



STRONG FOUNDATIONS PRINCIPLES AND BEST PRACTICE

The GAA's Green Club Programme emerged from a **SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDG)** partnership with local government, through the Government of Ireland's SDG Champions Programme. The Sustainable Development Goals were adopted by all United Nation members in 2015 as an acknowledgement of the interdependence of social, economic and climate challenges and objectives. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals are often summarised as the five Ps of People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace, and Partnership. These five Ps are at the heart of the GAA's commitments and strategies. The Association is committed to:

- Supporting the health and well-being of its members (People).
- Respecting the environment in which we live and play (Planet).
- Promoting and growing our games (Prosperity).
- Fostering inclusion and harmony (Peace).
- Working with other local and national groups to support our games, membership and communities (Partnership).

This interdependence of people, environment and sport is very much at the heart of the Green Club Inclusion Toolkit.

The **LUNDY MODEL OF ENGAGEMENT**, developed by Professor Laura Lundy of Queen's University Belfast, is a model of child participation that has relevance and value to engagement with many other seldom heard groups. The four-parts of this model are:

Space | Voice | Audience | Influence¹

The Lundy Model recommends (i) that there be a safe and inclusive space for the target group to express their views, (ii) that the target group be supported in expressing and communicating their views, (iii) that decision-makers listen carefully to the views being expressed, and (iv) that the view expressed have a real and tangible impact on decision-making. The Lundy model has been a reference throughout the development of this Toolkit.

The Green Club Inclusion Toolkit was developed with funding from the Government of Ireland's Community Climate Action Programme (Strand 2), administered by Pobal (<https://www.pobal.ie/>). Pobal works on behalf of the government with communities and local agencies to support social inclusion and local and community development. The **POBAL GUIDE FOR INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN LOCAL PLANNING AND DECISION MAKING²** provided the principles and best practice guidance upon which the approach and resources of the Toolkit are based. In the design of its programmes, policies and activities, the GAA is led by the nine principles for inclusive community engagement, that our decision-making and practice be Genuine, Purposeful, Planned, Clear, Inclusive, Collaborative, Accountable, Accessible and Fit for Purpose.

The GAA's Community & Health Department has produced simple, comprehensive guidance on identifying the challenges and implementing best practice for seldom heard communities in the GAA context. This is included in full at the end of this document and reflected in the actions and recommendations throughout the Toolkit.

The Toolkit was informed by a range of other fantastic resources across the areas of sport, climate and inclusion. Many of these are included in the list at the end of this document and are well worth consulting by sport and community actors with an interest in these areas.

¹ See https://eu-for-children.europa.eu/about/lundy-model_en for more details on the Lundy Model

² Second edition published October 2023. Available from <https://www.pobal.ie/resources/>



Engaging Seldom Heard Communities in the GAA

Challenges in engaging seldom held communities in the club and its activities may include:

1. Lack of trust

Some communities may have experienced discrimination, exclusion, or indifference from the club, other sports organisations or wider society and may be reluctant to engage or believe their input will lead to real change.

2. Language and Communication Barriers

Information may be presented in ways that are inaccessible (complex language, untranslated materials etc.). This can make it difficult for non-native English speakers, people with low literacy levels or those who are unfamiliar with Gaelic Games terminology or processes.

3. Unfamiliarity or Disconnection from the GAA

Many individuals from minority ethnic groups, new communities, or urbanised populations may not have a cultural or historical link to Gaelic Games. They may not see the relevance of engaging in club planning or feel it's "not for people like me."

4. Physical or Social Accessibility

Meeting venues or formats may not be accessible to people with disabilities, older adults, carers, or people with transport needs. These individuals are unintentionally excluded from participating.



5. Time, Capacity and Competing Priorities

Seldom heard groups often face social or economic challenges that limit their ability to participate (e.g., shift work, caregiving, housing insecurity). Strategic planning may not seem like a priority, or a realistic possibility, to engage with.

6. Fear of Being Tokenised

People may feel they're only being consulted to "tick a box" rather than to genuinely shape outcomes. Leads to disinterest, mistrust, or passive engagement.

7. Cultural or Identity Barriers

Concerns about religious observance, cultural values, gender norms, or identity safety (e.g., for LGBTQ+ individuals) in GAA spaces. Individuals may feel unsafe or unwelcome participating unless those issues are explicitly acknowledged.

8. Lack of Representation or Visibility

If there's no one from their community visibly involved in the club or leading engagement efforts, seldom heard groups may feel excluded or invisible. This reduces motivation to participate in what feels like "someone else's" space.

