



## A game plan: a flexible model for changing your sport

Being able to participate in sport is good for our health and wellbeing – physically, mentally and socially – and it's a great way to connect and develop a sense of belonging.

However, recent research by Victoria and La Trobe universities shows sport is a significant site for homophobic harassment, discrimination and exclusion. This has created some unique challenges, not only for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex (GLBTI) people, but also for sporting codes.

To better understand and respond to these challenges, the Australian Sports Commission (ASC) funded the *Fair go, sport!* project. This project aimed to increase awareness of sexual and gender diversity in sport and promote safe and inclusive sporting environments.

In 2011, the project focused on hockey, with Hockey Australia and Hockey Victoria as the major project partners. The project was

managed by the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC), evaluated by La Trobe University and advised by a representative Steering Committee.

*Fair go, sport!* enabled hockey to explore issues of diversity and inclusion in a positive way; to showcase what it was doing well and identify new opportunities for action. While the project has achieved great things, its primary achievement has been to identify a way of working within a sporting code that builds a genuine commitment to inclusion and participation at community, state and national levels and leads to creative and sustainable change.

# A flexible model of engagement

This model is based on our experience working with hockey at the state and national levels. Importantly, it draws on the experience of the four community pilot clubs who participated. It is a recommended approach. It doesn't claim to prevent homophobia or guarantee full and open participation and inclusion of GLBTI people in sport, but it does claim to be an effective starting point.

As a model, it does not detail a prescriptive series of steps or compliance requirements. Rather, it outlines a process that will engage and challenge your sport to create and sustain cultural change.

This model reflects the *Fair go, sport!* evaluation written by Dr Gillian Fletcher of the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University, 2012.



## Band 1: The sport

Each sport is unique in terms of its structure, scope, strengths and opportunities. Understanding and appreciating your sport from these vantage points will help you better respond to your sport's unique needs and develop solutions that will work.

## Bands 2 and 3: The players and the other stakeholders

**Govt** The Australian Sports Commission, state/territory departments of sport and recreation and local government

**NSO** National Sporting Organisation

**SSA** State Sporting Association

**LCA** Local clubs and associations

**PS** Practice supports (internal and external expertise; includes project drivers, pilot clubs and project advocates)

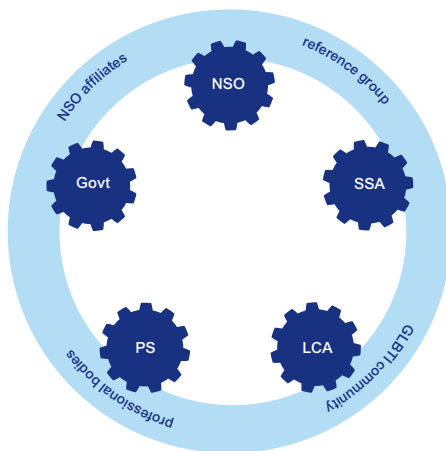
*Fair go, sport!* is about processes that are not customary in the sporting sector. These processes are asset-based and focused on action learning – they are explained on page 7. *Fair go, sport!* is also about partnerships and stakeholders, and the many relationships that bind your sport.

At each level within a sport (national, state and local clubs) you have players and stakeholders with their own roles and responsibilities. The *Fair go, sport!* model recognises they each have a unique contribution to make, and that working together brings rich opportunities to learn and develop your sport.

The relationships and conversations that occur between and within each level of your sport are critical for cultural change, especially when promoting sexual and gender diversity. Often, sports have internal and external champions, expertise and consultants to drive and support this practice.

*Fair go, sport!* does not seek to impose particular activities or interventions at any level. Instead, it encourages conversations about your sport's needs and what you might do to meet these needs using an action-learning approach. This applies at each level of the sport, between levels and with stakeholders.

Each level focuses on its role and contribution and how best to ensure those contributions are embedded in sustainable practice.



