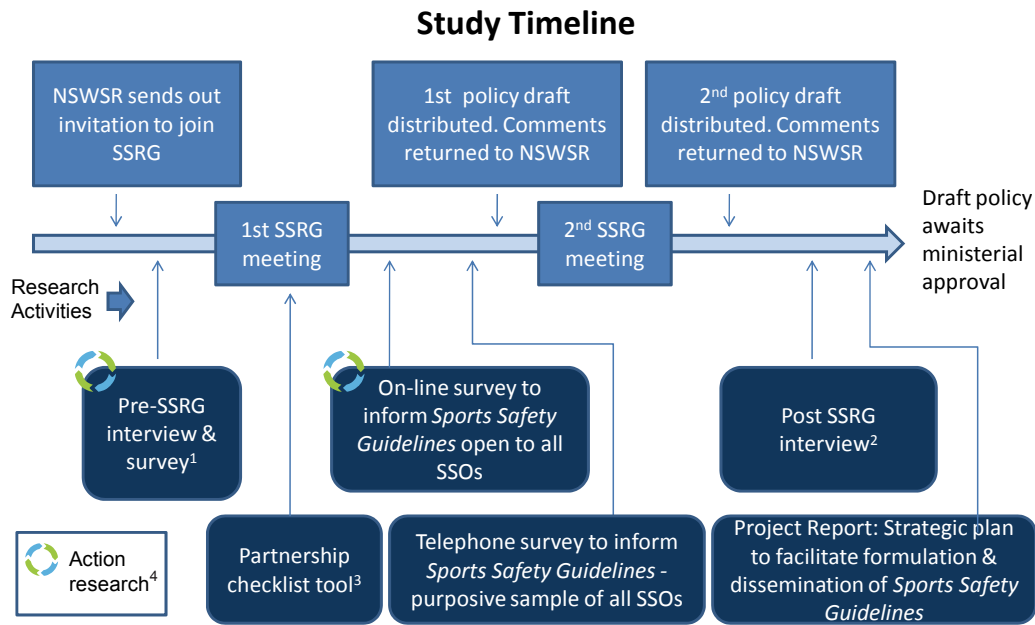
- Anticipated difficulties in dissemination and uptake of the *Sports Safety Guidelines* at the community level
- Potential solutions to address anticipated difficulties
- Lessons learned (facilitators and barriers) from previous efforts to implement safety initiatives at the community level of their sport.

To facilitate an action research approach, the data on the *Sports Safety Guidelines* were de-identified, summarised and provided to NSWSR, and the SSRG facilitator, to assist in the discussion around the *Sports Safety Guidelines* at the second SSRG meeting.

Activity 3: The development of a strategic approach to facilitate the future development, dissemination and implementation of Sports Safety Guidelines for NSW.

The data from Activity 1 and 2 was used to inform a strategic approach for the development, dissemination and implementation of the NSW *Sports Safety Guidelines*.

Figure 2: Timeline of research activities against the timeline for the development and operation of the Sports Safety Reference Group



¹ All invited participants of SSRG were invited to participate in the interview and survey
² Any participant who attended one or both SSRG meetings was invited to participate in this interview
³ Participants surveyed at the end of the first SSRG meeting
⁴ Information from research, provided to NSWSR to inform subsequent activities

RESULTS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

PART 1 THE MULTI-AGENCY PARTNERSHIP RESULTS

1.1 Selection of participants

NSWSR invited 28 organisations to be represented on the *Sports Safety Reference Group*. This included 16 sporting organisations, six government departments and six non-government organisations. Government and non-government groups were invited based on their association with the sporting sector and their potential role in the promotion of sports safety and prevention of sports injuries. Sporting groups were selected to ensure a wide range of sports were represented including: those considered to be industry leaders and influential in the sporting sector; sports with high injury risk; sports with excellent track records in risk management and excellent injury prevention strategies in place; and sports that were interested in taking action in these areas.

Table 1: Organisations invited to join the Sports Safety Reference Group.

State Sporting Organisations	Government Departments	Non-government Organisations
9 Field Sports	NSW Health	Associations of Independent Schools
2 Court sports	Department of Local Government	Associations of Catholic Schools
1 Water sport	NSW Office of Fair Trading	Sports Medicine Australia (NSW Branch)
1 Motor Sport	Department of Education and Training Sports Unit	YouthSafe
1 Indoor sport	NSW Sporting Injuries Committee	New South Wales Sports Federation Inc
1 Cycling sport	Parks & Leisure NSW	NSW Association of Disability Sports
1 Equestrian sport		

1.2 Pre-reference group meetings

Representatives from 25 of the 28 organisations invited to join the SSRG (14 SSOs, six government departments and five NGOs) participated in a telephone interview prior to the first reference group meeting to explore participant understanding about the role of the SSRG, and to discuss their concerns about, support of, and aspirations for the establishment and operation of the SSRG. Nineteen of these participants also provided written responses to questions on potential strengths and weakness of a partnership approach to the development of the *Sports Safety Framework*. Representatives from two SSOs and one NGO who were invited to participate in the telephone and written survey declined to do so because of time constraints arising from upcoming sporting events.

The interview schedule and survey questions are provided in Appendix 1.

Interviews revealed that there was generally a high level of support for the idea of a SSRG. While there was a general understanding among respondents that the group would have a role in safety and injury prevention in sport, there was some confusion about the exact purpose of the group. A small number of respondents correctly understood that the initial role of the group was to create the *Sports Safety Framework*, but the majority thought the initial task of the group was to create the *Guidelines*.

Respondents identified the following potential challenges for a partnership approach to sports safety policy:

- The large number of individuals on the SSRG may make it difficult to have a meeting that will function efficiently
- The diversity of sport will make it difficult to address all the safety issues
- Time constraints will make it difficult to bring together all of the major stakeholders
- Ensuring that key individuals from each organisation attend
- Creating clear terms of reference to keep the SSRG activities focused
- A lack of sports injury data and evidence of intervention effectiveness

Respondents identified the following strategies as suitable to address the identified challenges:

- Clear objectives for the group
- Good facilitation
- Knowledgeable representatives from participating organisations
- Allow everyone's voice to be heard
- Reassure participants that decisions will be acted upon

Respondents identified the following potential strengths arising from adopting a partnership approach to sports safety policy development:

- The development of a sense of ownership within the sector.
- The development of a consistent approach within the sector, which has the potential for greater impact. A consistent approach was thought to increase the likelihood of acceptance, and to increase the chance that policy would lead to change within the sector. Also, having a common objective was cited as “making sense” as participants or volunteers in one sport

often participated or volunteered in another. Consistent messages and unified education was thought to increase reach and impact on the sporting population.

- The potential for external benchmarking and external recognition of safe practices in sport.
- The creation of a broad based approach to sports safety. The multiple perspectives provided from the partnership were thought to provide greater coverage of issues, breadth of experience, and benefits were thought to arise from multiple theoretical and practical inputs.
- Time and cost savings through drawing from and sharing existing, established, effective resources. This avoids “reinventing the wheel”, limits duplication and minimises the need to produce new resources.
- Enhanced advocacy—many organisations with a shared vision can lobby as one voice.
- Creating a mechanism that could be used to tackle other sport-related issues. The partnership was thought to have the potential to build stronger relations between sports, to help partners to understand each other’s needs and give partners the opportunity to collaborate with like sports. This would provide participants with ongoing contacts and facilitate positive, open communication across a range of issues of mutual interest.

Respondents identified the following potential weaknesses arising from a partnership approach to sports safety policy:

- Time constraints—the amount of time necessary to reach agreement within a large group caused concern with many participants.
- The potential for the over-representation of a vocal minority.
- Failure to represent all stakeholders, given the large number of sports and their very disparate nature and needs.
- The lack of an established partnership, necessitating the need to develop a new partnership and to gain commitment from the participants.
- The vision of the common goal may not be shared by all and therefore the real needs might not be addressed.

Implications: The potential SSRG members were approaching the first SSRG meeting with a high level of support. In order to maintain this support, it was recommended that concerns expressed by potential participants be addressed wherever possible in the planning and operation of the group. In keeping with the action research approach adopted for this project, the following strategies to address the concerns identified by respondents were recommended to NSWSR, prior to the first SSRG meeting:

- Acknowledge the concerns that participants have raised about the SSRG. Confidence in the leadership of the SSRG could be enhanced by highlighting specific strategies to address these concerns.
- Use a facilitator who is experienced in working with large groups.
- Address the confusion about the purpose of the meeting by providing a brief outline of the role of the SSRG and the purpose of the *Framework* and the *Guidelines*. In particular, many participants do not appreciate the staged approach of *Framework* leading to *Guidelines*. As SSOs are most interested in the *Guidelines* it will be important to explain the logic

and necessity of developing a *Framework* first. Further, participants would benefit from an understanding of what the deliverables of the SSRG will be.

- Engage participants who feel that they already have the necessary safety policies by acknowledging the value of the depth of experience that they can bring to the partnership.
- Provide a clear time-line of future activities and clarify the time commitment expected from participants.
- Help participants understand what the *Framework* is all about by providing examples of vision statements that have led to guidelines and policies in other areas, states or countries. These could be distributed during the meeting and made available to participants during breaks.

1.3 Partnership mapping

Partnership mapping (using the modified *VicHealth Partnership Tool*) was undertaken to document how the organisations invited to be part of the SSRG related to each other, and to identify any organisations featuring significantly, which may have been overlooked in the list of invitees. A copy of the *Partnership Mapping Survey* is available in Appendix 2.

Nineteen out of the 28 participants who were asked to complete a partnership map, did so. Those who participated included three out of five government departments, five out of seven NGOs, and 11 of the 16 SSOs.

Mapping results supported the central position of NSW SR within the sector. Other partnership organisations with numerous connections were the NSW Sporting Injuries Committee and the NSW Sports Federation.

Educational organisations reported relationships with a range of sports. Some of the larger, high profile sports reported organisational relationships with each other while many sports did not report relationships with other sports. Relationships were reported between Sports Medicine Australia (NSW Branch) and some of the larger sports, but similar relationships were not reported with other sports. No SSOs reported existing relationships with NSW Health.

Implications: The results of the partnership mapping were limited by missing data, as not all invited organisations participated. However, a number of significant points can be made. The central position of NSW SR within the sector was supported by the partnership mapping. Other organisations with significant relationships with sports included the NSW Sporting Injuries Committee and the NSW Sports Federation. These organisations would appear to be ideally placed to promote and disseminate sports safety policy because of their existing, established links. The lack of reported relationships between NSW Health and participating SSOs may have implications for the dissemination and uptake of injury prevention or health promotion messages from the health sector to sports. The absence of established relationships among many sports, either with other sports or other agencies, was also supported by the results of the *Partnership Tool Checklist* (refer below) and may have implications for the operation of the SSRG.

1.4 Evaluation after first SSRG meeting using the *Partnership Tool Checklist*

Fifteen participants from the first SSRG meeting completed the modified *Checklist* from the *VicHealth Partnership Tool* at the end of the first meeting. Participants were asked questions about the “partnership” as it pertained to the members of the SSRG working together on the task of developing the *Sports Safety Framework*. A copy of the modified *Partnership Tool Checklist* is available in Appendix 3. The detailed responses are available in the Appendix 4 and a summary of the responses are as follows:

- There was strong support for a partnership with at least 80% of respondents agreeing that there were areas of common interest and complementary capacity. There was also a willingness to share ideas, resources, influence and power to fulfill the goal. Almost three quarters of respondents felt there was a shared understanding and commitment to the partnership, and that the benefits would outweigh the costs of the partnership.
- At least 80% of respondents felt that their core business was partially interdependent with that of other partners, and that the variety of members brought a comprehensive understanding of the issues being addressed to the partnership. However, only a third of respondents felt that there was a history of good relations between the partners.
- At least 80% of the respondents agreed that the partners had the necessary skills for collaborative action, that the administrative, communication and decision making structure of the partnership was as simple as possible, and that the relevant managers in each organisation supported the partnership. Two-thirds of respondents felt that there were strategies in place to enhance the skills of the partnership and that the role, responsibilities and expectations of partners was clearly defined.
- At least 80% of respondents felt that there was a participatory decision-making system that was accountable, responsive and inclusive.
- Almost all respondents (93%) felt that there were strategies in place to ensure alternative views were expressed within the partnership, and 80% agreed that there were informal structures in place for the sharing of information. Three-quarters of respondents felt that there was a core group of skilled and committed members that would continue the partnership into the future. Half the respondents felt that there were formal structures in place to share information and resolve demarcation disputes. Only a third felt that differences in organisational priorities, goals and tasks had been addressed to minimise the barriers to the partnership.
- At least 80% of respondents agreed that the partnership could demonstrate or document the outcomes of its collective work, and that there was a clear need and commitment to continuing the partnership in the medium term. However, less than half of respondents felt that there were resources available (internally or externally) to continue the partnership, that there were processes for recognising and celebrating collective achievements and/or individual contributions, or that there was a way of reviewing the range of partners involved.
- In terms of implementing collaborative action, over 80% of respondents felt the activity of the partnership was adding value (rather than duplicating activities) for sport in general, and the agencies involved. However, less than half of respondents agreed that there were regular

opportunities for informal voluntary contact between the different agencies involved in the partnership, and only one third agreed that collaborative action between agencies was rewarded. About 10% of respondents agreed that there was standardisation of those safety-related process and procedures common across agencies.

