

# ***Participant-led Design***



A key to designing a solution to a challenge is to get close to the issue and work with the people we are trying to help. This is participant-led design.

We don't need to have the answers, and we must not make assumptions about what may or may not work best. What we must do is facilitate the right environment to support the people involved in formulating and developing a solution that will work for them in their community.

Experience shows that when girls are asked to co-design a programme or project, they are more likely to buy into, own, commit to and enjoy the activity. If this is achieved, it's more likely that an initiative can be sustained, and outcomes will be long lasting or become embedded as a culture or even a habit.

A fundamental principle of a HERA programme is to ensure that the girls are consulted from the very beginning and that no programme is delivered until the participants have been asked what they want. Methods of participant led design or co-creation include surveys, workshops and interviews.

## ***How do we implement a participant-led approach?***

- ◆ If the group of participants hasn't already been established; identify a target demographic and geographic area
- ◆ Depending on the group, engage other service providers to help recruit girls who will initially be involved in the programme. This may include schools, social workers, religious organisations, Girl Guide NZ, local Council Facilities
- ◆ Be aware of requirements for parental/carer agreement. While it may not be your responsibility (i.e. if you're working with a school), it's valuable to foster relationships with parents/carers, particularly in the early stages, to promote the benefits of physical activity. Additionally, if they are likely to present barriers which impact the girls participating, it would be useful to understand and work through before time is spent developing a programme.
- ◆ Recruit other adults, senior students or even ambassadors to support the process. This may be individuals who already have an established relationship with some participants or can facilitate discussions. If you have a budget, consider outside organisations who work in this field; they often have experience at discussing and challenging ideas. Don't underestimate the power that encouragement from peers can have on engaging girls in sport or physical activity.

- ◆ Depending on the scale of the project, bring the girls together as one group or smaller local groups for the first workshop session.
- ◆ Create a safe and relaxed environment. Make sure everyone feels comfortable to contribute and emphasize that any idea is a good idea. Offer various ways for the girls to offer up their opinion, whether it be verbally or written. Consider having a 'Post It Park' on the wall where girls can add ideas throughout the session.
- ◆ Set out clear goals about the purpose of the session and what you, as the deliverer, would like to achieve and generally what the girls, as participants, would like to achieve.
- ◆ Then, let go of any pre-conceived ideas you may have to ensure that that you are being led by the participant.
- ◆ Ask questions to identify what the girls want and determine any potential challenges or barriers. Provide options and examples, not just open-ended questions, especially if it's a struggle to create good conversation.
- ◆ Allow conversations to develop naturally and organically as much as possible.
- ◆ Everyone can have a say. If someone is dominating the conversation, make sure you let other voices be heard.
- ◆ Ensure you are actively listening to responses and continually check, challenge and clarify to ensure what the girls are saying has been understood and noted.
- ◆ If the group produces several ideas, ask them to rank them in terms of importance, to help decide where to focus first. Post It's are a very useful tool to take with you!
- ◆ It's likely that the programme could be to help deliver specific outcomes for your organisation. It's okay to ensure that the design reflects this and if the conversation goes completely off track, bring it back with a reminder of everyone's goals.
- ◆ It's important to understand that participant led design can be a time-consuming approach and several sessions may be required to design a suitable programme.
- ◆ Once a programme has been designed and implemented, it's okay to continually refine, test and re-evaluate to ensure it works for all parties, is still relevant and is positively impacting those involved.