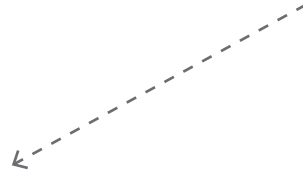
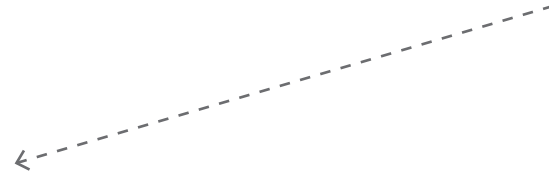
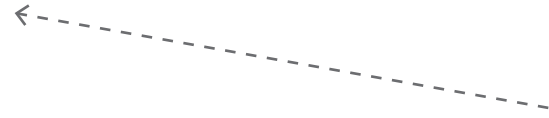
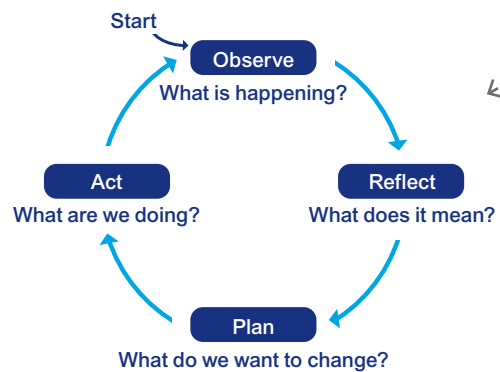
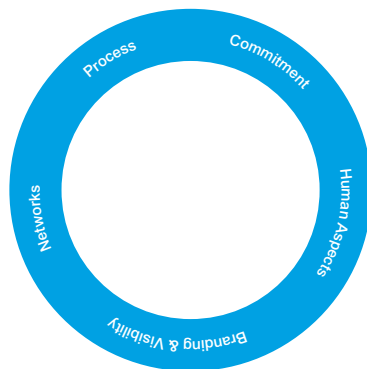
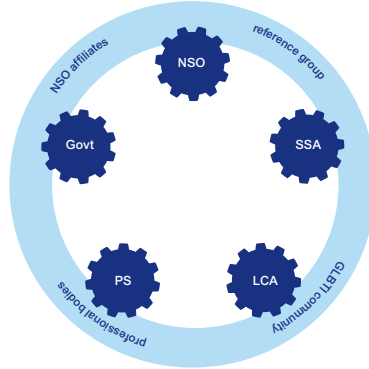
## Band 4: The playing field

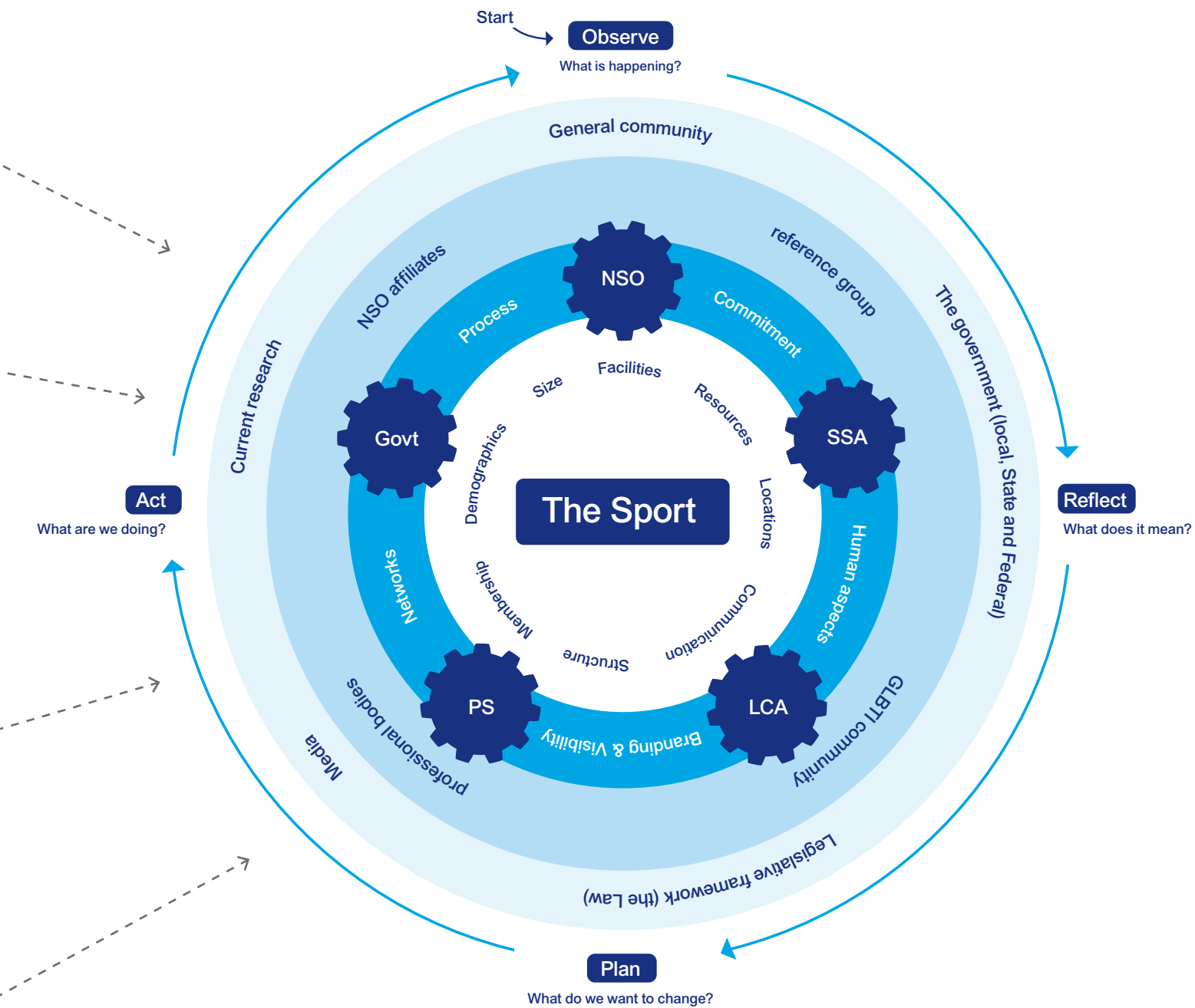
When commencing this cultural change project, it is important to consider your context. This includes the general community, the government environment, the legislative framework, media and current research related to the subject area. Understanding the social, political, legal and broader sporting landscape is essential for you to respond effectively to the needs and challenges in your sport.