- Between 10 and 20% of respondents did not know the answer to significant determinants of partnership success, such as whether the perceived benefits of the partnership outweighed the perceived costs, whether there was a core group of skilled and committed members who would continue over the life of the partnership, and whether there were resources available to continue the partnership.

Implications: These results indicate that the sporting, government and non-government sectors perceive opportunities for a partnership approach to address common issues and that there is strong support for collaboration, sharing of resources, knowledge and experience across organisations. The majority also believed that the partnership approach was adding value to their work, rather than duplicating activities. However, partnership approaches to common issues had not been commonplace in this sector, with the majority of respondents not reporting a history of good relations between partners. The “newness” of the partnership approach was further evidenced by concerns about the partnership, and the number of participants who were unable to respond (in the affirmative or negative) to some of the significant determinants of partnership success.

1.5 Post-reference group meetings

Twenty-four SSRG representatives participated in telephone interviews after the completion of the second SSRG meeting. This interview was undertaken with participants who attended either the first (n=11), second (n=6) or both (n=7) SSRG meetings. This interview explored participant satisfaction with the partnership process and outcome, the perceived impact of the *Sports Safety Framework*, and ways of improving the policy development process. A copy of the interview questions is included in Appendix 5.

Participants who attended only one of the two SSRG meetings reported that they did so because of other conflicting engagements for their organisation. No participant reported failure to attend because of disinterest or failing to support the process.

The majority of respondents were satisfied with the establishment and operation of the SSRG. Reasons for their satisfaction included: the range of sports that were invited to participate; the level of organisation of the meeting; the high level of involvement from participants; good facilitation; and the consultative nature of the meeting. The majority also felt that the strengths of the partnership approach included: the variety of participants involved; the variety of expertise and the different perspectives; and the opportunities to learn from others. There was also a sense that the breadth of involvement would promote ownership of the policy outcome and promote change.

The identified weaknesses of the partnership approach tended to reflect the lack of previous “partnership” experience, and the fact that two meetings were not enough time to build true partnership. Other weaknesses focused on the lack of time to discuss common issues, and not being able to cover everything. These latter reported weaknesses may have reflected a misconception by some participants that the SSRG would be discussing specific safety issues.

Several respondents indicated confusion around why some participants—particularly those outside of the direct sporting sector—were part of the partnership, and suggested that the issues being addressed by the partnership were generally only for the sports sector.

Suggested improvements for the partnership approach included continued working together so that participants could get to know each other. A number of respondents felt the group size was too large and that more could have been achieved with small group work, feeding back into the larger group.

The majority of respondents reported that they felt the SSRG had achieved its aim. Most reported a high level of satisfaction with the document produced (i.e. the *Sports Safety Framework*).⁶ However, a number of respondents reported reservations about its implementation and one sport was hoping for more than “principles”.

Most participants felt there was adequate representation of a wide range of stakeholders on the SSRG. Individual participants suggested more representation from disabled groups; the exclusion of groups outside of sport (non-SSOs) and having these participants as “resources” rather than as members; and having representatives from the club level. Two participants suggested more involvement by smaller sports on the SSRG.

Most participants reported a high level of support from their organisations for the *Sports Safety Framework*. The reasons behind this support included the fact that the *Framework* had the support of NSWSR. This was seen by at least one participant as making sports safety more important to sports, because the government saw it as important. Others reported that their organisation saw benefits in having a *Framework* with a common direction, and in having an industry wide approach. Several participants reported a high level of support, but that they remained skeptical as to what effect the *Framework* would have in practice. Capacity limitations around the cost and additional resources needed to implement the *Framework* were raised by several participants.

Almost all participants reported that they believed they had made a reasonable contribution to the development of the *Sports Safety Framework*. These contributions included sharing: issues of relevance to their sport i.e. “having our voice heard”; their knowledge or insights or policies; and sharing experiences about “how things work on the ground”.

There was considerable variation in the likely implications of the *Framework* on participant organisations. Amongst SSOs the reported implications were substantial for some, with reports that the *Framework* will refocus the organisation, or impact on future planning processes, or that it will be something that will be communicated and implemented across their sport. For other SSOs the *Framework* validated what they were already doing, so it would have limited additional implications for current practice. A number of SSOs indicated that implementing the *Framework* would be the next challenge.

For government departments and NGOs, some participants reported that the *Framework* would have minimal implications for their organisation. Others reported that it would: be used for advocacy or promotional purposes; be added to other guidelines disseminated by their organisation; shape the injury prevention activities of their organisation; or that it would receive continued support because it aligned with other safety promotion activities of their organisation.

⁶ Known as the Sports Safety Plan 2012 in its final form.

All participants (except for two) indicated a continuing desire to participate in the partnership. Those who indicated they were unlikely to continue with the partnership were one SSO representative who felt the work of the SSRG was completed, and one government department representative who thought the next stage of the partnership was more appropriate to SSOs.

Implications: There was a high level of satisfaction with the partnership approach taken to develop the *Sports Safety Framework*, and evidence that the participants in the SSRG wished to continue the process. The organisation and facilitation of the group were significant factors in fostering this satisfaction. The “newness” of the partnership approach for the sector was very evident, and attention may need to be given to “partnership building” activities in future partnership endeavours. The public health approach to injury prevention and health promotion is interdisciplinary in nature, and takes a multi-sectoral approach. However, feedback from participants indicates that this approach may not be well understood in the sports sector and an opportunity for the various participants from different sectors and agencies to share what they may be able to bring to sports safety may enhance the functioning of the partnership in the future.

1.6 Partnership management

Procedure

Two SSRG meetings were convened by NSWSR and held on September 15th and October 26th, 2009. Twenty participants attended the first meeting and 15 participants attended the second. Both meetings were facilitated by the same experienced external facilitator (from another state), who had considerable understanding of the sports sector.

Participants were welcomed to both meetings by staff from NSWSR, before the meeting was handed over to the facilitator. At the opening of the first meeting, the issues of concern to participants (see Section 1.2) were acknowledged and specific strategies to address them were outlined.

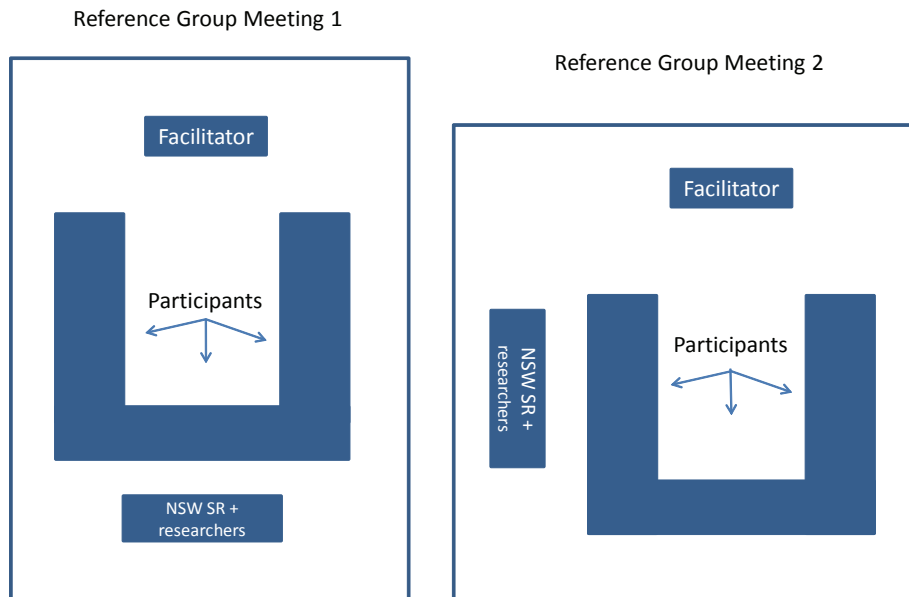
Participants were seated in a U-shape configuration. NSWSR staff and the researchers (who were acting as observers) sat behind, or to the side of the participants, as shown in Figure 3. This physical arrangement facilitated communication between participants themselves, as well as between participants and the facilitator. Further, this arrangement meant that no individual participant had a more dominant position “at the table” than another. Placing NSWSR staff at the rear or side of the meeting took them largely out of the field of vision of the participants and the facilitator. This promoted direct communication between the facilitator and the participants, and created a strong sense within the group, that the “partnership” was the decision-making body.

Documentary analysis included review of: letters of invitation; the meeting agendas for the Reference Group; and the Partnership Manager’s diary of activities undertaken in the planning and management of the partnership.

Letters of invitation to the first SSRG meeting indicated the purpose of the group. A follow-up email contained the list of invited participants and a copy of the research report which had identified the need for a SSRG.¹¹ The Partnership Manager made telephone contact with the small number of invitees who had failed to respond to the invitation. An agenda was circulated prior to the first meeting. The first draft *Sports Safety Framework* was circulated to SSRG members for comment two weeks after the first meeting. Written comments were sought prior to the second meeting.

At the second SSRG group meeting the draft *Sports Safety Framework*, with participant comments included, was discussed. A final draft version of the *Framework* was circulated to the group in the week following the second meeting, and written feedback again sought. A final reminder email requested feedback from all participants. The final draft *Framework* (renamed the *Sports Safety Plan 2012*) was developed based on comments received, and was submitted by NSW SR to the government policy approval process.

Figure 3: Layout of meeting facility



The diary of activities from the Partnership Manager indicated the following activities were required to establish the SSRG and administratively support the two meetings:

- Developing a realistic project time line at the project commencement
- Regular SSRG planning meetings with two other senior NSW SR staff to discuss all aspects of the SSRG meetings including letters of invitation, agenda, facilitation, budget and outcome
- Sending invitations, email follow-up and telephone contact with non-responders around the activities of the SSRG
- Distributing draft plans in various versions to participants, collating comments from respondents, finalising latest draft version.
- Telephone and email liaison with the SSRG meeting facilitator
- The logistical needs of the SSRG meetings—venue booking, catering, room configuration.

Implications: A dedicated Partnership Manager, careful planning, excellent communication, good facilitation, and suitable facilities provided a supportive environment for a partnership approach to policy development. The background work necessary to support the group was considerable and should not be underestimated. The rapid turn-around on partnership documents maintained the momentum of the SSRG. There was a high level of satisfaction with the process among participants.

PART 1

Conclusions and Recommendations

The research undertaken with key stakeholders in 2007 identified support for a partnership approach to policy development, with the lead agency identified as NSWSR.

The focus of Activity 1 was on gaining an understanding of how the multi-agency partnership worked, and to identify opportunities to advance a partnership approach to sport safety promotion in the future.

The research found that there was considerable support for the partnership approach before the first meeting of the SSRG, and this support continued after the second (last) meeting. The value of the partnership approach to policy development was identified by participants as promoting a sense of ownership of the policy outcome, and of increasing the likelihood of change within the sector.

The research team recommends that the enthusiasm evidenced in the partnership should be harnessed by moving as soon as possible into the next stage of partnership work.

The logic behind the partnership approach is that sports safety requires more than the response of one person, one organisation or one sector alone,¹⁵ and that the formation of partnerships can enhance the capacity of organisations to achieve their goals.¹⁶ However, there was still confusion among some participants as to why some agencies had been included. This may have arisen because of the limited previous networking between partners and a lack of understanding as to what other partners can bring to the partnership. This should be addressed in future partnership meetings by highlighting for the group each partner's role in sports safety and the expertise, resources or services each can bring to the partnership.

