



Improving your
communications:
A guide for clubs
and groups

Sports organisations, their participants and their volunteers face ongoing challenges from Covid-19 restrictions, including additional health and safety protocols, and the possibility of reduced capacity upon their return. These necessary restrictions cause disruptions to everyday life and the operating rhythm of organisations which in turn can make it harder for organisations to keep their people engaged.

Regular and relevant communications play a vital role in engaging and retaining your people. This guide highlights why you may benefit from reviewing your current approach to communicating with your participants and volunteers, the key messages your people might benefit from hearing and how you can quickly plan and deliver improvements to the way you communicate.

This guide has been developed using insight drawn from the Club Matters Return to Sport and Activity Survey (August 2020) which included the opinions of more than 1,200 volunteers and 2,500 participants from sports clubs and groups.



Since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, feeling informed and up to date has become a high priority for people. People want to know what's going on, how things are changing and what they need to do. The communications your organisation shares are vital for coordinating, reassuring and engaging people during periods of tighter restrictions, and when we are able to return to play.

Good communications can improve engagement and participation levels in the short term and aid long-term retention. More broadly, your communications can help to support your people physically, by encouraging them to stay active, and mentally, by making sure they still feel part of your club or group and by offering a social outlet where possible.

During the first lockdown, some organisations communications were not meeting the needs of their audience. Survey results revealed that **29%** of participants and **22%** of volunteers were not fully satisfied with their organisation's communications during the first national lockdown.

When organisations get their communications 'wrong' or are inconsistent, it can make their people feel:

- **Hesitant.**
- **Worried.**
- **Nervous.**
- **Neglected.**
- **Confused.**

When organisations get their communications 'right', it can make their people feel:

- **Valued.**
- **Excited.**
- **Grateful.**
- **Happy.**
- **Satisfied.**
- **Trusted.**
- **Optimistic.**
- **Expectant.**

Our research found that people who were happy with the communication they received from their organisation during the first lockdown were more likely to say they would return in the future. Through the research, a number of characteristics of 'good' communications were identified. These included sharing regular communications, based on open and honest sharing. This went beyond sharing information about plans, policies and actions, to providing reassurance and interactivity.

5 key messages to communicate

Our research indicated that anxiety levels had a strong influence on whether people were willing to return to their organisation after lockdown. At the time of the survey, 56% of participants and 68% of volunteers had some level of anxiety about returning. Anxiety is linked to personal circumstances and the messages people are hearing from various media sources. Good communication can help reduce anxiety and provide reassurance by sharing:

What's happening within your organisation.

Share communications about details like upcoming training sessions, including virtual ones, planning for fixtures and social events.

How people will or are being kept safe.

Promote any measures, protocols and practices you have introduced to keep people safe, like equipment cleaning, social distancing and continued virtual sessions.

The latest guidelines.

Where possible, share any new advice from your NGB, other relevant body or the Government and details of how your organisation will follow them.

How the rules will be enforced.

Make people aware of how new rules will be enforced, including how you will hold people to account if they break them.

What they are missing and why it's still worth attending.

Remind people why they love their sport/activity and your organisation by sharing quotes from individuals and images of fun sessions or events.

Communications planning

Communicating effectively is an on-going process. Taking time to plan out what messages you'd like to share, with whom, when and how can be highly beneficial. You can develop a communications plan to help you with this. We have developed a dedicated communications plan template which you can adapt based on your organisation's needs. [Click here to download the template.](#)

Top tips for communicating effectively during the pandemic

Based on the insight from our surveys, we have identified six top tips for communicating with your people during the pandemic:

1. Use multiple channels to make your communications widely available.

Your people will be using a range of different communication channels in their everyday lives. Some will prefer certain social media platforms, whilst others might prefer direct contact methods like email or phone calls. Also, some people might not have access to certain channels so remember to adapt your approach where needed. To maximise your reach, find out which channels your people are already using.

2. Maintain regular communications to share timely information.

Regular communications enable you to share new plans and information in a timely manner. During times of constant change, it is recommended that comms are shared weekly. It is also worth remembering that some channels are better suited for short updates or quick responses, like social media or group chats, whilst other channels, like emails, work better for information that might need to be found again later.

3. Increase engagement by making some communications interactive.

Covid-19 restrictions, personal circumstances and feeling anxious about returning can make people feel isolated and disconnected. Providing opportunities for people to get involved virtually can help people stay engaged and connected. Hosting fun quizzes or Q&A forums to ensure people understand key messages, or setting skills challenges to help keep people connected can help increase engagement.

4. Keep the tone positive.

People are looking for good news, positive energy and reassurance to counterbalance the news they hear in the media. While your people may be feeling frustrated, keep your communications upbeat and focused on what is still possible. Share stories about small wins and quotes about why people love their sport/activity and your organisation. Also, recognising the efforts of your volunteers and thanking them for their work will help encourage them to continue.

5. Create open dialogue and personalise communications to make them feel relevant.

Providing opportunities for people to share their thoughts, concerns and feelings with your organisation will help them to feel valued and listened to. Also, people are more likely to engage with messages that they feel are specifically for them, rather than generic communications. If you have capacity, you could try personalising communications by adding names, team or other relevant details. For example, you could ask different people to contribute to your newsletter to share news from different groups within the organisation.

6. Be open and honest and give everyone access to the same information at the same time

Knowing what's going on is very important to people, now more than ever. We recommend taking an open approach to sharing information and plans as they emerge. Giving people access to the same information quickly, and at the same time, they are more likely to trust the communication channels and pay more attention.

Examples

The following examples show the kind of messages you can share. Feel free to edit the text and use them in your own communications.

- To help keep us all safe as we return to [*your sport or activity*], we've introduced a few new processes. Check out all the information on our website, or just get in touch!
- [*Individual*] told us they are really looking forward to [*e.g. training in person again*]. What are you looking forward to about being able to return to [*your organisation's name*] after lockdown?
- We want to give a huge thank you to [*Individual e.g. volunteer*] for their efforts to [*e.g. get your organisation's facility ready for return*]. We really appreciate all your hard work!
- We have been missing spending time with everyone at [*your organisation's name*], so we are going to host a virtual quiz for everyone! Head to our [*e.g. Facebook page, website etc.*] for the joining details!
- We are so grateful for the efforts of our volunteers during this period. We know not everyone will be able to return in person straightaway, so if you want to continue volunteering from home then just get in touch with us.



Useful Links

- [Communicating and engaging as a virtual club](#)
- [Communicating with your people](#)
- [Communications plan template](#)
- [Marketing Options](#)
- [Making the most of social media channels](#)
- [Club Matters Return to Sport and Activity Survey findings](#)
- [Inclusive Marketing and Communications – Activity Alliance](#)

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