While *Fair go, sport!* is about process – it is also about leadership and engagement.

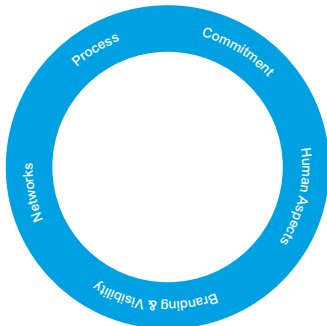
Peter Gourlay, Project Officer  
Victorian Equal Opportunity  
and Human Rights Commission





# Critical factors contributing to success

Partners in the *Fair go, sport!* project identified five key factors critical to its success. We recommend paying close attention to these factors in your project.



## 1. Processes and people

*Fair go, sport!* focuses on processes and people, as well as the outcomes these processes and people create. It is interested in not only what is done, but how and why it is done.

### Conversations

This approach is based on the idea that engagement is not just evident in what people do, but is a product of what people think and feel. Therefore, the model looks at how and why things can happen, rather than just what can or should happen. This means encouraging conversations between and in all levels of your sport about what is happening, what this means, what we want to change and how we can change it.

### An assets-based approach

An assets-based approach is about focusing and building on your strengths, rather than thinking about where you've gone wrong. It means:

- identifying and building on your sport's current strengths and opportunities; thinking about what you can do now to build on the good things you already have in place
- focusing on positively promoting a culture of respect and inclusion for people of all sexualities and gender identities in your sport, rather than just challenging negative behaviours like homophobia.

It is not about what is not being done or not done well; it's about opportunities, possibilities and the many actions (sometimes small, sometimes large) your sport can take to make a positive difference.

### Action learning

Action learning is just as it sounds – learning by doing. As the diagram on page 7 shows, it's a cyclical and continuous process where you observe, reflect, plan and act.

It doesn't come with a template for action, but rather encourages conversations, consultation and creativity. It helps identify issues, generate solutions and improve decision-making. Most

importantly, it's an inclusive process that allows clubs to practise being inclusive as a way of building an inclusive culture.

The absence of prescribed steps is unusual in sport and can be challenging, but allowing the steps to unfold as needs and opportunities are identified is critical to developing meaningful actions. And meaningful actions are much more likely to be sustained.

For a more detailed understanding of Action Learning, see page 7.

### Pilot clubs and Project Advocates

Using pilot clubs allows your sport to start where you have greatest interest. It enables you to drive sustainable change through 'real people in real clubs doing real things'. It's also a great way to create diverse and often unexpected opportunities, contributing to a genuine momentum for inclusion across your sport.

A Project Advocate is the primary project contact who facilitates their club's involvement by:

- encouraging their club to work on ideas and activities that meet the club's needs and respond to the project aims in their own way
- sharing ideas and learning from other Project Advocates to bring new thinking and possibilities to their own club.