Network analysis has been used extensively in sociological and organisational academic literature, but it is now being used in community settings to help to build capacity through the development of strong collaborations. In this research we used a simplified form of network analysis to conduct a cross-sectional exploratory investigation of existing working relationships between partnership members. The findings were limited by the fact that not all participants completed the mapping exercise (network analysis is quite sensitive to missing data¹⁷). However, the analysis provided a number of interesting findings:

- The central position of NSWSR within the sector was confirmed, which provides support for its continuing leadership role in the partnership process
- The considerable number of links within the sector to the NSW Sporting Injuries Committee indicates that this organisation could be a potential point of influence within the sector, and a key body to disseminate partnership outcomes.
- While links were reported between Sports Medicine Australia (NSW Branch) and a number of the larger sports, there is potential to increase the reach of the Sports Medicine Australia (NSW Branch) into the sporting sector through the work of the partnership, particularly through the skills and resources it will bring to the development of the *Sports Safety Guidelines*.
- On the issue of sports safety and injury prevention, NSW Health does not appear to have well established relationships with the community sports sector. This may have significant

implications for its ability to influence injury prevention. While government health agencies bear much of the cost of sports injuries, prevention of these injuries is largely outside their control.¹⁵ Therefore the partnership would appear to offer a valuable opportunity for NSW Health to improve its influence and to bring much needed health promotion and injury prevention expertise to future sports safety interventions.

The research team recommends that the information gained from this network analysis be presented to the partners in the SSRG, to allow organisations to see their current position and influence within the sector. This could provide the necessary impetus for some organisations to take steps to improve their outreach. The re-application of the network analysis tool to the partnership members in the future could provide useful objective evidence for process evaluation of the partnership.

The *VicHealth Partnership Analysis Tool* examines seven factors that relate to the quality of a partnership:

- determining the need for the partnership,
- choosing partners,
- making sure partnerships work,
- planning collaborative action,
- implementing collaborative action,
- minimising barriers to partnerships, and
- reflecting on and continuing partnerships.

In this project we modified the tool to enable its application in the sports sector. We believe it has provided some useful insights into the functioning of the SSRG. In the first application of the *Tool*, a number of aspects of the partnership that need strengthening were identified. These include:

- Creating a formal structure to enable information to be shared between participants
- Addressing differences in organisational priorities, goals and tasks to minimise barriers to partnership
- Looking at resource limitations which may impact on continuing the partnership
- Creating opportunities for informal voluntary contact between partners
- Creating ways to reward collaborative action
- Discussing ways to facilitate the standardisation of safety procedures across agencies

The research team recommends that these specific issues are discussed in the next partnership meeting, and ways of addressing them be agreed, and acted upon.

It is well recognised that partnerships often fail because little conscious effort is put into managing them.¹⁸ The diligent planning and competent management that was observed to be provided by NSWSR are factors that have been recognised as key activities for partnership success.¹⁸ However, in terms of its ongoing success, we recommend that the modified *VicHealth Partnership Tool* be used to conduct ongoing process evaluation of the partnership into the future. It appears to be useful in highlighting strengths and deficiencies or discontent within the partnership, which if left unaddressed could lead to inefficiencies.

Sports Safety Reference Group participants identified the benefits of creating the *Sports Safety Framework* as generating a shared vision for safety promotion and injury prevention across the different

stakeholders; and “legitimising” sports safety within the sector. The creation of an “institutional environment” that supports injury prevention has also been identified as critical in international research on sports safety.¹⁹

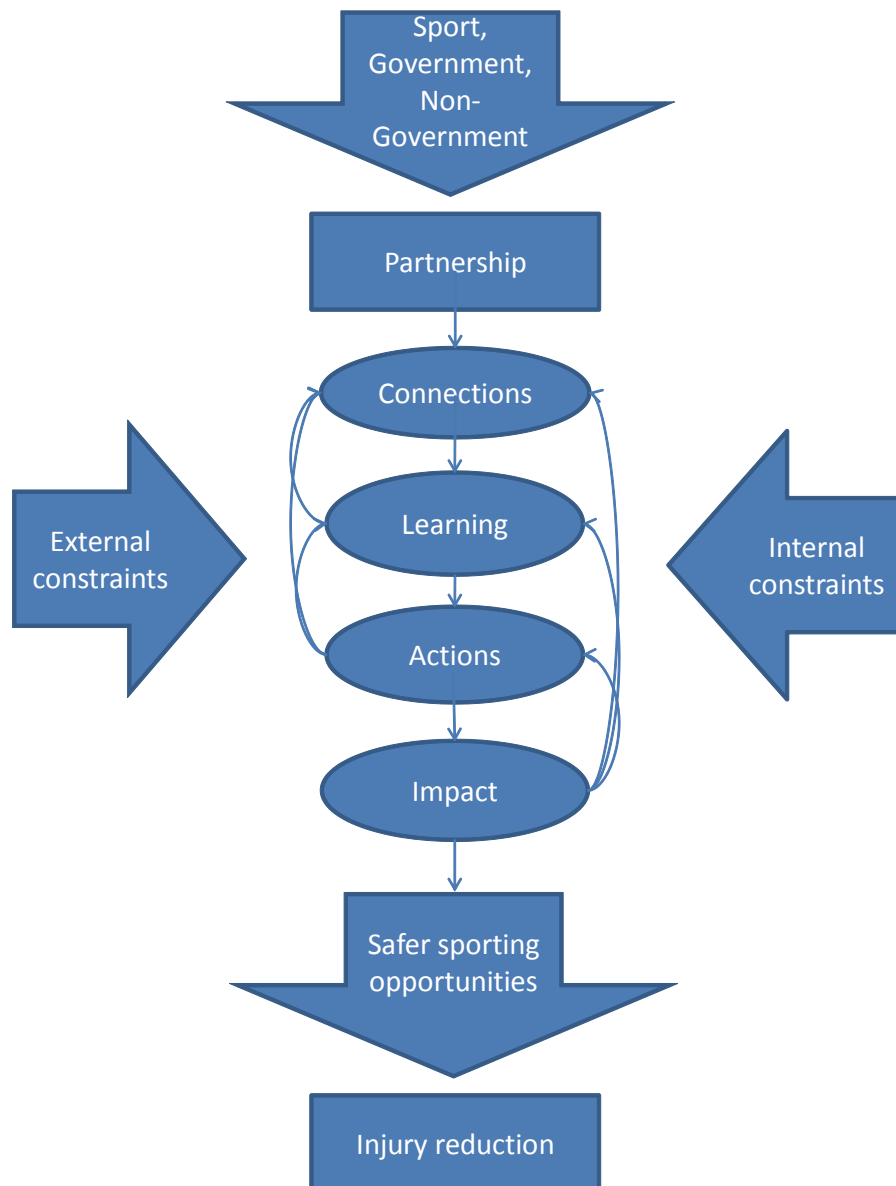
There was an indication from participants that the benefits of the partnership approach will be particularly valuable in the *Guidelines* development process. The correct mix of participants could aid the integration of proven and promising safety strategies with practical experience at the “ground level”. Some participants suggested that representatives from clubs be included in the *Guideline* development process. We suggest that this could be done by creating a number of smaller working groups which include representatives from a range of clubs. These groups could be asked to review the draft *Sports Safety Guidelines* and provide input from the perspective of “ground level” users.

While partnership approaches to developing policy are becoming increasingly common, there is a need to justify the investment of the time and resource being made by participants. In addition to objective outcomes (benefits) of the partnership, ‘soft’ benefits have also been identified. The model developed by Boydell and Rugkasa (2007) to focus on tangible and intangible benefits may be a useful model for thinking about the potential benefits that may arise from the continued operation of the SSRG.²⁰ Boydell and Rugkasa’s model was derived from a series of case studies examining multi-sectoral partnerships to reduce health inequality in Ireland. The model as presented in Figure 4 has been modified to make it relevant to the operation of the SSRG.

The overall purpose of the SSRG is to reduce injuries in sport by promoting safer sporting opportunities across all community-level sports. The sectors having some influence over this are the sporting, government and non-government sectors. The SSRG contains representatives from these three groups and brings them together providing an opportunity to connect with each other and to understand each other’s perspectives and roles. The partnership provides the opportunity for these different sectors to work together, sharing experiences and resources, to create policies and programs that will provide safer sporting opportunities for all, thus achieving the main objective of the group. The potential for positive spin-offs along the way is indicated in the model by the various arrows. For example, as partners learn more about each other there is the potential for them to connect on other issues, jointly working together to improve the operation or effectiveness of their organisation. The model highlights the potential barriers to partnership progress, which are considered to be either internal or external constraints. Internal constraints may include conflict between participants or the time-consuming nature of partnership work. External constraints may include lack of sector funding or political support.

There appears to be a good synergy between the modified *Vichealth Partnership Tool* and the model of effective partnership working. Therefore, we believe that the *Partnership Tool* will be a useful tool for process evaluation (both tangible and intangible successes) of the SSRG.

Figure 4. A model of effective partnership working for sports safety based on the model developed by Boydell, L.R. and J. Rugkåsa, *Benefits of working in partnership: A model. Critical Public Health*, 2007. 17: p. 217-228. (Taylor and Francis Ltd, with permission of the publisher).



PART 2

SPORTS SAFETY GUIDELINES

RESULTS

2.1 On-Line Survey

2.1.1 Demographics of survey participants

Seventy-nine NSW-based SSOs were invited to participate in an on-line survey to explore the:

- sports safety needs of their organisation and sport (i.e. the potential content of the *Sports Safety Guidelines*)
- format of the *Sports Safety Guidelines*
- difficulties their organisation might experience in communicating, distributing and implementing the *Sports Safety Guidelines* at the community level

Forty-five (57%) of the invited SSOs attempted the on-line survey. Of these, three provided no response, three provided a partial response, and 39 provided responses to all sections of the survey. The remaining analysis is based on the responses from these 39 organisations, although not all respondents answered all questions.

Table 2 shows the types of sports that took part in the survey.

Table 2: Sports involved in the on-line survey (n=39).

Field sports	8	Water sports	6
Indoor sports	3	Equestrian sports	3
Ice sports	2	Court sports	4
Motor sports	3	Multi sports	1
Martial arts	2	Golfing	2
Extreme sports	3	Shooting sports	2

The respondents held different positions within their respective organisations ranging from: Chief Executive Officer to Special Project Manager and from Risk Manager to Community Officer.

Thirty-six (92%) of the participating SSOs represented elite levels of sport (professional, international, national, and state) and 30 (83%) represented community or recreation levels. The size of the participating SSOs ranged from fewer than 500 to over 50,000 registered participants (see Table 3).

2.1.2 Contents of Guidelines

Survey participants were asked to rate the importance, on a three point scale from *Very Important* to *Not important* (with additional “*uncertain*” and “*not relevant options*”) of 40 separate elements of sports safety⁷ according to how important each element was to the community level of their sport. Table 4 lists the elements of sport safety in order of importance as rated by the survey participants.

Table 3: Size of State Sporting Organisations participating in the on-line survey (n=39).

Number of registered participants	N (%) of SSOs in survey	Number of registered participants	N (%) of SSOs in survey
Fewer than 500	5 (13%)	5,000–9,999	2 (5%)
500–999	4 (10%)	10,000 – 49,999	9 (23%)
1,000–4,999	10 (26%)	50,000	9 (23%)

Table 4: Elements of sport safety in order of importance (n=39)

RANK	ELEMENT	% of respondents who rated element as	
		<i>Very or Somewhat Important to their sport</i>	<i>Not Relevant to their sport</i>
1	Fair play and conduct of participants	100	0
2	Insurance	100	0
3	Risk management planning	97	0
4	Safe surfaces and environments	97	3
5	Coach accreditation	95	3
6	Safe equipment	95	0
7	Child protection	95	3
8	Behaviour of officials (coaches, referees/umpires, managers etc)	94	3
9	Emergency planning	92	0
10	Safe facilities	92	3
11	Drugs in sport	90	3
12	Alcohol	87	3
13	Official (referee, umpire etc) accreditation	87	5
14	Sport first aid and injury management personnel	87	5
15	Hydration	87	8
16	Behaviour of spectators	87	8
17	Bleeding	87	10
18	Injury surveillance and injury recording	82	0
19	Sport first aid and injury management equipment	82	5

⁷ The 40 elements included in the on-line survey were based on the checklist at the back of the National Sports Safety Framework (Finch C, McGrath A. SportSafe Australia: A national sports safety framework. A report prepared for the Australian Sports Injury Prevention Taskforce. Canberra: Australian Sports Commission, 1997) and the components of the Sports Safety Audit Tool (Donaldson A, Hill T, Finch C, Forero R. The development of a tool to audit the safety policies and practices of community sports clubs. J Sci Med Sport 2003;6:226-30.)

