How do we engage harder to reach groups in physical activity?
Executive summary

Background
The Big Lottery Fund (BIG) has commissioned Hall Aitken to evaluate the Community Sport Initiative between 2005 and 2010. This document summarises the key findings from the third year evaluation of the Community Sport Initiative. It is our interpretation of the main evaluation report, which can be downloaded from our website at www.biglotteryfund.org.uk

The Community Sport Initiative includes the following programmes:
- The Active Lifestyles and Community Sport programmes in Northern Ireland
- Active Futures in Scotland
- Mentro Allan in Wales

Key findings
- It is estimated that in the first two years of activities, projects in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales supported over 80,000 people.
- The programmes have successfully reached communities who have low levels of participation in physical activity. Over 80% of participants were inactive before they were involved in project activities.
- Projects have engaged local communities in the delivery of activities. Approximately 16,000 volunteer coaches, instructors and activity leaders are supporting project activities.
- Projects are supporting socially and economically deprived communities. Almost four out of 10 participants live in socially and/or economically deprived areas.
- Projects are supporting groups with low levels of participation in traditional sports activities. Approximately 10 per cent of participants are disabled people and a further 10 per cent are people from Black or Minority Ethnic communities.
- Projects are developing good practice models by involving targeted groups in recruiting project co-ordinators, planning and evaluating activities.
Key lessons learned

All of the Community Sport projects aim to engage groups who traditionally have low levels of participation in physical activity and sport.

Projects have learned the following key lessons about how to effectively engage harder to reach groups in physical activity:

**Young people who are not currently participating in physical activity**
- Offering a range of activities that are not seen as sporty, such as dancing, walking, trampolining, boxercise and outdoor activities can help to engage young people in physical activity.
- Involving young people in recruiting project co-ordinators is a useful way of increasing participation in activities.

**Older people**
- Locating activities in accessible locations that older people are familiar with plays a crucial role in motivating people to participate in activities.
- Being able to socialise and make friends are two important factors which motivate older people to take part in activities. Socialising needs to be marketed as a key component of project activities.

**Women who are not currently participating in physical activities**
- Childcare can be a major barrier to women participating in sport. Providing childcare facilities or running classes that coincide with school hours are two ways in which projects are able to target women with childcare responsibilities.
- Offering ‘non-sporty’ physical activity options such as dance classes or yoga can help to engage women in physical activity.

**People from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities**
- Working in partnership with established organisations that have relationships with BME communities increases interest and engagement in activities. Partner organisations play important roles in referring people to projects.
- Introducing activities through family sessions can be an important way of engaging with some BME communities.

**People with disabilities**
- Ensuring that participants have the opportunity to choose from a range of activities helps to motivate people to take part.
- Using innovative methods of measuring the impacts and soft outcomes of projects is a useful way of recording the difference that projects are making for participants.

**People who live in socially or economically disadvantaged areas**
- Employing a project co-ordinator who is able to gain the trust and respect of the local community helps to motivate local people to participate in activities.
- Providing the opportunity to take part in different activities such as dance, paintball, yoga and outdoor pursuits is an effective way of engaging people who do not currently participate in sport.

“In the first year of the programme a young person with a visual impairment participated in the project and gained skills and confidence to go and get a National Pool Lifeguard qualification. She has recently been employed as a sports coach.”

Clearing Hurdles project
This section provides information about each of the programmes that are being delivered across the UK.

**Northern Ireland**
We have provided £4.5 million to support two programmes in Northern Ireland.

- £2.4 million has been allocated to Sport Northern Ireland to deliver Community Sport. This programme aims to initiate community sport development projects in disadvantaged communities to improve the well being of individuals and increase participation among groups that are under represented in sport and physical activity. All Community Sport projects have now finished.

- A further £2.1 million was allocated to support the Active Lifestyles programme which aimed to increase grassroots participation in physical activity among groups that were inactive. The Active Lifestyles programme is supporting projects to engage particular target groups including older people, people with disabilities, young people and people who live in rural areas.

**Scotland**
We have committed £5.5 million in Scotland to support the Active Futures programme. Active Futures is supporting 31 projects that encourage inactive 17-24 year olds to participate in physical activity. It also aims to prevent people who are currently active from giving up physical activity. Active Futures has prioritised projects that target young women, young disabled people and BME communities. Funding is supporting partnerships that open up existing facilities and activities, or introduce a new activity programme.