### Collaborative evaluation

*Fair go, sport!* uses a collaborative or consultative approach to evaluation. This requires a strong partnership between the project team and the evaluator that facilitates continuous learning for all. What is learned from the evaluation is continuously fed back to the project team, and what is learned in your sport is fed back to the evaluator. This collaborative approach contributes to:

- high levels of accountability within the project team
- increased knowledge sharing
- stronger project outcomes, because the evaluation informs the project as the project unfolds; the project team can learn and adjust along the way, rather than waiting until the end of the project for the evaluation findings.

This approach complements the action-learning process.

## 2. Leadership and commitment

While *Fair go, sport!* is about process, it is also about effective leadership. This involves:

### Commitment

Leaders at each level in your sport (national, state and community) and everyone involved (including administrators, coaches, officials, players and supporters) recognise inclusion is central to your sport's core business and are already considering how your sport and its affiliates can contribute to inclusion.

### Capacity

Leaders at each level in your sport have the time, energy and resources (both financial and practical) to make inclusion central to their core business. Involvement in this project requires more than a paper commitment – it means actively driving and supporting members and affiliates to create change by attending events and identifying, creating and participating in opportunities to promote the project's goals.

### Impact

Leaders at each level in your sport recognise this project is about having an impact, both in your sport, across sports and in the wider community. This means first allowing the project to have an impact on the way you go about your business as leaders – so you are modelling inclusion in all you say and do to lead your sport.

### Partnerships

Leaders at each level in your sport are willing to learn from and engage with people at all levels in your sport to openly examine your sport's strengths and opportunities. They are also willing to engage with external practice supports to draw on their expertise as you work towards creating an inclusive culture.

### Communication

Leaders at each level in your sport recognise the project is about having an impact, both in your sport, across sports and in the wider community. They are willing to create and accept opportunities to promote and support the project and share your sport's learning in each of these communities.

### Delivery

Leaders at all levels have a shared commitment to ensuring the project delivers real results that can be seen, felt and measured across your sport. Importantly, this requires a commitment to ensuring inclusion remains core business beyond the life of the project.

### 3. A recognition of the human element

Sexual and gender diversity is often considered irrelevant or even inappropriate in sport, especially for junior teams, so opening conversations can be confronting.

An unintended consequence of this reluctance is that GLBTI people can feel unwelcome, excluded and even fearful when they feel they are assumed to be straight, not acknowledged as part of sport, or not identified in policies and other documentation.

In opening these conversations in your club, this model recommends you:

- use inclusive language and challenge offensive stereotypes — don't assume everyone is straight
- recognise potential discomfort or awkwardness in yourself as well as others; and anticipate there may be some pockets of resistance. Let people know they won't be judged on their feelings. It's how we relate to others that really matters
- use the support material available, e.g. people may be afraid of saying something wrong inadvertently — some education and information through factsheets or a glossary can help
- draw on the support of key stakeholders, including people within your local GLBTI community and other practice supports — use their experience, perspectives and stories to help make the issues real for your sport
- address sexuality and gender-identity discrimination as health and wellbeing issues with major negative consequences for young people — and use the research and evidence available to support your code's involvement.

### 4. Effective branding and strong visibility

Branding is about giving the project an identity, presence and visibility to raise its profile and generate further interest and commitment. Branded promotional materials and merchandise help carry your message to a wide audience and can become powerful symbols of your commitment to inclusiveness and cultural change.

The *Fair go, sport!* brand is linked to the rainbow flag, a long term symbol of inclusion for GLBTI people. Universally recognised, it represents a commitment to inclusion and shows GLBTI people they are recognised and welcome. Remember:

- using the *Fair go, sport!* logo is a clear demonstration of your sport's commitment to creating safe and inclusive environments
- running events and producing merchandise are great ways to start conversations and reassure sports of their community's support.

As colourful as the *Fair go, sport!* brand and merchandise are, these alone cannot combat heterosexism and homophobia – you do need actions.

### 5. Active networks to spread the good word

*Fair go, sport!* is an interplay between people and processes, so developing and using networks (within the project, sport and community) is integral. To begin, think about who needs to know what about your project and who is available to support you.

It is also important to recognise the structure and networks that already exist within your sport. This will inform your project and be reflected in its design. Don't reinvent the wheel or think you have to do everything.