20	Referral of injured participants to appropriate sports medicine providers	80	3
21	Pre-participation screening and gathering information about pre-existing medical conditions	80	5
22	Modified rules for participants with a disability	77	5
23	Stretching and flexibility	74	0
24	Rehabilitation of injured participants	74	3
25	Conditioning	74	5
26	Sport first aid and injury management facilities	74	10
27	Head injuries, concussion etc	74	15
28	Sun protection	74	15
29	Modified equipment for participants with a disability	74	74
30	Warming up	72	0
31	Cooling down	72	0
32	Adverse weather	72	3
33	Protective equipment	72	23
34	Return to play of injured participants	69	10
35	Modified rules for junior participants	69	21
36	Infectious disease control	59	15
37	Modified equipment for junior participants	59	28
38	Pregnancy	54	21
39	Modified rules for older participants	54	28
40	Modified equipment for older participants	41	36

Other safety issues that were not included in the initial list but were identified as important to at least some of the SSOs that participated in the survey were: fractures including ankle, rib, neck and back (stress fractures); environmental factors; survival skill in an adverse aquatic environment; and matching participants by skill and size.

2.1.3 Guideline format (n=38)

Thirty-three (87%) SSOs indicated that their organisation wanted the *Sport Safety Guidelines* in a web-based format. A lesser number indicated they wanted the format in CD-ROM (40%) and/or hard copy (40%). The main reason for their choice of the web-based format was the ease of access and dissemination. Other reasons included: cost effectiveness; ease of updating; control of information; and assurance of integrity of the *Guidelines*. Those wanting a hard copy highlighted that the age/demographic of volunteers responsible for their sport at a community level made on-line access difficult, and that hard copies were a quick reference resource for clubs when on-line facilities were not available. Hard copies and CD-ROMs were seen as tangible products that could be easily distributed to clubs and members.

Table 5: Preferred format for safety guidelines.

Preferred format for safety guidelines	Number (%) of State Sporting Organisations (n=38)
Web only	16 (42%)
Web + CD-ROM + Hardcopy	6 (16%)
Web + CD-ROM only	6 (16%)
Web + Hard copy only	5 (13%)
Hard copy + CD-ROM only	3 (8%)
Hard copy only	2 (5%)

2.1.4 Communication and Distribution (n=32)

Around one quarter of the SSOs (n=9) indicated that they would not have many difficulties communicating and distributing the *Guidelines* in their sport at the community level. They indicated that they could distribute the *Guidelines* through their established communication networks. The remaining organisations identified the following potential difficulties in communicating and distributing the *Guidelines* at the community level:

- Time and resource (including financial) constraints at the state level
- People do not read emails
- Contact databases are always changing
- Communication breakdown—information stops at the club executive level
- Large populations to reach
- Technology (web and e-mail access) difficulties
- Problems with administrator turnover and passing on information

2.1.5 Implementation

Given the volunteer nature of community sport, about half the SSOs specifically indicated they would have difficulties ensuring that the *Guidelines* were implemented at the grassroots level. Some of these SSOs reported that they pass information on to club administrators but had little or no influence over whether the information was acted on or if it was passed on to coaches and again to individual participants. Some indicated that they lacked the resources at the state level to support or monitor implementation at the grassroots level. Reported difficulties identified in implementing the *Guidelines* at the community level are summarised below:

- Time and resource constraints at the grassroots level
- General lack of interest in safety
- Lack of understanding of the importance of safety
- Volunteers already overburdened
- Turnover of volunteers and officials
- Reaching rural areas
- Difficulties in monitoring and driving compliance

2.1.6 Suggested solutions to challenges (n=27)

Suggested solutions to the communication, distribution and implementation challenges described above include:

1. Improving communication by
 - Using different forms of media (e.g. magazines, newsletters and other easily distributed documents), and the Internet.
 - NSWSR developing a broad communication strategy to disseminate the principles of sports safety and to raise the awareness in the general community thereby generating upward pressure on clubs to implement the *Guidelines*
2. NSWSR developing training programs to be delivered at no cost to clubs
3. Integrating the *Guidelines* into existing programs
4. Making implementation of the *Guidelines* mandatory
5. Creating a specific position (safety officer) within each sport with responsibility for promoting the *Guidelines* around the state
6. Creating a safety officer position within each club with responsibility for using the *Guidelines* to inform club safety policy and practice
7. Establishing an accreditation system to recognise sports which adopt the principles underpinning the *Guidelines*
8. Financial support for SSOs (i.e. extra funding and resources) to enable them to promote the *Guidelines*

2.2 Semi-structured Interview

To complement the information obtained through the on-line survey and provide more detailed and in-depth information about the SSOs' perspectives on the *Guidelines*, 23 SSOs were invited to take part in a telephone interview to discuss:

- the preferred format for the *Sports Safety Guidelines*
- anticipated difficulties in communicating, distributing and implementing the *Guidelines* and
- potential solutions to address any anticipated difficulties.

A purposive selection of sports was made to ensure that there was representation of as many different types of sports as possible: male and female; high and low participation levels; high and low injury risk; indoor and outdoor; high and low public profile; traditional and peripheral/new emerging; individual and team; and high and low organisational infrastructure.

Twenty SSOs participated in an interview. The three SSOs that did not participate in an interview could not be contacted after multiple calls and emails to the individuals identified as the most appropriate contact by NSWSR. Twelve of the SSOs that participated in the interview had also

participated in the on-line survey, and the remaining eight had not. The sports represented are listed in Table 6:

Table 6: Sports participating in the telephone interview (n=20).

Field sports	6	Water sports	2
Indoor sports	3	Equestrian sports	1
Ice sports	1	Court sports	3
Motor sports	1	Multi sports	1
Golfing	1	Shooting sports	1

All SSOs represented the recreational/community and the elite levels of competition. The participants consisted of senior managers (e.g. Chief Executive/Executive Officer, General Manager) and operational managers (e.g. high performance, coaching & development, community). These SSOs represented between 300 and 180,000 registered participants.

2.2.1 Sport Safety Guideline Format (n=20)

All SSOs requested that the *Sport Safety Guidelines* be made accessible in an electronic format (Internet or CD) because they considered this a cost-effective and often-used or familiar format that facilitated easy dissemination to their affiliated associations, clubs and individual members. Almost half also wanted a hardcopy so they had something tangible to distribute and because some clubs don't have internet access or the members are not technically savvy. One requested that the *Guidelines* be made available in a format (e.g. MS Word) that enabled them to be customized and amended (e.g. additional information or organisational logo added) to meet the specific needs of their sport or their affiliated associations and clubs.

2.2.2 Challenges Identified in Communicating, Distributing or Implementing the Sport Safety Guidelines

The alignment of the *Guidelines* with the existing policies and regulations was not identified as a challenge for the majority of SSOs as they reported being committed to integrating the *Guidelines* into their existing policies. A small number of SSOs believed it would be a challenge and that the *Guidelines* need to be simple, easily adapted to their sport and align with the policies of their national body.

The majority of SSOs indicated that they faced challenges ensuring compliance with the *Guidelines* by community clubs in their sport because, while safety could be endorsed and promoted, it was difficult to monitor and enforce safety related activities at the community level. The volunteer nature of sport and the independent governance of clubs were identified as challenges. For example, some SSOs highlighted difficulties around communication with volunteers, and the necessity to work with volunteers to encourage uptake of new initiatives.

However, a minority of SSOs did not report this to be a problem as they reported good communication throughout their organisation, and that their members were aware of the safety risks and self-monitor effectively. Further, a number of SSOs reported that they didn't have any challenges with disseminating information to their grassroots volunteers—they reported that finding enough volunteers was the bigger issue.

Turnover of community club administration was not reported as concern by the majority of SSOs at interview. They believed that they have been highly effective when passing on information to new administrators by having workshops and hand-overs at annual general meetings. Some grass roots organisations have adopted a four year administration term with half of the administrators changing every two years, and new people usually being enthusiastic. However the few interviewed SSOs that did report having challenges with the turnover of administration reported that communication, and frequent changing of administrators and constant re-educating are the biggest problems.

Most SSOs did not identify any challenges with the way injury and risk is viewed in their respective sports. They indicated that their participants followed the rules or they didn't participate so the majority of the participants were very aware of the regulations as they are part of the rules of the sport. There was also reported to be a great emphasis placed on safety in the courses (coaching, sports trainer etc) offered to grassroots organisations.

2.2.3 Potential Solutions and Practical Support to Address Challenges

The most common suggestion by SSOs to overcome the challenges identified was to plan and implement an effective communication and education strategy to promote safety. Other suggestions included: provide incentives for volunteers to attend training courses; have the government offer more financial support, resources, education and courses; and develop and implement an effective way to monitor safety activity at the grass roots level.

The need for more funding, resources, staff and time was identified as essential to facilitating the implementation of the *Guidelines*. When prompted, most SSOs supported the provision of:

- online and face to face training;
- case studies of successful implementation of safety initiatives;
- safety checklists;
- policy templates; and
- evidence-based and best practice guidelines.

Collecting injury data and providing access to it was also identified as worthwhile practical support.

NSWSR was identified as the most appropriate provider of support. Other suggestions were the: federal and state governments; Australian Sporting Commission; and their own organisations.

2.2.4 Safety Initiatives Implemented

Most SSOs reported that they had recently implemented new safety initiatives in their sport. Some examples were: coach, official, safety and sports trainer course accreditation; environmental, equipment and facility modifications; injury recording systems; and issue-specific safety policies (e.g. codes of behaviour, heat, pregnancy, lightning and limiting exposure—e.g. restricting participation based on experience or physical build).

The new safety initiatives were often developed at the national or state level and then disseminated and implemented through policy and regulation change at the national or state level. They were usually communicated via website, email, newsletter, mail-out, and face-to-face meetings to the grassroots level. New initiatives were often made compulsory/mandatory and supported via inclusion into rulebooks, constitutions and policy/procedures manuals, and included in the roles of officials (umpires, referees etc).

The majority of SSOs reported that the safety initiatives they had implemented had been successful. Some of their successes were attributed to the fact that the safety issues being tackled were highly promoted by government and society (e.g. child protection and sun protection). Success was mainly measured in terms of member awareness of safety issues. Other measures of success were a decrease in insurance claims and injuries. Several SSOs reported that they were unsure if their safety initiatives had been successful as evaluation was still being done and that they had no way of monitoring grass roots compliance to policies and regulations.

SSOs reported learning many lessons through the process of implementing previous safety initiatives. Several indicated that generating change was an on-going, continuous process that often met with resistance. Volunteers need to be constantly reminded, through a range of communication channels, supported with training and resources and followed up. Incorporating new safety initiatives into policy and regulations was considered as an essential component of successful implementation.

2.2.5 Sport Safety, Risk Management or Injury Prevention Initiatives That Should Be Linked With The Sport Safety Guidelines

The SSOs generally supported all of the suggested prompts (linking with the NSW SR *It's Your Business* program, YouthSafe *SafeClub* training, and SMA policies) when asked about the current sports safety, risk management or injury prevention initiatives and resources that should be linked or integrated with the *Guidelines*. Linking with insurance activities and safety programs was also suggested. Specific initiatives that were also mentioned were: the NSW Cancer Council Sun Smart program; Sports Medicine Australia (NSW Branch) templates and policies; and the Sport Ranger program. NSW SR was identified as the key agency to undertake any linking activities mainly through courses, seminars, work meetings and online courses to integrate the *Guidelines* into other programs. Incentives were mentioned by one participant, such as insurance premium rebates if a club does a course.

2.3 Guidelines-related Discussion at the Second Sports Safety Reference Group meeting

A significant proportion of the second SSRG meeting was spent discussing the *Guidelines*. Specific issues discussed were:

- Who the target audience should be
- What the *Guidelines* should contain
- How the *Guidelines* would be used
- How they should be developed

The members of the SSRG made the following key points in relation to the *Guidelines*:

1. The target audience for the *Guidelines* was primarily the providers of grassroots/community sporting opportunities such as clubs, councils, commercial providers (gyms, health centres etc) and schools. It was also acknowledged that SSOs and the various levels of the education system responsible for sport would also use the *Guidelines*.
2. The *Guidelines* should be used to complement and inform new and existing sport-specific safety policies and procedures of sports providers, not override them.
3. The *Guidelines* should be used to:
 - identify what sports safety issues are important
 - benchmark current safety activities and policies
 - provide information about what to do on specific safety issues.
4. It is essential that the *Guidelines* include a ‘process oriented’ risk management component to facilitate identifying, prioritising, managing/controlling, and monitoring risks.⁸ It was made clear that the *Guidelines* should not just be a list of safety issues and how to tackle them. There was the potential that sporting organisations would address only the issues listed (even if they were not particularly relevant to them) and ignore (or not have a mechanism for identifying and addressing) risks that were not on the list but were potentially more important in the context of specific sports at the community level.
5. The *Guidelines* should facilitate two-way communication. This would enable sports providers to access information about specific safety issues/risk management processes and also to provide feedback on, and seek solutions to, new risks as they are identified. The example used during the discussion on this point was the recent dust storms in NSW—this was an unforeseen risk that sports providers had not experienced or considered previously and no best-practice or evidence-based guidance was available. Therefore, the SSOs want to have an avenue through which they could raise new risks and initiate a pro-active process of developing guidance in response to, and in preparation for, the next time a similar safety issues arises.

