



Women in Rugby Clubs Toolkit



Kia ora.

Rugby has traditionally been a game for men, but the growth of women's rugby has been phenomenal over the past few years. From Small Ferns to Black Ferns, girls and women have been taking up the game in greater numbers than ever before. But the institutions and traditions that have been built up around rugby have been slow to adapt. From World Rugby down, there is a recognition of the importance of having more women participating in all aspects of our game. Some clubs have been at the forefront of a more inclusive and supportive environment for wāhine in rugby. Many others want to but aren't sure about where to start and what are the critical areas to focus on. This toolkit aims to provide guidance and inspiration for your club to be part of the change that will ensure rugby continues to thrive in our communities like it has for the last 100 years.

PURPOSE

This resource is for all rugby clubs throughout New Zealand to share, read, discuss and act on. It's as much about a change process than anything else, because we need to change what we currently do and how we do it in order to meet the challenges that face the future of club rugby. Whether it's finding more players, coaches and volunteers, increasing the use of club facilities, improving club finances or connecting with the local community, many of these challenges can be met by the contributions and benefits that more women in clubs will bring. Change is hard, especially when things have been done the same way for years. When everyone is open to what's possible, when there's clarity on what needs to get done and why, great things can be achieved. This resource aims to provide the why and how to get more women involved in your club, all you need to do is add is the people. He waka eke noa!

How do we know what women and girls want from the club?

1. Firstly, concentrate on your current club members. If they are happy, they will bring in new members. If they are not happy, you need

to understand what you can do to give them a more positive experience to keep them in the club. By achieving this, you can turn your club members into club ambassadors to easily attract more members.

2. Make sure your club committee and boards represent the different people in your club. It is important to remember that different women have different motivations about joining and different expectations of what they want to get from their club.
3. Give current members the opportunity to shape how they interact with your club. Allow them to give recommendations, comments and express their own ideas to improve everyone's experience.

WHY HAVE MORE WOMEN AND GIRLS INVOLVED IN RUGBY CLUBS?

The benefits of having more females involved in your club include:

- More members and supporters
- More players
- Diversification of decision-making
- Wider sponsorship and fundraising appeal
- Increased numbers of volunteers, admin, coaches, referees and role models
- A more appealing social atmosphere with a wider community inclusion and diversity

On the flip side, the benefit to female of being a part of a rugby club include:

- Participating in regular sport will improve physical fitness, promote longevity and will help with the prevention of non-communicable diseases such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes and dementia.
- Being part of a club will increase social connections and enjoyment will lead to better mental and social wellbeing ([source](#)).

Te Ara Ranga Tira – The Rugby Way

The most important element to a rugby club is not the institution itself, or the facilities, instead; he tangata, he tangata, he tangata! It is people, it is people, it is people!

Te Ara Ranga Tira – The Rugby Way is about reconnecting to the values of rugby that have underpinned the game since it first started taking root in Aotearoa.

- Te Pou Maioha – A welcoming environment
- Te Pou Hiranga – Supporting one another to be their best
- Te Pou Ihiihi – Evoking passion
- Te Pou Tika – Inspiring Fair Play

The relationships and atmosphere that women experience in clubs have a fundamental impact on the enjoyment they get and their encouragement of others to be involved. One of the strongest motivations for women to be a part of a club is an opportunity to meet other women socialise and feel part of something that reflects their own values.

Understanding the challenge

To understand how to be more welcoming to women and girls in clubs, you need to understand the challenge of how to get more women and girls simply playing sport. Central to this is understanding their lifestyles, motivations and the barriers to participating.

Did you know? Women have a strong influencing role within their families and are important role models. Family members who play sport often influence other family members, and girls are more influenced by ‘physically active’ mothers than sporting heroes or events. (source)

Therefore, it follows that the more women we can get involved in rugby clubs, the more kids and families will develop a lifelong love of the game by playing, refereeing, coaching, governing, and supporting.

Motivations to participate

There are many motivating factors for women that once understood, can be better responded to. The three key factors that clubs need to promote to women and girls are:

1. The idea of getting something unique or meaningful from being involved.
2. Being part of a club is sociable, it’s an opportunity to have fun and make new friends.
3. Participating in sport provides a sense of achievement and is good for your health.

For women, flexibility is key!

In order to reflect the increasing complexity of women’s lives, clubs need to be open to offering flexibility, rather than providing rigid competition, training and social structures. These are some simple suggestions your club can use to provide more flexibility:

- Session Times – Commitment is one barrier to rugby for women, as many simply cannot commit to structured weekly sessions due to other commitments they have in their life. Clubs could look to have less trainings, more flexible hours to train (what about a ‘Bring your bub’ training during the day?) and different game days.
- Fees – An upfront start-of-the season fee can also be a barrier to entry for some families and women may not have that disposable money. Clubs could look at different options of payment, discounting fees for voluntary work, or applying for a grant to subsidise.