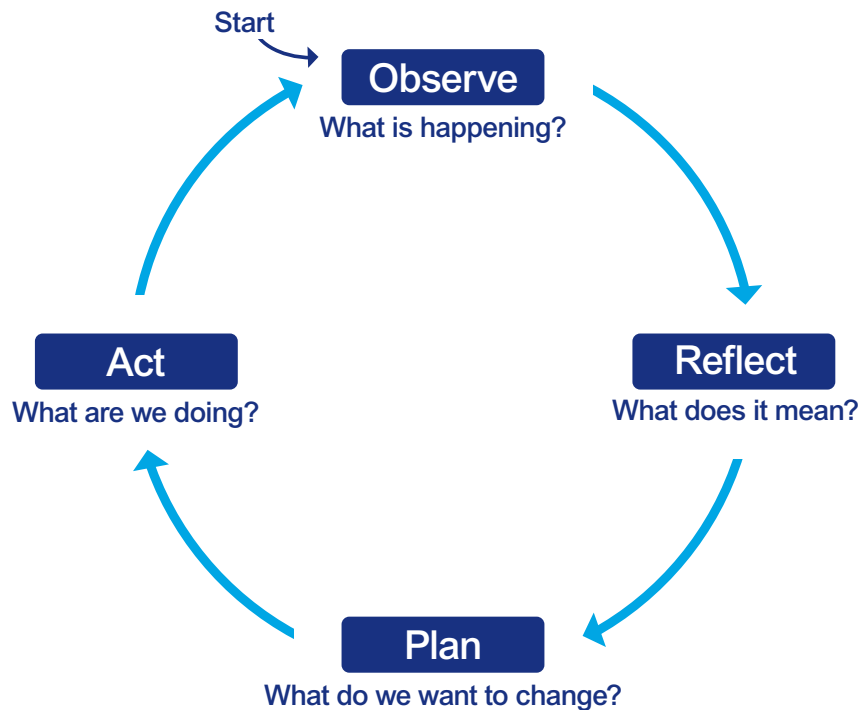
In your project design, think about setting up a reference group. Reference group members (individual and organisational representatives) not only provide expert advice to guide your project, they can also encourage links to other sporting, professional and community organisations and ensure a wide range of relevant perspectives are represented. Your reference group representatives can also be advocates and spokespeople for your project. Remember:

- think about whose support and insights you need and how you can use their contacts and networks
- create and nurture media contacts — while clubs may not have confidence or media experience, a project officer or peak body can provide support
- create interest through participation in community events — work with others and piggyback on their campaigns
- identify high profile and respected champions and ambassadors to be spokespeople.



Language is a key thing here. Language can reveal attitudes and create an atmosphere, so if language changes, it can be an indicator of changes in attitude. **Grant Weir, Game Development Manager, Hockey Australia**

# Action Learning: A checklist



## Observe

### What is happening?

Action learning can begin anywhere in its cycle, but usually starts with you asking: 'Where are we at now?'

#### Key questions:

- What's been happening?
- What can we see or notice?
- What are people experiencing?
- What's new? What's different?
- Who is affected and how?
- What's not happening?

#### How can we do this?

- Observe, listen, walk around
- Talk to people
- Use surveys or questionnaires
- Audit resources, policies, procedures and other documentation
- Ask questions and discuss at meetings
- Collect and analyse member demographics and information
- Identify your existing communication channels and how you can use them to progress

## Reflect

### What does this mean?

Reflecting on your observations is more than analysing what you've seen. Try to extract meaning and establish some shared understandings.

#### Key questions:

- What does this mean?
- What does this tell us?
- What do we think?
- What did we learn?
- What insights does this give us?
- Is there agreement? Why? Why not?

#### How can we do this?

- Don't rush to conclusions
- Discuss, interpret what you have observed
- Share your thoughts
- Get other people's perspectives and ideas
- Consider possibilities, develop a theory, and draw conclusions

## Plan

### What do we want to change?

Once you have identified a need or issue, work out how to respond and where to start. Develop a plan; think about what has to be done and how, what tools can assist you and who else needs to be involved.

#### Key questions:

- What could we do? What can we do?
- What do we want to do?
- What are our priorities?
- How can we do it?
- Who needs to be involved? How? When?
- What do we think will happen?

#### How can we do this?

- Be clear about what you want to achieve
- Identify people and resources you will need
- Think about how the plan might affect others
- Prioritise actions
- Work out who will do what – and when
- Work out how to observe and measure what happens

## Act

### What are we doing?

Implement your plan to see what happens.

#### Key questions:

- What are we doing?
- Who is doing what? When?
- What happens?
- How do others respond?

#### How can we do this?

- Follow the plan
- Think about how it's going
- Be flexible if circumstances change or opportunities arise
- Keep others informed
- Take notes, keep records
- Think about how the actions are responding to the issue or question

#### Important:

Your observations about your implementation form the basis for further reflection and your next round of planning and action)