⁸ See *Standards Australia. Guidelines for managing risk in sport and recreation: HB 246-2004. Sydney, 2002.* for an overview of this process.

6. The *Guidelines* should be developed by NSWSR under the guidance of the SSRG. The current SSRG members were generally supportive of the idea of playing an on-going role in overseeing the development, dissemination, implementation and monitoring of the *Guidelines*.
7. The first port of call for most community sports providers when seeking guidance on sports safety issues would be their state governing sports body. Therefore, all SSOs and governing bodies (e.g. education system) should provide a link to the *Guidelines* which should be hosted on the NSWSR website.
8. The *Guidelines* should be hosted on the NSWSR website but provide a link to other relevant sources of information on specific safety issues and risk management processes (e.g. sun protection—NSW Cancer Council; risk management—Safeclub (Youthsafe) and Australian Standards Guidelines; heat policy—Sports Medicine Australia).

PART 2

Conclusions and Recommendations

Content of the Sports Safety Guidelines

SSOs wanted both issue-specific and process-oriented guidance. They wanted the process-oriented component of the *Guidelines* to contain links to material about risk management planning including training opportunities, resources, templates and case studies. The issue-specific material has been listed in Table 4, and should be considered as a starting point in terms of *Guidelines* content. The SSOs wanted issue-specific material to be simple to understand and practical to use at the community level, by volunteers. They wanted the *Guidelines* to be a dynamic resource which is updated and modified as necessary. They also wanted the process of dynamic guideline development to be interactive, with the opportunity for SSOs to include new issues to be addressed as they arose.

The research team recommends the establishment of a scientific sub-committee to ensure the *Guidelines* have an acceptable scientific or best-practice evidence base. This sub-committee should also have responsibility for regular review of the *Guidelines* to ensure their currency over time.

Format

There was strong support from SSOs for the *Guidelines* to be web based. This was seen as an effective format for dynamic material. However, there was a significant need for tangible formats—hard copy and CD-ROM—to ensure those without Internet access or skills were able to access the *Guidelines*. Material in hard copy and CD-ROM formats can become outdated quickly. Therefore the research team recommends that these formats are clearly marked with an ‘expiry’ date.

Attitude

There was strong support from SSOs for the development of the *Guidelines*. There was also a demonstrated willingness among SSOs to share resources developed within their sport with other sports. There was strong support for NSWSR to lead the development of the *Guidelines*.

Context

SSOs have a significant role in the broad communication of information and educational material to their affiliated associations, and they have well developed and frequently used channels of dissemination. However, some SSOs reported significant limitations in terms of ensuring the uptake of distributed material at the grass roots level. SSOs reported resource limitations in terms of any additional activities, other than dissemination, that may be required to promote uptake of the *Guidelines*.

SSOs were supportive of the integration or linkage of the *Guidelines* to existing initiatives such as the NSWSR *It's Your Business* program and the YouthSafe *SafeClub* training.

PART 3

A STRATEGIC APPROACH TO DEVELOPING, DISSEMINATING AND IMPLEMENTING THE *NSW SPORTS SAFETY GUIDELINES*

The purpose of a strategic approach to developing, disseminating and implementing the *Guidelines* is to increase the rate at which community sports providers use the *Guidelines* to inform their safety policies and practices. This involves two separate but related processes.²¹ Firstly, the *Guidelines* should be developed to enhance the likelihood that community sports providers will want to use them (adopt), actually use them (implement) and continue to use them (maintenance). Secondly, stakeholders (e.g. NSWSR, SSOs, government departments, NGOs, education authorities, local government) with an interest in seeing the *Guidelines* used at the community level should put strategies in place designed specifically to increase the awareness, adoption, implementation and maintenance of the *Guidelines* by community sporting organisations.

The following is an outline of a strategic approach for stakeholders to use to enhance the likelihood that community sports providers will be aware of, and choose to adopt, implement and maintain the use of the *Guidelines*. This approach incorporates the finding from earlier stages of this research project (particularly Research Activity 2) and is underpinned by the *Diffusion of Innovations* theory of EM Rogers.²²

***NSW Sports Safety Guidelines* development**

Theory suggests that the community sports providers' subjective evaluation of the *Guidelines* (based on their personal experiences and perceptions of the *Guidelines*), communicated through their interpersonal networks will drive the diffusion process and ultimately determine the rate at which the *Guidelines* are adopted and used. It is important to note that the rate of adoption of the *Guidelines* depends more on the community sports providers' perceptions of the attributes of the *Guidelines*, than on the attributes as classified objectively (i.e. by scientific evidence) or perceived by NSWSR, SSOs or other external 'experts'.

Therefore, the *Guidelines* should be developed in such a way as to enhance the likelihood that community sports providers perceive them as having a relative advantage when compared to either not doing anything about safety and injury or the current way they access sports safety- and injury prevention-related information and resources. In addition to being perceived as able to prevent injuries and improve safety, the relative advantage of the *Guidelines* might be perceived in terms of improved sporting performance, reduced cost, higher social status and approval, or saving time and effort.

To enhance the likelihood of adoption, the *Guidelines* also need to be perceived as:

- Compatible with the needs, values and beliefs of community sports providers;
- Compatible with current ideas about safety and injury prevention;
- Simple and easy to use; and
- Able to be trialed on a small scale.

It is also important that the use of the *Guidelines* is as ‘observable’ as possible so that potential users are aware that others are using the *Guidelines* and reaping the benefits. This might be achieved by developing a series of case studies showing how prominent and well respected organisations have used the *Guidelines* to successfully address common safety issues. This is particularly challenging when introducing preventive interventions such as the *Guidelines* as the undesired event (i.e. the sports injury) may not occur even in the absence of the *Guidelines*, and the desired consequence (i.e. prevention of an injury) is an unrecognised or delayed reward. Therefore, if using the *Guidelines* can be shown to produce observable results in other ways, such as improved performance, greater availability of participants for selection in teams or reduced expenditure on medical treatment and supplies (e.g. prophylactic strapping and taping), they may be more likely to be adopted and used at the community level.

Recommendations on *Guideline* Development

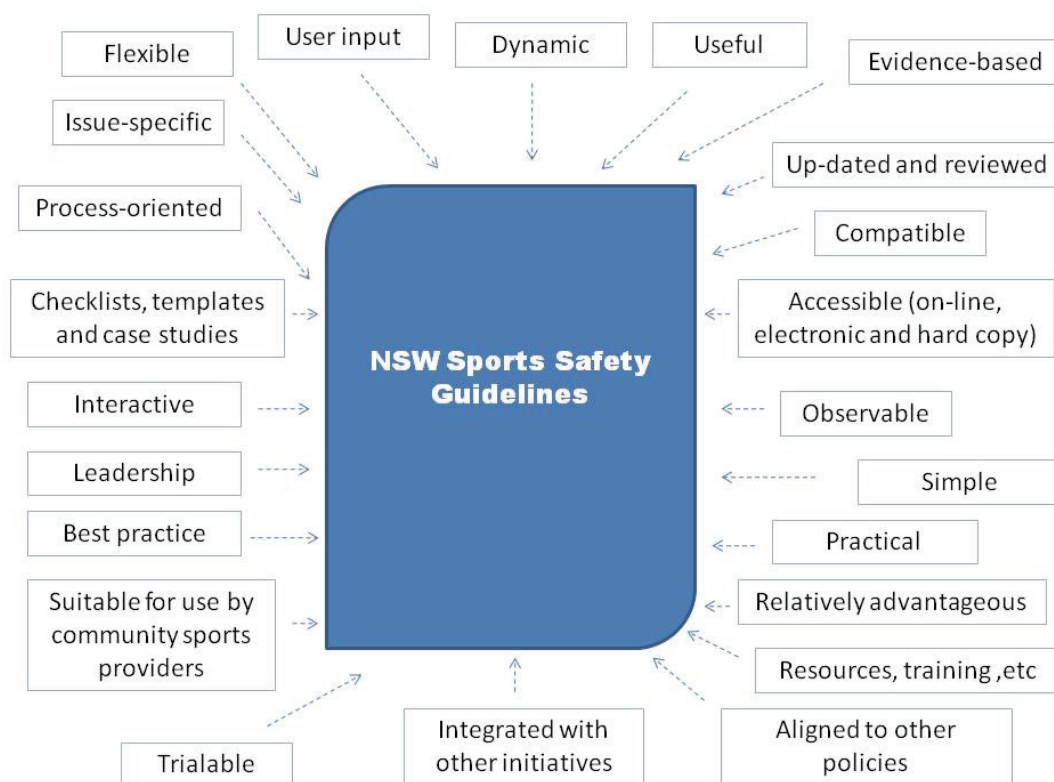
Based on the outcomes of our online survey and telephone interviews with SSOs, the discussions at the two SSRG meetings, and informed by the principle of the Diffusion of Innovations theory, we recommend that the following steps be taken to facilitate the development of the *Guidelines*:

1. NSWSR should:
 - a. Continue to convene the SSRG to oversee the development of the *Guidelines*. The main role of the SSRG should be to facilitate the exchange of information and ideas between the guideline developers (NSWSR) and users (community sport and recreation providers) to ensure that evidence-based, user-friendly and community sports-relevant *Guidelines* are developed.
 - b. Reduce the size of the SSRG to facilitate ease of meeting and consultation.
 - c. Include representatives from ‘end-users’ groups such as community sports clubs, schools and local councils on SSRG.
 - d. Include representatives from sports for people with disabilities on the SSRG.
2. The SSRG should:
 - a. Agree upon the priority safety issues and risk management processes to include in the initial content of the *Guidelines* based on the elements of safety identified as important in this study (see Table 4) and the best-practice risk management processes as they apply to the prevention of sport injuries.

- b. Develop a 'rationale' for the *Guidelines* that highlights the relative advantage, from the perspective of community sports providers, of the *Guidelines* over current ways of obtaining guidance on sports safety and injury prevention interventions and risk management processes.
 - c. Establish a *scientific sub-committee* to ensure the *Guidelines* have an acceptable scientific or best-practice evidence-base.
 - d. Access, and assess the scientific quality of, currently available evidence-based and best practice guidelines and standards on priority safety issues and risk management processes.
 - e. Establish a process for gaining meaningful input from representatives of potential *Guidelines* users (e.g. community sporting organisations, local councils, schools) and any 'gatekeepers' (development officers, regional sports bodies, school sport and physical education advisors etc) to ensure that the content and presentation of *Guidelines* meets their needs and is compatible with their values, beliefs, previous experience and expectations.
 - f. Establish a two-way communication process between the users of the *Guidelines* (i.e. community sports providers, SSOs, Education system etc) and the guideline producers (i.e. NSWSR, SSRG) to enable new risks to be identified and responded to.
 - g. Establish a process to regularly monitor, review and up-date the priority safety issues and risk management processes that are covered by the *Guidelines*.
3. NSWSR should develop and regularly up-date an easy to access and navigate web-page that:
 - a. Contains or provides links to:
 - i. High quality guidance on priority safety issues
 - ii. Information about, and resources to support community sports providers to undertake appropriate risk management processes
 - iii. Resources and training that will support community sports providers to adopt risk management processes and used evidence-based injury prevention interventions.
 - b. Enables users of the *Guidelines* to provide feedback, particularly on new risks that have been identified and for which there is currently no guidance on how to address.
 - c. Is linked to all relevant SSOs, government department and non-government organisation websites so that anyone looking for guidance on sports safety issues will easily locate the *Guidelines*.
 4. NSWSR should develop, make available for widespread dissemination, and regularly up-date an easy to use hard copy and or CD-ROM version of the *Guidelines*.

Figure 5 illustrates the characteristics of the *Guidelines* that are likely to increase their adoption, implementation and maintenance within the community sports sector.