- Adaptable – The need to talk to your female club members is very important. Ask them what they want and how clubs can better support them. Take on board their suggestions and be flexible and adaptable to meet some of their needs.
- Rugby Competitions - Be flexible on what formats of rugby you offer – don’t just stick the traditional delivery of 15s rugby. For example, make available 10s, 12s, shorter games or seasons, alternative game days, field modifications etc.

Barriers to getting involved:

There are two types of barriers to why women many not feel like they can get involved in club rugby:

- Logistical barriers: These include things like time and cost, finding the right activity at the right time, understanding conflicting constraints on time (child pickup/dinner/work) and a lack of information about the opportunities to participate.
- Emotional barriers: These are the fear of being judged, worries of appearance, social confidence, not fitting in, concerns about ability, injury and health conditions, or even feeling bad about being away from their family.

As we’ll see, giving your female members a voice and encouraging them to provide feedback, advice and suggestions is an important part of being welcoming and growing their participation in your club. Ask them what they want and actively try to provide them with it. Use your social media to engage with your rugby community – you can use this free platform to poll, survey or connect with your members to show them that you care.

Have a look at Aktive’s Social Media Toolkit for clubs to find some tips and tricks on how to get the best out of the different social media platforms.

HOW DO WE GET THERE?

There are many ways rugby clubs can be more welcoming and supportive of women. It’s important rugby environments feel safe and welcoming for all and [here are five simple steps](#) to make sure rugby is inclusive to everyone. Case studies with clubs who have been successful in doing this have shown that there are three key areas that clubs should focus on:

1. Include women in the governance of the club
2. Provide good quality coaching
3. Equitable facilities and equipment

The Sport NZ - Voice of the Participants survey Sport New Zealand - Ihi Aotearoa ([source](#)) is completed every year by club participants. The survey focuses on nine core drivers that influence a great club experience. Each of the drivers directly relates to the three key areas for clubs to focus on to encourage more women in rugby clubs.

Governance & Culture	Coaching	Facilities & Equipment
Professional and well-managed	Quality of coaches	Clean and well-maintained facilities
Fair and equal opportunities	Fulfilling potential	Having well-maintained playing/training venues
Being friendly and welcoming	Providing information when needed	Social environment

Sport New Zealand has released the [Young Women profile](#). This report provides key insights into the perceptions of young women aged 12–17 – their behaviour, experiences, needs and desires – to help those working with young women navigate these complexities and support young women on their physical activity journey. It is designed to be a starting point for those looking to better engage with and provide for young women as we recognise that not all environments and communities are the same, and young women are a diverse group with different and evolving needs.



SECTION ONE

**INCLUDE WOMEN IN
THE GOVERNANCE
OF THE CLUB**

**“I’M FULLY COMMITTED TO LEADING THE
CHANGE TO ENSURE WOMEN ARE INVOLVED
IN DECISION-MAKING.”**

- BILL BEAUMONT, WORLD RUGBY CHAIRMAN

INCLUDE WOMEN IN THE GOVERNANCE OF THE CLUB

The role of a board or committee member is to represent the needs and wants of every member within your club. Women's rugby is the fastest growing female sport in New Zealand. However, our leadership hasn't kept up with this change. Our boards and committees need to reflect this growth so that the needs of women and girls are considered when decisions are made on strategy and resourcing.

Many clubs across New Zealand have already seen the importance and need for this and have women currently sitting on their boards and committees, but they need more support. One woman is not enough. Research suggests you need a critical mass of 30% women on your board or committee to get the most from this important and crucial step. Sport NZ have set a target of 40% gender balance target for all its partner sports organisations by 2021. This is part of the leadership strategic priority under its [Women & Girls](#) focus area.

"Too often people are told they're not leadership material. I don't believe in that; I believe everybody can exercise leadership. Knowing your values, strengths and passion and then being able to influence change for the greater good."
- Dr. Sarah Leberman

Your board or committee has the responsibility for the overall delivery of the game in your club, from the off-field services to the on-field experience.

To do this well, they need to draw on diverse perspectives and views of your membership and local community. If everyone comes from similar backgrounds, you get a narrowness of decision making that fails to see opportunities and risks until it is too late.

In 2021 the New Zealand Rugby Board approved a Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2021-2024 with a focus in four areas: Māori, Women, Pasifika and LGBTQI+. The Strategy sets a target of 50% diversity with a minimum 33% women on Provincial Union boards by 2024. This will be achieved as Unions are guided by Te Ara Rangatira – The Rugby Way and embrace the aspiration of the strategy "Everyone can see a place for themselves in rugby. We will embrace and celebrate diversity to make better communities for all; where we will learn from each other and succeed together.

