

The Sport NZ Strengthen and Adapt Programme aims to assist Softball NZ to consider our current state and how we can rethink and reimagine our future to maximise softball's ability to deliver in Aotearoa for the future.

Through this Strengthen and Adapt Programme, Softball NZ's identified scope was about evolving the softball system, enabling capable, aligned, and consistent delivery.

Consultation

It was important that we provided opportunities for the softball community to contribute to the project and guide us in determining what the priority could or should be.

Alongside reviewing previous data and research, we undertook the following community consultation:

- Club Survey
- Three on-line forums for softball associations
- Interviews with selected individuals
- Focus group discussions with:
 - Representatives of the U15 Developing Sox Training Squad – Girls
 - National Team Management – female game
 - National Team Management – male game

Thank you to all those that were able to attend and/or contribute. We appreciated the constructive comments and the desire for the best for softball within New Zealand.

A summary of our key findings thus far (the full 'Discovery Report' will be available in the near future):

- Softball has many strengths, but these are not celebrated or consistently understood. Some of the strengths identified include:
 - Great community involved in the game with a whānau oriented environment
 - Fun, friendly environment
 - A game where there is lots happening and lots of opportunities to be engaged
 - Can be simple to play and understand
 - Gender make-up of sport particularly at a junior level (estimated to be 50/50)
 - Māori and Pasifika participation
 - Opportunity to build on current good practice and co-operation
- There is a small, long-serving and dedicated team at Softball NZ (5FTEs) but capacity has led to a lack of engagement and buy-in to national initiatives by Associations and Clubs, and missed opportunities for learning and connection across the sport.
- There is an overall trend of declining membership (over the past 10-20yrs) but more recently (over past 5yrs) there have been increases in adult participation (premier/senior team numbers, particularly in the more social or modified opportunities, but decreases in youth participation, particularly within the school environment.
- The softball community are asking for more work and support to lift the reputation or improve the understanding of the value of softball and increase the visibility and exposure at all levels within the sport.

- Retention of rangatahi is currently an issue but is not well understood across the sport nor measured. The latest Voice of the Participant Survey show that 33% of rangatahi want to see improvement in player development programmes.
- Māori and Pasifika make up most of the membership at 48% (40% and 8% respectively).
- Females are 40% of softball's membership. Surveys indicate a high level of female satisfaction but only 2/3rds think there are appropriate programmes and/or opportunities in place for women and girls at their club.
- There is an opportunity and desire within the wider softball community for a better informed regionally/nationally connected network of organisations. Associations are integral to delivery of softball at the community level and are the conduit to clubs.
- There is limited connection and alignment across the various national representative teams/programmes, but a willingness to work together, including having greater clarity of the role and purpose of the programmes and aligning to core values and messaging.

This information will guide us in determining the most important things that could be invested in to take softball forward. Advice from Sport NZ is to take a 'less is more' approach and we are currently exploring and finalising the potential key area/s of transformation. This may include further targeted consultation (yet to be determined) before Softball NZ submits our plan to Sport NZ at the end of September 2022.

We will continue to keep you updated via our normal communication channels. If you have any questions about this project, please get in touch.