9. Cost

The real or perceived financial costs of playing a sport or getting involved in a club can be a barrier to participation for some individuals and families



Engaging Seldom Heard Communities in the GAA

Good Practice approaches that encourage seldom heard communities to engage with the GAA include:

1. Partnering with Trusted Local Organisations/Groups

Community members may not trust or feel connected to mainstream institutions like the GAA. It can therefore be a good idea to collaborate with groups that they already engage with, such as representative organisations for ethnic minority or migrant populations (e.g., local integration forums, new communities partnerships), people with disabilities (e.g., Enable Ireland), LGBTQ+ groups (e.g., Sporting Pride), travellers and Roma organisations, refugee and asylum seeker support groups, older adults (e.g., men's and women's sheds).

2. Go to Where People are Already

Expecting people to come to us can exclude those unfamiliar or uncomfortable with GAA spaces. Attend community centres, places of worship, cultural festivals, or local events. Ask to speak or distribute information during existing community meetings or activities.

3. Use Inclusive Communication Methods

Language, literacy, and format can be barriers. Translate materials into relevant community languages. Use plain English and visual aids. Offer audio or video alternatives to written surveys or flyers. Avoid jargon, specifically Gaelic Games jargon (e.g., use "local sports club" instead of "club strategic plan process").

4. Offer Multiple Ways to Engage

People have different comfort levels and access needs. Facilitate one-to-one conversations, small group discussions, or focus groups in familiar settings. Provide online and offline options (e.g., surveys, drop-in sessions, WhatsApp feedback). Offer child-minding, transport support, or refreshments to reduce participation barriers.

5. Involve Community Members in the Planning Process

Representation creates more meaningful, relevant engagement. Invite community leaders or members from underrepresented groups to join the committees or planning team, so that they have a voice in the club. Use a "community ambassador" model — e.g., recruit a local person to reach out to their own network.

6. Build Long Term Relationships, Not One-Off Consultations

Token engagement can damage trust and lead to apathy or disengagement. Follow up with updates and feedback — "you said, we did." Maintain contact and invite seldom heard groups to future club events and initiatives. Run collaborative events. Share spaces. Include inclusions and community engagement issues on meeting agendas.

7. Address Power Imbalances Explicitly

People from underrepresented groups may feel their voices don't carry equal weight. Use facilitated discussions with inclusive ground rules. Prioritise listening and validate lived experience. Actively challenge bias or dismissiveness within planning groups.





Useful Resources

The resources below provide best practice advice and examples across areas of sport, inclusion and climate.

THE LUNDY MODEL OF CHILD PARTICIPATION

https://eu-for-children.europa.eu/about/lundy-model_en

A GUIDE FOR INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN LOCAL PLANNING AND DECISION MAKING

<https://www.pobal.ie/resources/a-guide-for-inclusive-community-engagement-in-local-planning-and-decision-making/>

SPORT IRELAND DIVERSITY & INCLUSION POLICY

<https://www.sportireland.ie/ethics/diversity-and-inclusion>

ACTIVE DISABILITY IRELAND – ACCESSIBLE CLUB TOOLKIT

<https://activedisability.ie/accessible-club-toolkit/>

GAA HEALTHY CLUBS - COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT EXAMPLES FROM GAA HEALTHY CLUBS

<https://healthyclubs.gaa.ie/case-studies/>

TOWARDS AN AGE-FRIENDLY STADIUM: CROKE PARK – A CASE STUDY IN PRACTICE

<https://agefriendlyireland.ie/age-friendly-resources/>

Search for 'stadium' within the resources pages

ULSTER GAA DISABILITY & INCLUSION POLICY & PLAN 2025-2028

<https://ulstergaa.b-cdn.net/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Ulster-GAA-Disability-Strategy-2025-2028.pdf>

SPORTING PRIDE: BRINGING SPORT AND THE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY CLOSER

<https://www.sportingpride.ie/>

INTEGRATION THROUGH SPORT SICAP CASE STUDY 2024 (PAUL PARTNERSHIP LIMERICK)

<https://www.paulpartnership.ie/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/PAUL-Partnership-SICAP-Case-study-2024.pdf>

TASC – THINKTANK FOR ACTION ON SOCIAL CHANGE

<https://www.tasc.ie/work/climate-justice/>

TRUST – SPORT AS IT SHOULD BE (KEY CONCEPTS ON HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION THROUGH SPORTS)

<https://trustsport.net/online-course>

AS I AM - IRELAND'S AUTISM CHARITY

<https://asiam.ie/advice-guidance/resource-library>

BLUEPRINT TOOLKIT:

BRIDGING CREATIVITY AND CLIMATE RISK COMMUNICATION THROUGH CO-CREATION

https://www.creativeireland.gov.ie/app/uploads/2025/04/BluePrint-Toolkit_Final.pdf

SPORT AGAINST RACISM IRELAND

<https://www.sari.ie/>