There are many studies from both the commercial and not-for-profit sectors that have demonstrated the benefits women bring to governance roles. World Rugby are also going through this journey and have highlighted a few benefits that gender diversity will bring:

- 15% more likely to have greater financial returns
- Better customer satisfaction
- Better board accountability

The following is a series of practical steps that every rugby club can use to achieve a balanced board. For more information on the steps World Rugby are taking, take a look at their [Balancing the Board](#) resource.

INCLUSION CHECKLIST

- Discuss it at board level - Start a conversation about your current representation and discuss the case for change.
- Review the constitution - Identify any restrictive rules that might create obstacles to attracting and appointing women. Do you have appointed or co-opted positions or are they all representative, which may make it harder for women?
- Review the competency requirements - Think about the breadth of skill and knowledge that you need on your Board. Are there local women who would bring these skills to the table?
- Seek and invite female candidates - Cast the net wide to identify and attract quality female candidates. Think about the language you use when advertising to appeal to women.
- Run the selection process - Make sure your process is free of bias and fair to everyone.
- Welcome the new members - Create a positive early experience so the benefits of new talent can be harnessed from the outset. You may already have women involved who will step up.
- Maintain a positive environment - Involve women Board members fully in all aspects of the Board's work. A good Chair will make sure all voices at the table are heard.
- Prepare for the future - Create a healthy pipeline of female candidates to draw from in the future. Discuss what the Board does with young people in the club and how their input is valuable.

What Great Looks Like in the Governance Space: [Te Rarawa RFC](#) – They have appointed a female president of rugby club, and their flagship team is their women's team.



SECTION TWO

**PROVIDE GOOD
QUALITY COACHING**

**“COACHING DETERMINES THE SUCCESS
OF A LIFE-LONG LOVE OF THE GAME.”**
- WAYNE GOLDSMITH, COACHING GURU

PROVIDE GOOD QUALITY COACHING

At any age, but especially with kids, a coach can determine whether a participant continues or drops out of a sport. Therefore, understanding how to coach females is significant to the continued growth of women's rugby.

In many ways, the game of rugby is much the same for females and males, however there are a few important differences in the way coaches should engage with females in order to give them the best experience possible and increase the likelihood of retaining them in rugby.

Language

The game of rugby is already predominantly viewed as a masculine sport, so coaches should be conscious of finding simple ways to avoid emphasising the image of rugby being a 'man's' game. For example, simple terms we take for granted in rugby could change. 'Eight-man scrum' becomes 'eight in the scrum' and 'pass to the man on your left' could change to 'pass to your left' etc.

Consider the language you are speaking. If you have a large base of Pacific and Māori participants, can any of your welcomes, coaching or traditions reflect these and other cultures, and in particular the role females play within these cultures?

Communication

This is one of the biggest differences between coaching females and males. Males will just do what you ask and tend to not ask questions. Conversely, female players want lots of information and detail - they ask many questions and will not get started until they understand exactly what they need to do. However, this does mean girls tend to learn more quickly, so more content can be covered in one session compared to males. As a coach, you need to be willing to listen and have patience to respond to all questions so you can get the most from each athlete and give them a positive coaching experience.

Trust

Female players also tend to need to trust their coach more than males, especially as it is a such a physical sport. All drills, skills and knowing why they are doing them needs to be accepted before they can actively participate and enjoy their experience. Girls are also naturally team players; they will readily pass and are less inclined to run selfishly with the ball compared to males. You may need to emphasise to females to do more running and back themselves!

Strength and education

Girls and boys are on average equal in strength up until about age 13. Beyond this, females are obviously physically different and tend not to be as aggressive as boys. After the age of 13, tactics, skills and drills need to be changed and modified to adapt to this. There is also a need to educate our coaches in terms of gender education. This includes menstrual cycles, sexual harassment and the safety of physical and mental wellbeing. These aspects of female athletes are important to know for both female and male coaches. This also identifies a need for coaches to be part of your [Safe Kids](#) and [RugbySmart](#) programmes to give a better coaching experience to our female players.

The World Rugby Women Coaching Rugby Toolkit is designed to create a robust framework and pathway for unions and regional associations to address challenges and barriers in four core areas:

- Planning: Developing a plan to increase the quantity and quality of female rugby coaches through workforce audits, mapping out future states, gap analysis and monitoring and evaluation.
- Recruitment: Understanding motivations and complex value systems, promoting coaching to women and open, transparent requirement processes.
- Development: Providing and promoting support networks, education and review of organisational culture that values women in the workforce.
- Retention: Support, connection and recognition strategies to engage and excite women.