Figure 5: Characteristics of the *NSW Sports Safety Guidelines* that will make them more likely to be adopted, implemented and maintained by community sports providers

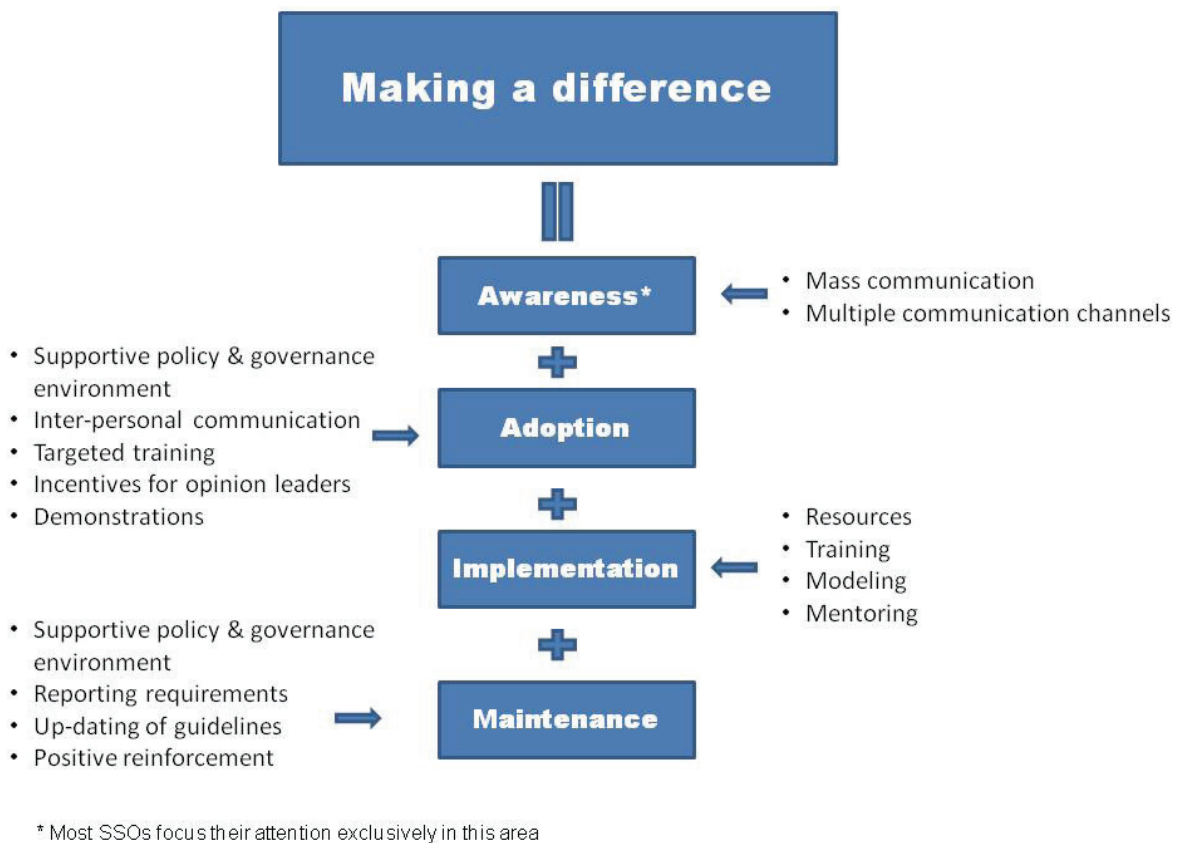


Making a difference with the *Guidelines*

Evidence-based guidelines and best practice risk management processes, no matter how well developed, will have little impact on the number and severity of sports injuries if no one:

- Knows about them;
- Decides to use them;
- Uses them in the way they are intended; or
- Continues to use them over a long period of time.

Therefore, for the *Guidelines* to make a real difference to the safety policies and practices of community sports providers, it is important that the key stakeholders in sports safety in NSW (e.g. NSWRSR, SSOs, education system, NGOs, other relevant government departments—health, local government etc) develop, implement and monitor effective strategies to raise awareness and facilitate adoption, implementation and maintenance of the *Guidelines* at the community level. Figure 6 indicates the activities and strategies that need to be in place to enable the *Guidelines* to make a difference in sports safety at the community level.

Figure 6: Making a difference with the NSW Sports Safety Guidelines

The decision to use the *Guidelines*

Community sports providers are unlikely to make instantaneous or impulse decisions to use the *Guidelines*. According to the Diffusion of Innovations theory, such decisions are more likely to be a process that occurs over time and involves the following series of steps:

1. Finding out about the *Guidelines* and seeking further information about them—e.g. how useful others have found them, and how to access and use them
2. Developing a positive attitude towards the *Guidelines* and deciding to use them
3. Trying the *Guidelines* on small number of safety issues to determine their usefulness
4. Using the *Guidelines*, and possibly modifying them if necessary, for all safety issues
5. Confirming that using the *Guidelines* is useful
6. Institutionalizing the use of the *Guidelines*

Mass media communication channels, such as television, websites, newspapers, magazines newsletters, and non-personal email alerts are important and useful at Step 1. Inter-personal, two-way communication channels, such as face-to-face meetings, personal emails, training, and discussions with peers are more influential at Steps 2 and 3. Personal experience is most influential at Steps 4, 5 and 6.

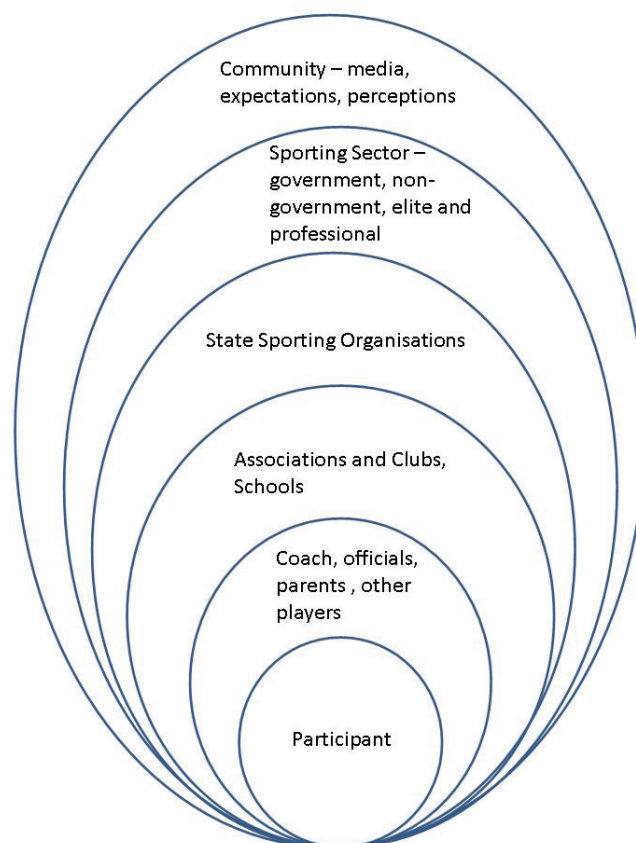
The findings of this research and our previous research²³ indicate that most SSOs and NSWSR currently see that their primary role is raising awareness about the *Guidelines*. These organisations may hold that successfully raising awareness about the *Guidelines* is sufficient to facilitate adoption, implementation and maintenance at community level. Alternatively, they may consider that supporting the adoption, implementation and maintenance of the *Guidelines* at the community level is outside their mandate. Health promotion research suggests that successful communication of an evidence-based intervention is not sufficient to ensure significant public health impact.^{24, 25}

Recommendations for making a difference with the *Guidelines*

Given the above, this strategic approach to disseminating and implementing the *Guidelines* will focus on the phases outlined in Figure 6 separately. It highlights the action required in each phase to improve the likelihood that community level sports providers will use the *Guidelines* on an on-going basis to change their sports safety practices.

It is recommended that a *NSW Sports Safety Guideline Diffusion* sub-committee of the SSRG be established to identify appropriate, context-specific strategies to promote awareness, adoption, implementation and maintenance of the *Guidelines* at community level. It is suggested that an *ecological* approach¹⁹ illustrated in Figure 7 be adopted by this sub-committee to ensure that strategies are directed at all the levels of influence on the safety behaviours and attitudes of individual sports participants.

Figure 7: An ecological approach to sports safety and injury prevention addresses all levels of influence.



Phase 1: Raising Awareness

The findings of this research indicate that most SSOs believe they have effective communication strategies in place to ensure that their community level sports providers are aware of new policies and initiatives. Most SSOs currently use a combination of the following communication channels to disseminate safety information to their affiliated community organisations:

- Hosting material on their website
- Notifying affiliated community organisations via:
 - e-mails
 - electronic and paper-based newsletters
 - electronic and paper-based policy statements
 - operational manuals including CD-ROMs
 - face-to-face meetings

The SSOs report experiencing the following challenges in communicating with their affiliated community organisations:

- A fairly regular changeover of administrators at community sports organisations with a subsequent loss of corporate and organisational knowledge
- Difficulty ensuring that community level administrators receive and act upon communications from the SSOs
- A small proportion of community sports administrators do not have regular access to the Internet or are not computer literate. Many SSOs experience communication breakdowns somewhere between themselves and their affiliated regional associations and community sporting organisation (including administrators, community coaches, officials, first aid personnel, parents and individual participants).

A strategic approach to raising awareness about the *Guidelines*

The Diffusion of Innovations theory suggests that mass communication channels should be used primarily to create knowledge about a new idea and interpersonal networks should be used to persuade individuals to adopt an innovation. Therefore, key stakeholders with a role to play in raising awareness of the *Guidelines* (SSOs, NSWSR, other government departments, NGOs, local government, education authorities etc) among community sports providers should:

1. Evaluate their current information dissemination and communication processes to identify and address any significant breakdowns between themselves and: regional associations; community sports administrators; community coaches, officials, volunteers etc; and individual participants.
2. Raise awareness of the *Guidelines* at all levels of community sport (see Figure 7) by using all existing communication channels including:
 - a. Organisational websites (including links to enable access to the *Guidelines*)
 - b. Emails
 - c. Articles in electronic and hard-copy newsletters, magazines and journals

- d. Face-to-face meetings
 - e. Training courses and seminars
 - f. Adding information to policy, procedure and operational manuals
3. Monitor the effectiveness of their communication of the *Guidelines* to all levels of their sport.

The primary purpose of raising awareness should be to ensure that stakeholders at all levels of community sport:

- are aware of the *Guidelines*,
- know how to access them and
- develop a positive attitude towards using the *Guidelines*

Phase 2: Encouraging Adoption

Being aware of the *Guidelines* and having a positive attitude towards using them are good first steps on the pathway towards impacting on the safety policies and practices of community sports providers. However, this awareness and positive attitude needs to be translated into actually ‘having a go’ at using the *Guidelines*.

The role of change agents

Key stakeholder agencies interested in generating a change in safety policies and practices in community sport (e.g. researchers, SSOs, NSWSR, education system, local government, NGOs, government departments) will need to identify and use appropriate ‘change agents’ to facilitate the adoption of the *Guidelines* by community sports providers.

Change agents are individuals who are specifically given responsibility to influence the clients’ innovation-decisions in a direction deemed desirable by the change agency. In the context of the *Guidelines* the change agents will be people—project officers, sports development officers, health promotion officers etc—within the key stakeholder agencies (e.g. SSOs, local government, education system, NGOs) whose role it is to facilitate the flow of the *Guidelines* from the key stakeholder agency to the community sports providers.

The role of the change agent is to:

- Establish an information exchange relationship with different levels of community sport
- Develop a need for safety-related change among the community sports providers
- Assist community sports providers to diagnose the safety-related problems that may be resolved by adopting and using the *Guidelines*
- Create an intent to use the *Guidelines* among the community sports providers
- Translate the intent to use the *Guidelines* into actually adopting and using them
- Stabilise the adoption and use of the *Guidelines*
- Reinforce on-going use of the *Guidelines* and prevent discontinuance

To be successful in the above role the change agents need to be perceived by the community sports providers as credible, competent, trustworthy and empathetic. In addition, success may require repeated contacts between change agents and the community sports providers.

Another key role of the change agents will be to inform the key stakeholder agencies, and in turn the SSRG and NSWSR, about how the *Guidelines* need to be modified to fit the changing safety and injury prevention needs of the community sports providers.

According to the Diffusion of Innovations theory, change agent success in securing the adoption of the *Guidelines* by community sports providers will be positively related to:

- their efforts in contacting the community sports providers;
- their ability to identify and work through appropriate community sports sector opinion leaders to gain leverage and improve efficiency; and
- the extent to which they are perceived as more oriented to the needs of the community sports sector than to the needs of the stakeholder agencies.

More effective communication between the change agents and the community sports providers will occur when the two are more similar to each other. The personal acceptability of the change agent is as or more important than their technical expertise when it comes to facilitating the adoption of the *Guidelines* by community sports providers. Change agents may be able to speed up the rate of adoption of the *Guidelines* among community sports providers by organising demonstrations and opportunities to trial the *Guidelines*.