**Wales**
Mentro Allan is a £6.5 million programme that aims to increase activity levels among ‘hard to reach’ groups with low levels of participation in physical activity. The programme seeks to achieve this aim by increasing recreational use of the natural environment in Wales. The 15 projects are each targeting people in specific geographical areas.

A National Partnership was funded in Wales to help organisations develop and deliver projects. The National Partnership is conducting its own evaluation of the Mentro Allan programme and the findings will link into the evaluation of the Community Sport Initiative. The Community Sport evaluation will conduct case study visits to projects in Wales to complement the National Partnership’s evaluation. Further information about the National Partnership’s evaluation is available at www.mentroallan.co.uk.
The aim of the evaluation is to assess whether the programmes are meeting their aims and to examine ‘what works’ in increasing physical activity among people who experience barriers to participation. We have commissioned Hall Aitken to evaluate the programme in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales between 2005 and 2010. This report represents our interpretation of the year three evaluation report.

The specific objectives of the evaluation are:

1. To determine the programme’s impact in relation to their aims and to BIG’s mission and values. Particular focus is placed on strategic working, supporting partnerships, and promoting social inclusion, equality and diversity.

2. To compare the impact of the programmes in increasing physical activity among the different target groups in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales.

3. To add to the evidence base and develop a theory of ‘what works’ in meeting the aims of the programmes and increasing participation in physical activity among the target groups.

4. To highlight and disseminate evidence of good practice and innovative approaches in delivering and sustaining projects.

5. To assess the impact of partnership working on meeting the programme aims.

6. To assess how projects have linked with local and national strategies and how these have complemented the delivery of the programmes.

7. To highlight lessons learned in order to inform future policy development.

Hall Aitken is using a variety of methods to evaluate the programmes including analysis of annual monitoring reports, stakeholder interviews and case study visits to projects. A website (www.bigcsi.com) has been developed to provide tools for projects and a series of workshops will be held to provide support for projects. This document summarises interim findings from the evaluation as many projects are still being delivered.
Key country findings

**Northern Ireland**

**Reaching groups with low levels of participation in physical activity**

- It is estimated that 37,782 people participated in activities that were funded by the Community Sport programme. After two years of project delivery, it is estimated that 34,309 people have participated in Active Lifestyles projects.

- Active Lifestyles projects engaged with a greater proportion of women than Community Sport projects. Over the programme, 49 per cent of Active Lifestyle participants were women compared to 42 per cent of the Community Sport project participants. This highlights the continuing challenge of engaging women and girls in physical activity.

- 61 per cent of people who participated in projects that were funded by the Community Sport programme lived in disadvantaged areas.

- Around one in six of the participants were new to sport, and had not taken part in sport or physical activity in the last 12 months.

- Approximately one in 10 people who participated in projects that were supported by the Community Sport and Active Lifestyles programmes have a disability.

**Overcoming barriers**

Staff turnover and difficulty recruiting enough volunteers limited the success of some projects. Projects that were successful in reducing staff turnover and recruiting volunteers offered them the opportunity of gaining accredited qualifications in coaching and management.

Engaging older men in physical activity has been challenging for projects. The University of the Third Age (U3A) project in Foyle successfully engaged older men by using participants as advocates to promote and advertise activities. Locating activities in a familiar and established setting with a successful track record of providing services for older people also played an important role in attracting older men.

**Actively Ageing Well in Belfast**

The Actively Ageing Well project has delivered activities in six neighbouring local authority areas. Each of the six areas successfully established partnerships with older people’s groups, leisure centres, NHS trusts, and community development workers. Before the project started, one of the main barriers for older people engaging in physical activities was the lack of suitable activities and facilities that were offered at leisure centres. The project has successfully worked in partnership with leisure centres and sports development officers to provide training about the needs and interests of older people. As a result of the project, many leisure centres now offer specific activities and equipment for older people and a welcoming environment where people feel that they can socialise and participate in activities.

**Innovation and good practice**

Projects found that to sustain interest in activities it was important to increase the involvement of participants in making decisions about the choice, structure and timing of activities.

Partnership working has been very important to the success of projects. Partner organisations played a major role in advertising projects and encouraging target groups to participate in activities.

Employing project co-ordinators who could effectively engage with target groups was important to sustaining people’s participation in activities.