[Download here](#)

COACHING CHECKLIST

- Use club networks as resources for coaches.
- Create a positive, inclusive environment and experience.
- Retain new players to become club coaches, support them to increase and develop their participation.
- There is an untapped market in Small Black and junior rugby, in the parents of girls who can manage, coach, referee. Support them to develop these skills and increase the likelihood of life-long love of rugby.
- The NZR Players Association have put together a [High Performance Female Player resource](#) document for rugby administrators and coaches with things to consider when working with female performance athletes.
- Offer Ako Wāhine level one female-led coaching courses. Consider the time you run it, if kids can attend and play in a space in the rugby club, offer food.



“LET’S DO THIS!”

- JACINDA ARDERN, NZ PRIME MINISTER

SECTION THREE

**EQUITABLE FACILITIES
AND EQUIPMENT**

EQUITABLE FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT

A key factor that clubs have control over is the physical environment in which rugby is provided to its members, and equal access to all facilities and equipment is part of this.

The women's game is increasing in numbers every year and doesn't seem to be slowing down. This means there will be more teams, more competitions and more participation opportunities continuing to be developed. Most facilities that are used for club rugby were built for men, so to ensure clubs can offer women facilities that encourages them to participate, clubs need to ensure they are appropriate for the needs of women and girls.

An overwhelming barrier for girls and women in many rugby clubs is the lack of female or unisex changing rooms. The lack of adequate changing rooms was highlighted in the [Wider Auckland Rugby Facilities Plan](#), which looked at all the facilities across the wider Auckland region for future planning.

It is essential that our environments encourage our female players (and whānau) to feel safe and appropriately catered for. Facilities play an important part in this.

Female friendly spaces don't necessarily need to be separate dedicated facilities. Often it is more about transforming existing amenities to cater for greater flexibility in use, removing urinals and open showers and replacing with toilet cubicles and shower cubicles that allow showering and changing in privacy. In other words, great change facilities cater equally well for all users.

Considerations for your changing rooms:

Children will often need to attend training or games. It is important to keep children safe and included. Leaving children in the car or alone unsupervised is not best practice. Communicate with your female players to ensure their children are catered for, including potentially identifying or setting up a space for families to use in the club rooms. Consideration where this might be is important - don't place a child-friendly space near the bar/toilets or exits.

CHANGING ROOM CHECKLIST

- Timings to use facilities need to be flexible for women to accommodate family and work commitments.
- Toilets/showers/changing rooms need to be clean. Hire a cleaner if need be, make sure there is always toilet paper and provide sanitary bins.
- Partitioning between changing room and foyers outside (modesty screening).
- Adequate lighting in and around the changing room.
- Accessible toilet and shower (in some cases this may double up with the referee room).
- Personable space with cubicles that have access to power points.
- Family-friendly attributes (breastfeeding areas + baby change table).
- Direct access between wet and dry areas.
- Communal space for referees with gender neutral change/toilet/shower facilities.
- Mirror and shelving above basin for personal items.
- Private spaces for medical requirements.
- Lighting that ensures all spaces are well lit.
- If females and males are sharing facilities and equipment, you need to create a schedule so there is equal and available access during trainings and game times and avoid any awkward cross over.

FACILITIES CHECKLIST

- Ensure there is a fair allocation of quality fields and field space - the women's teams cannot always be scheduled for the worst training time on the worst fields.
- Provide new jerseys and outfitting that are made for females, not the male hand-me-downs. Most rugby apparel companies have a range of women's outfitting.
- Clubs need to offer some form of recognition to women who play a high number of games for the club, the same as for the men. It doesn't need to be a blazer and a tie, ask your female players what they want, but recognition is important.
- Make the off-field facilities more welcome. This includes making all people more welcome, supplying better food, larger beverage range and a safe play area for kids. Ask the members of your club for their ideas on what they want and how to achieve it, you might be surprised!
- Are all your light bulbs working and are all areas inside and out (including the car park and safe passage to it) well lit?
- Have you catered for everyone with food, non-alcoholic beverages and alcohol? Also consider smaller items such as appropriate glassware and table coverings.
- Clean and tidy bar and kitchen areas with appropriate health certification.
- Are there comfortable seating spaces? Not everyone enjoys standing at a bar leaner.
- Are the bathrooms in particular clean and tidy with appropriate hygiene amenities?
- Appropriate access for those less physically able.
- Ensure the social areas are warm and comfortable.
- Flexibility in layout is also desirable to enable the space to cater for a variety of community users.

CELEBRATION OF WOMEN AND GIRLS IN RUGBY 2022

This unique initiative for 2022 will put the spotlight on the women and girls' game from grassroots (Rugby Clubs and Schools) all the way to the world stage and culminating for the celebration of Rugby World Cup October –November 2022.

This is an opportunity to recognise and celebrate the important role of Women and Girls to our great game.

New Zealand Rugby is creating a calendar of events that will celebrate Women and Girls in Rugby across Aotearoa in 2022.



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