The role of opinion leaders

According to the Diffusion of Innovations theory, the people most likely to influence the rate of adoption of an innovation within a system are the higher status, more respected and innovative members. These individuals are known as opinion leaders within a system. Key stakeholders and change agents responsible for encouraging community sports providers to use the *Guidelines* to inform their safety policies and practices should identify and concentrate promotional efforts on these influential opinion leaders.

The opinion leaders within a system generally:

- Have greater exposure to mass media
- Are more likely to move outside their local area and local systems (including participation in seminars, workshops and other training events)
- Conform highly to the norms of their system
- Are more innovative
- Have extensive interpersonal networks and social participation.

Some strategies to identify opinion leaders within the various levels of the community sports system include asking:

- ‘Key informants’ (e.g. development officers, regional association office bearers, local government sport & recreation officers) who they think are the opinion leaders
- Potential *Guidelines* users (e.g. community clubs, schools) who they would go to for safety-related information and advice

Opinion leadership structures are usually relatively stable over time but there may be different opinion leaders for different issues and topics. For example, sports administrators may be the opinion leaders for policy-based sports injury prevention interventions, coaches may be the opinion leaders for training-related interventions, and sports trainers may be the opinion leaders for sports medicine-related interventions.

A strategic approach to encourage adoption of the *Guidelines*

- SSOs and other key stakeholder agencies should develop policy environments that require and encourage their affiliated community sports providers to adopt a strategic and evidence-informed approach to safety and injury prevention, facilitated by using the *Guidelines*. Initiatives that could be undertaken to achieve this include:
 - Using the *Guidelines* at the national or state level of the sport to develop evidence-based safety policies and regulations and then communicating the new policies via websites, emails, newsletters, mail-outs, and face to face meetings to the grassroots level.
 - Recommending affiliated clubs use the *Guidelines* and supporting this by including guideline-related information in organisational governance structures, policy/procedures manuals, rulebooks, constitutions and, in the roles of officials (umpires, referees etc).
- SSOs and other key stakeholder agencies should identify appropriate change agents within their organisations and give them responsibility for facilitating the adoption of the *Guidelines* by community sports providers.
- Change agents within the SSOs and other stakeholder agencies should identify and work through influential opinion leaders at several different levels in the community sports system to facilitate diffusion of the *Guidelines* across and through the various levels of the system (e.g. regional associations, community clubs, teams, individual participants, schools).
- Change agents should support the adoption and use of the *Guidelines* by opinion leaders through targeted activities including:
 - training
 - incentives
 - provision of resources and practical assistance.
- Once opinion leaders have begun using and experiencing the benefits of the *Guidelines*, change agents should continue to work with the opinion leaders to promote the adoption of the *Guidelines* to other community sports providers by encouraging opinion leaders to:
 - Champion the use of the *Guidelines*
 - Model the use of the *Guidelines*
 - Develop case studies of how they use and benefit from the *Guidelines*
 - Feedback their experiences to the SSRG to inform them of any changes required in the *Guidelines*.

Phase 3: Supporting Implementation

According to the Diffusion of Innovations theory, once a community sports provider is aware of and decides to adopt the *Guidelines*, they will need to be supported to use and implement the *Guidelines* as intended. The representatives of the SSOs that participated in the research conducted for this project indicated that more funding, resources, staff and time would be required to facilitate the implementation of the *Guidelines* at the community sports provider level. They also suggested, or supported the idea of providing: online and face-to-face training; case studies of successful implementation of safety initiatives; safety checklists; policy templates; and evidence-based and best practice guidelines. Collecting injury data and providing access to it was also identified as worthwhile practical support. NSWSR was identified as the most appropriate provider of support. Other suggestions were the federal and state governments, the Australian Sporting Commission, and their own organisations.

A strategic approach to support implementation of the *Guidelines*

- NSWSR, through the SSRG should develop a range of resources to support community sports providers to implement the *Guidelines* as intended. The resources should include:
 - Policy templates
 - Safety checklists
 - Case studies of how community sports providers—particularly influential opinion leaders—have used the *Guidelines* to inform and improve their safety and injury prevention policies and practices
 - Evidence-based and best practice informed guidance on common important safety issues and risk management processes
 - Reliable and up-to-date injury data.
- NSWSR, through the SSRG should develop and provide, or provide links to existing, safety and injury prevention-related training activities to support community sports providers to implement the *Guidelines* as intended. The training provided should include:
 - How to access and use the *Guidelines*
 - How to apply the principles of risk management to prevent injuries in the context of community sports providers (e.g. *SafeClub* training).
- SSOs and other key stakeholder agencies, through their designated change agents should work with the identified opinion leaders to promote and encourage community sports providers to access and use the available guideline implementation-related resources and training.
- Change agents within SSOs and other key stakeholder agencies should develop strategic safety and injury prevention mentoring and modeling programs that encourage community sports providers who have successfully used the *Guidelines* to support other community sports providers to also use the *Guidelines* to inform and improve their safety policies and practices.

Phase 4: Ensuring Maintenance

The ultimate goal of a strategic approach to the development, dissemination and implementation of the *Guidelines* is to have all community sports providers using the *Guidelines* on an on-going basis to inform their safety and injury prevention policies and practices. This will require the development of strategies to ensure that community sports providers who initially adopt and implement the *Guidelines* continue to use them into the future.

A strategic approach to encourage maintenance of the *Guidelines*

- NSWSR could link the funding they provide to SSOs to the continued use of the *Guidelines* and the on-going promotion of the *Guidelines* to affiliated community sports providers.
- SSOs and other key stakeholder agencies should develop policy environments that require and encourage their affiliated community sports providers to adopt and sustain a strategic and evidence-informed approach to safety and injury prevention facilitated by using the *Guidelines*. Initiatives that could be undertaken to achieve this include:
 - Using the *Guidelines* at the national or state level of the sport to develop evidence-based safety policies and regulations and then communicating the new policies via websites, emails, newsletters, mail-out, and face to face meetings to the grassroots level.
 - Recommending that affiliated clubs use the *Guidelines* and supporting this by incorporating guideline- related information into organisational governance structures, policy/procedures manuals, rulebooks, constitutions and, in the roles of officials (umpires, referees etc).
 - Linking use of community sports facilities (often owned by local government) to on-going use of the *Guidelines*.
 - Linking on-going insurance cover and premium costs for community sports activities to on-going use of the *Guidelines*.
- NSWSR and SSOs should include the on-going use of the *Guidelines* as a component of all governance-related training for community sports providers (e.g. *Running Your Club, It's Your Business*)
- NSWSR, Sports Medicine Australia (NSW Branch), YouthSafe and other training providers should incorporate information about the on-going use of the *Guidelines* into their existing and future safety and injury prevention training courses.

Tailoring the strategic approach to meet differing needs of differing community sports providers

According to the Diffusion of Innovations theory, there is a ‘continuum of innovativeness’ within which all individuals and organisations can be located based on how willing they are to take up a new idea. There are five different categories of adopter reflecting different relative degrees of innovativeness:

1. Innovators—the first people to take up a new idea (2.5% of all individuals or organisations).
The qualities and characteristics of innovators include:
 - a. ‘Venturesomeness’
 - b. Higher exposure to mass media
 - c. Likely to travel or have contact with people from outside their local community
 - d. Slow rate of progress from knowledge to implementation
 - e. Prepared to accept a high degree of uncertainty about an innovation
 - f. Launch new idea into the system—gate keeping role
 - g. Economically secure
 - h. Generally least need the benefits of the innovation

2. Early Adopters—the second group to take up a new idea (13.5%).
The qualities and characteristics of Early Adopters include:
 - a. Respected in the local system
 - b. Opinion leaders in local system
 - c. Speed up the diffusion process
 - d. Well connected in local and extended networks
 - e. Accept and trust scientific and objective evidence

3. Early Majority—the third group to take up a new idea (34%).
The qualities and characteristics of Early Majority include:
 - a. Deliberate
 - b. Think for some time before adopting innovation
 - c. Rely on a combination of mass and inter-personal communication channels

4. Late Majority—the fourth group to take up a new idea (34%)
The qualities and characteristics of the Late Majority include:
 - a. Rely on inter-personal communication
 - b. Shorter time between knowledge about and implementation of idea
 - c. May adopt due to economic necessity or peer pressure
 - d. Skeptical and cautious
 - e. Only prepared to accept a small degree of uncertainty

5. Laggards—last people to take up a new idea (16%)
 - a. Base decisions on what was done in the past
 - b. Traditionalist
 - c. Suspicious
 - d. No uncertainty or risk
 - e. Economic limitations

Early Adopters—the group in which most opinion leaders will be found—of a new idea within a system will generally have or be:

1. more years of formal education
2. higher social status
3. greater upward social mobility
4. from larger organisations
5. a more favorable attitude towards change
6. better able to cope with uncertainty
7. a more favorable attitude towards science
8. less concerned about peers subjective experience
9. more aspirational
10. more engage in active information seeking
11. more social participation
12. more highly interconnected through interpersonal networks
13. more likely to move outside their local area and local systems
14. more contact with change agents

Therefore, in the context of the *Guidelines*, change agents within the key stakeholder agencies (e.g. SSOs, local government, education system, NGOs) should consider using a different approach, including different communication channels and messages, with each community sports provider adopter category.

A Summary of a strategic approach to developing, disseminating and implementing the *Guidelines*

Developing the *Guidelines* and facilitating their widespread adoption and sustained implementation is one of the key injury prevention challenges facing the sport sector in NSW. The findings of this research project and the principles underpinning the Diffusion of Innovations theory have been combined to provide a relatively easy to understand and implement strategic framework to guide the dissemination of the *Guidelines*. Following this framework should ensure that attention is focused on the important issues of: how the target audience perceives the *Guidelines*; using different communication channels during different phases of the *Guidelines* dissemination process and with different types of adopters; and the role of change agents and opinion leaders in the dissemination of the *Guidelines*.

APPENDIX 1

Interview Schedule – Pre-SSGR meeting

1. How much you know about the Sports Safety Reference group? Can you please tell me what you think it has been set up to do?

*Interviewer to provide following response to participant if participant does not supply correct answer to Q1:
“The Sports Safety Reference Group will bring key stakeholders in sports safety together to formulate a strategic vision statement that will help to promote safety across all sports in NSW. Later, I understand the group will oversee the development of practical guidelines and resources for application in sport.”*

2. Thinking about the Reference Group and its first job of formulating a strategic vision statement, are there any particular challenges that the Group may need to deal with to successfully do this? How should these challenges be addressed?
3. What things do you think will need to be done or put in place to make it more likely that the Sports Safety Reference Group will be successful in formulating a strategic vision?
4. As far as your organisation goes, is being part of the Reference Group something that they are really behind? Does your organisation have any concerns or reservations about the group?
5. What about yourself, is being part of the group something that interests you? Do you have any concerns or reservations about being part of the group?
6. What contribution are you hoping that you and your organisation can make to the development of a strategic vision statement for NSW?
7. In terms of your sport, what do you hope will come out of the establishment and operation of the NSW Sports Safety Reference Group?
8. Almost 30 participants have been invited to be part of the reference group. Can you now please look at page 5 on the Partnership Document? You will see the list of the organisations that have been invited. Could you please just take a minute to look over the list, and see if there is any organisation missing, that you think should be involved in the group? Why is that an important group to include?

APPENDIX 2

Partnership Mapping Survey

A distinction can be made between different types of organisational relationships depending on their purposes and nature. Relationships in the sporting sector can be classified on a continuum ranging from *networking* through to *collaboration*.

This exercise is designed to demonstrate how the organisations invited to be part of the Sports Safety Reference Group relate to each other. Having an understanding of the strength and nature of existing relationships between participating organisations will help us in preparing for, and running the reference group.

It will also ensure that all the organisations who should be invited to be part of the reference group, have been.

Definitions

- **Networking:** Involves the exchange of information for mutual benefit. This requires little time and trust between partners. For example, organisations may attend a meeting on coaching accreditation where they provide an update on their activities, listen to what other organisations are doing and discuss issues that affect one or more parties.
- **Coordinating:** Involves exchanging information and altering activities for a common purpose. For example, organisations may meet and agree to participate in a coordinated campaign to address the issue of sport rage among parents.
- **Cooperating:** Involves exchanging information, altering activities and sharing resources. It requires a significant amount of time, a high level of trust between partners and sharing the turf between organisations. For example, a group of organisations may pool resources with the Department of Local Government to commission a study on how their sports can share local community sports grounds and facilities.
- **Collaborating:** In addition to the other activities described above, collaboration includes building the capacity of partner organisations for mutual benefit and a common purpose. Collaborating requires partners to give up part of their turf to another organisation to create a better system for all organisations. For example, a group of organisations may fund a project officer at NSW SR to develop a training package for coaches of all sporting codes on facilitating the participation of people with a disability in sport.