“The project co-ordinator plays a very important role in the project delivery and their rapport with the local community is extremely important.”

Derrynoose Community Association
Scotland

Reaching groups with low levels of participation in physical activity

- After two years of delivery an estimated 17,529 people have participated in Active Futures projects.
- Projects have successfully engaged participants with disabilities and a fifth of the beneficiaries had at least one disability.
- A fifth of participants were from BME groups. Projects that were most successful in reaching BME groups worked in partnership with organisations that had strong relationships with BME communities.
- A high number of people who have low levels of participation in physical activity have been supported by projects. Before attending activities, one in six participants had not taken part in sport or physical activity during the last 12 months.
- Projects have engaged with people from disadvantaged areas. Around four out of every 10 participants are from socially or economically disadvantaged communities.

Overcoming barriers

A key problem for all projects has been engaging with 17–24 year olds. Projects have overcome the lack of interest and commitment among young people by introducing a variety of activities and making personal connections with participants. Sustaining the interest and commitment of 17–24 year olds in activities remains a challenge for some projects.

Establishing trust between project staff and young people was crucial to the success of activities. The Stirling Girlzone project found that establishing trust was essential to engaging and sustaining young women’s participation in activities. By developing relationships with local community groups and local residents, the project became known and trusted by the target group.

Supporting young women in Edinburgh: The underground young women’s healthy living project

This project has focused on encouraging young women to participate in physical activities, including street dance, boxercise and trampolining. As the majority of participants have children, the project has provided a free crèche. This has increased and sustained participation in activities. The project has taken a proactive role in asking participants about their needs, interests and involving them in planning activities. One of the most popular activities is gardening. This is an activity that women can take part in with their children and there is the reward of growing and eating fruit and vegetables.

Innovation and good practice

Some projects have used online social networks to engage with participants and share learning with similar projects. Bebo and Myspace pages have enabled Dance Spark to contact other dance organisations and tutors in the West of Scotland. This has given the project the opportunity to share ideas and link up with new tutors who, in turn, bring new participants with them to the project.

Projects that worked with people who experience mental ill health involved participants in designing and planning activities. This played an important role in motivating participants to remain engaged and take part in activities.
Wales
Reaching groups with low levels of participation in physical activity

- It is estimated that the Mentro Allan programme has engaged with 5,110 participants during the first year of activities.
- Projects have been successful at engaging participants from the target groups. Almost a quarter of participants had some form of disability and a third of participants were from BME communities. More than 60 per cent of the participants were female.

“Attitudes to exercise are improving and participants are starting to enjoy the project and its social benefits. Three months ago, many people were struggling for breath after a 10-minute walk. Now they can comfortably walk two miles.”
The Mentro Allan Newport project

Overcoming barriers
The main barriers that were faced by projects were lack of transport and poor weather. Some projects have found alternative funding for transport costs and others have introduced activities that can be delivered when it is raining.

Most projects have developed relationships with other organisations that already liaise with targeted groups. Projects have found that this is an ideal way to identify beneficiaries and advertise activities. Other projects have set up referral schemes with local organisations to engage participants.

Supporting young people in Neath Port Talbot
The Mentro Allan project in Neath Port Talbot is increasing young people’s participation in physical activities by offering adventure sports such as mountain biking, climbing and canoeing. The project is also providing environmental and conservation activities such as nature walks and stone-walling to engage and teach young people about their local environment. Successful referral relationships have been developed with the Sports Council for Wales, Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council and the Countryside Council for Wales.
Innovation and good practice
As part of the Mentro Allan programme, the National Partnership has set up regular project workshops to encourage project co-ordinators to share ideas and learning. All of the projects have found this useful as a way of learning from other projects and maximising the impact of activities.

Projects have established relationships with other organisations that liaise with the target groups. They have found that these relationships are important to understand the needs and interests of target groups, such as people with physical disabilities.

Transport training has been used successfully by one of the Mentro Allan project to empower clients to travel independently to activities and to increase self-confidence. This form of training involves carers supporting their clients to use public transport by teaching how to enter and exit public transport and to identify the route to activities.
Next steps

In 2009 the evaluators will continue case study visits to projects in Scotland and Wales. Further examples of good practice will be posted on the evaluation website and there will be a number of events to share learning and good practice between projects. The next evaluation report will be produced by Hall Aitken in January 2010.