This questionnaire is based on 'The Partnership Analysis Tool', VicHealth.

Used with permission.

<http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/~//media/About%20Us/Attachments/VHP%20part%20toollow%20res.ashx>

Instructions

As a start, use the list of organisations invited to participate in the Sports Safety Reference Group provided. There is no need to include all of the listed organisations, in your diagram. Only include those with which your organisation has a link.

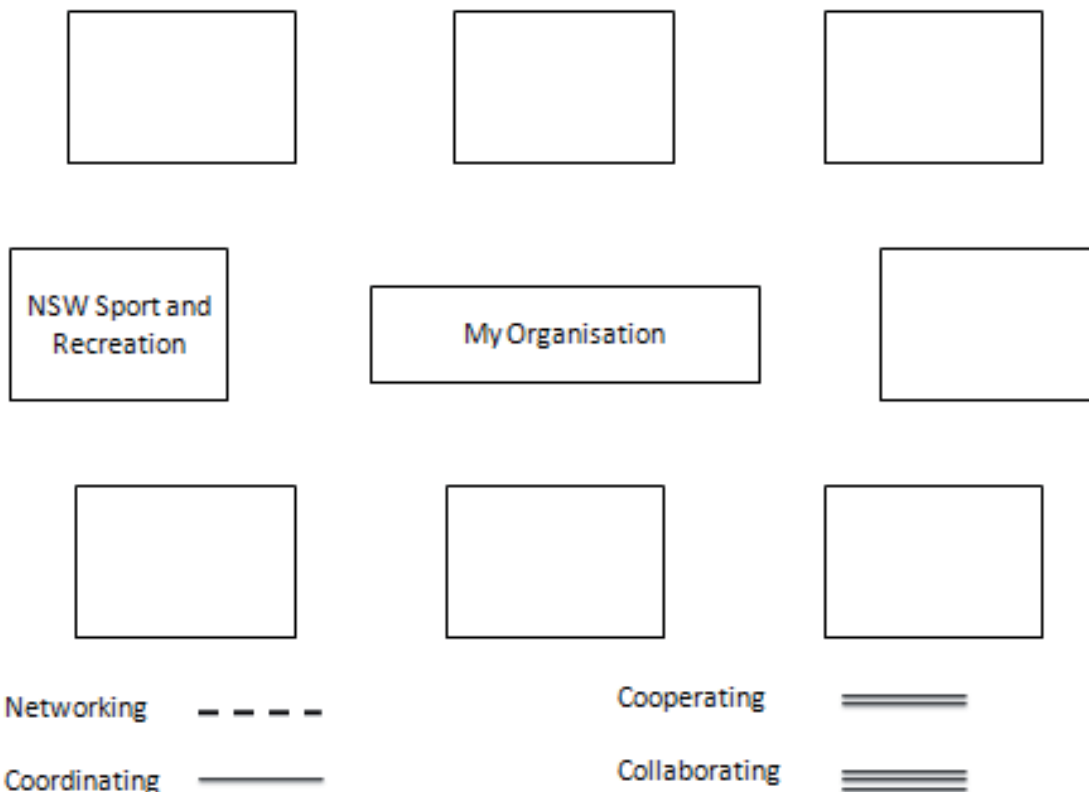
1. Using the legend given, link the organisations that you deal with in terms of the nature of the partnership you have with them. Your organisation is likely to have a relationship with NSWSR; however, there may also be important links between your organisation and the other organisations listed on page 5. Identify these organisations by using the number that appears next to their name and write it into the box.
2. The strength of the links between organisations should be based on how the partnership actually works rather than how people might like it to work or how it may work in the future.
3. If an organisation that you link with is missing from the list, please add it to your diagram by adding a box, using its name. Please note, only include linking organisations that are relevant to sport or sport safety.
4. Where possible, for each of the organisations in your diagram, give concrete examples of how you work together. Write these examples under the diagram.

Complete the Map for Your Organisation

Refer to the list of invited participants to the Sports Safety Reference Group on the next page.

Add extra boxes if needed.

Please briefly describe the nature of the relationships identified in your diagram below.



APPENDIX 3

The Sports Partnership Tool Checklist

In terms of the *Sports Safety Reference Group* (i.e. *the partnership of members*), please rate your level of agreement (from strongly disagree to strongly agree) with each of the statements below.

1. Determining the need for the partnership	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
There is a perceived need for the partnership in terms of areas of common interest and complementary capacity.						
There is a clear goal for the partnership.						
There is a shared understanding of, and commitment to, this goal among all potential partners.						
The partners are willing to share some of their ideas, resources, influence and power to fulfil the goal.						
The perceived benefits of the partnership outweigh the perceived costs.						

2. Choosing partners	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
The partners share common ideologies, interests and approaches.						
The partners see their core business as partially interdependent.						
There is a history of good relations between the partners.						
The partnership brings added prestige to the partners individually as well as collectively.						
There is enough variety among members to have a comprehensive understanding of the issues being addressed.						

3. Making sure the partnership works	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
The relevant managers in each organisation support the partnership.						
Partners have the necessary skills for collaborative action.						
There are strategies in place to enhance the skills of the partnership.						
The roles, responsibilities and expectations of partners are clearly defined and understood by all other partners.						
The administrative, communication and decision-making structure of the partnership is as simple as possible.						

4. Planning collaborative action	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
All partners are involved in planning and setting priorities for collaborative action.						
Partners have the task of communicating and promoting the coalition in their own organisations						
Some members have roles that enable them to work across the traditional boundaries that exist between agencies in the partnership.						
The lines of communication, roles and expectations of partners are clear.						
There is a participatory decision-making system that is accountable, responsive and inclusive.						

5. Implementing collaborative action	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
Safety related processes and procedures that are common across agencies such as pre-participation screening, injury data collection and safety policies have been standardised.						
There is an investment in the partnership of time, personnel, materials or facilities.						
Collaborative action by members and reciprocity between agencies is rewarded by management.						

The activity of the partnership is adding value (rather than duplicating activities) for sport in general, and the agencies involved in the partnership.						
There are regular opportunities for informal and voluntary contact between staff from the different agencies and other members of the partnership.						

6. Minimising the barriers to the partnership	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
Differences in organisational priorities, goals and tasks have been addressed.						
There is a core group of skilled and committed members (in terms of the partnership) that will continue over the life of the partnership.						
There are formal structures for sharing information and resolving demarcation disputes.						
There are informal ways of achieving this.						
There are strategies to ensure alternative views are expressed within the partnership.						

7. Reflecting on and continuing the partnership	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
There are processes for recognising and celebrating collective achievements and/or individual contributions.						
The partnership can demonstrate or document the outcomes of its collective work.						
There is a clear need and commitment to continuing the partnership in the medium term.						
There are resources available from either internal or external sources to continue the partnership.						
There is a way of reviewing the range of partners and bringing in new members or removing some.						

This tool is based on the VicHealth Partnership Tool.

Used with permission.

<http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/~ /media/About%20Us/Attachments/VHP%20part%20tool%20follow%20res.ashx>

APPENDIX 4

Results of *Sports Partnership Tool Checklist*

The following tables show the results obtain when we gave the modified *VicHealth Partnership Tool Checklist* to Reference Group members after the first meeting. These results indicate how the respondents viewed a range of factors related to: the need for a partnership; choosing a partner; the way a partnership works; planning and implementing collaborative action; minimising the barriers of the partnership; and reflecting on and continuing the partnership.

	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Don't Know
1. Determining the need for the partnership				
There is a perceived need for the partnership in terms of areas of common interest and complementary capacity.	0	13.3	80	6.7
There is a clear goal for the partnership.	13.3	13.3	73.4	0
There is a shared understanding of, and commitment to, this goal among all potential partners.	20	6.7	73.4	0
The partners are willing to share some of their ideas, resources, influence and power to fulfil the goal.	0	6.7	93.3	0
The perceived benefits of the partnership outweigh the perceived costs.	0	6.7	73.3	20
2. Choosing partners	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Don't Know
The partners share common ideologies, interests and approaches.	13.3	20	66.6	
The partners see their core business as partially interdependent.	0	13.3	80	6.7
There is a history of good relations between the partners.	20	26.7	33.3	20
The partnership brings added prestige to the partners individually as well as collectively.	0	26.7	60	13.3
There is enough variety among members to have a comprehensive understanding of the issues being addressed.	6.7	6.7	86.7	

3. Making sure the partnership works	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Don't Know
The relevant managers in each organisation support the partnership.	0		80	20
Partners have the necessary skills for collaborative action.	0	6.7	86.7	6.7
There are strategies in place to enhance the skills of the partnership.	6.7	13.3	66.6	13.3
The roles, responsibilities and expectations of partners are clearly defined and understood by all other partners.	0	26.7	66.7	6.7
The administrative, communication and decision-making structure of the partnership is as simple as possible.	6.7	6.7	80	6.7
4. Planning collaborative action	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Don't Know
All partners are involved in planning and setting priorities for collaborative action.	6.7	20	73.4	
Partners have the task of communicating and promoting the coalition in their own organisations	6.7	13.3	73.3	6.7
Some members have roles that enable them to work across the traditional boundaries that exist between agencies in the partnership.	6.7	13.3	66.7	13.3
The lines of communication, roles and expectations of partners are clear.	6.7	33.3	60	
There is a participatory decision-making system that is accountable, responsive and inclusive.	0	20	80	
5. Implementing collaborative action	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Don't Know
Safety related processes and procedures that are common across agencies such as pre-participation screening, injury data collection and safety policies have been standardised.	40	26.7	13.3	20
There is an investment in the partnership of time, personnel, materials or facilities.	6.7	20	73.3	
Collaborative action by members and reciprocity between agencies is rewarded by management.	33.4	13.3	33.3	20
The activity of the partnership is adding value (rather than duplicating activities) for sport in general, and the agencies involved in the partnership.	0	13.3	86.7	
There are regular opportunities for informal and voluntary contact between staff from the different agencies and other members of the partnership.	33.4	6.7	46.6	13.3

6. Minimising the barriers to the partnership	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Don't Know
Differences in organisational priorities, goals and tasks have been addressed.	40	13.3	33.3	13.3
There is a core group of skilled and committed members (in terms of the partnership) that will continue over the life of the partnership.	6.7	6.7	73.3	13.3
There are formal structures for sharing information and resolving demarcation disputes.	26.7		53.3	20
There are informal ways of achieving this.	0	6.7	80	13.3
There are strategies to ensure alternative views are expressed within the partnership.	6.7		93.3	
7. Reflecting on and continuing the partnership	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Don't Know
There are processes for recognising and celebrating collective achievements and/or individual contributions.	6.7	40	46.7	6.7
The partnership can demonstrate or document the outcomes of its collective work.	13.3	6.7	80	
There is a clear need and commitment to continuing the partnership in the medium term.	0	13.3	86.7	
There are resources available from either internal or external sources to continue the partnership.	33.3	6.7	46.7	13.3
There is a way of reviewing the range of partners and bringing in new members or removing some.	6.7	20	46.7	26.7

This tool is based on the VicHealth Partnership Tool.

Used with permission.

<http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/~ /media/About%20Us/Attachments/VHP%20part%20toollow%20res.ashx>

APPENDIX 5

Interview schedule - Post-SSRG meeting

Questions

1. How satisfied, on a scale from 0 to 10, were you with the way the NSW Sports Safety Reference Group was established and the way it operated? Why have you given this rating?
2. The Sports Safety Reference Group brought together a range of partners with an interest in sports safety. What were the strengths and weaknesses of a partnership approach?
3. How could the partnership process be improved?
4. How successful, on a scale from 0 to 10, do you think the NSW Sports Safety Reference Group was in achieving its main tasks? Why have you given this rating?
5. In terms of the membership of the Sports Safety Reference Group, were there any perspectives that were missing, that would have been useful to inform the development of the Sports Safety Plan? If yes, who?
6. How supportive, on a scale from 0 to 10, is your organisation of the final version of the Sports Safety Plan 2012? Why have you given this rating?
7. How much discussion did you have with other people in your organisation about the activities of the Reference group or the development of the Safety Plan?
8. What contribution do you think your organisation made to the activities of the NSW Sports Safety Reference Group?
9. What are the implications for your organisation of the Sport Safety Plan 2012?
10. What will your organisation do in response it?
11. How will your organisation change its activities?

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