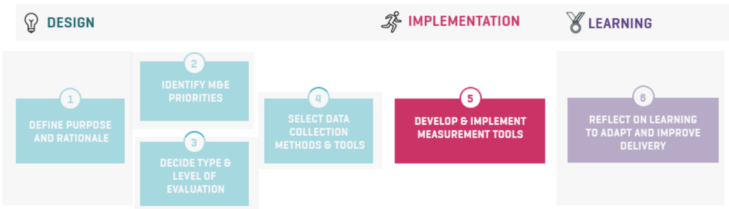

How to maximise your response rates

Securing a good response to your data collection is important, but not always easy. Here are some practical ideas to help, incorporating learning from Sporta's Make Your Move programme and Sport England's Get Healthy Get Active programme.

1. Planning and developing your data collection

Planning your data collection well in advance will ensure things run smoothly – leaving you more time to focus on achieving a good response rate.

Plan ahead	Plan your data collection tools, methods and timings as early as you can, ideally when designing your evaluation at the project design/inception stage.
Involve partners	Involve your project partners and your funder in the evaluation design. They may have experience of appropriate tools and ways to increase response rates. If you have project staff or coaches who will be involved, get their views too.
Ask participants	Ask participants what would encourage them to return evaluation data and build their ideas in if possible. Think about wording, format, incentives etc.
Test and check	Test your questions, tools and methods with participants and project staff before deploying them. Check how long it takes, that the language is accessible, that questions and answers all make sense, and so on. This helps participants feel involved, and project staff to anticipate any queries.
Logistics	Have a clear plan for your data collection to ensure things go smoothly. Think about: • When and where will you collect it? E.g. before or after a session? • Who will design the survey, and who needs to sign it off? • How will it be provided to respondents, and who is involved? E.g. Online surveys will need to be set up and circulated. Paper surveys will need to be printed out, taken to the session or posted, and returned or collected in. • How often will you collect it? E.g. at the start of the project, 3, 6 and 12 months. Is this the same point for everyone, or does it depend on when they started? Have you got the information you need to re-contact them? • How will you reach people who are no longer involved in the project? • How will you store, record, collate and analyse the data once you have it?
Data protection	Everyone is responsible for using personal data carefully and following data protection principles. Think about: • What consent you need to obtain, from whom and how you obtain it • How to make participants aware of their rights around their personal data • How you will securely store and transport completed forms • Whether you are collecting identifying information and how you will anonymise your data by removing or substituting personal data • For how long you will need to store the data you have collected

2. Designing your form

A well-designed form is clear, inviting and easy to use – which will really help your response rates.

Design and appearance	Surveys and registration forms will be seen by the public – so remember to design them well and add your logo and branding, the same as you would for any other external publication.
Accessibility	Think about who will be completing the form and whether they will have any accessibility needs – font size, colour, language, images, survey length etc.
Include the essentials	Include a Title, Introduction, Purpose, Closing Date (if necessary) and any other essential information – make the respondent feel informed and welcomed.
Prioritise	Include what you need, and nothing more.
Flow and order	Think about the order in which you ask questions. Keep the flow logical to make it easier for respondents to work through it. Consider starting with a few basic, simple questions to ease people in, and keep more personal or sensitive ones until nearer the end, once you've built up people's trust.
Layout	Use a clear layout with ample spacing between questions – it's easier on the eye and looks less daunting.
Length and duration	Think about how many questions and how many pages your form is, and how many minutes it will take to complete. If it's a long form, break it into logical sections with sub-headings. If you think it's *too* long, then consider prioritising the questions (e.g. score them out of 5) and removing the least important.
Format	Design it for the format: e.g. is it paper or online, self-completion or face-to-face? If you offer multiple formats, remember that what works for one might not work as well for another.
Instructions	Include instructions where necessary to guide respondents through your survey or explain things.
Pilot it	Pilot it. Take the survey yourself and ask some colleagues to do the same. If you can, trial it with a small group of people who will eventually complete it for real. Think about clarity, readability, flow, understanding, duration etc.

3. Designing your questions

A well-designed form needs well-designed questions – otherwise people may skip them, or abandon the form altogether. Here are our tips for designing effective questions.

Question clarity and wording	Tailor the language to the audience, and keep it clear and concise (which also saves on space). Check your tone, and challenge the wording of each question to ensure it's clear and easy to answer.
Instructions on how to answer	Make it clear how to answer: tick, circle, select one, select all that apply, write in etc.
The right question types	Think about what information you want and use the best questions for the job: • Open questions (free response) when you want a qualitative response • Closed (multiple choice) questions when you want to quantify the answers • Use Rankings to order items relative to each other (e.g. best to worst), or Ratings if you want to rate items individually A mixture of question types can add variety and keep people's attention for longer. But avoid using too many open questions if possible: these can be time-consuming to analyse and respondents are more likely to skip these questions.
Scales	Scales are typically used within rating questions to capture people's attitudes, opinions or perceptions. When using scales: • Explain what the scores represent. E.g. On a scale of 1 to 5, is 1 best or worst? • Make sure they are balanced. In odd-numbered scales the middle option should be neutral. In even-numbered scales there should be an equal number of positive and negative. • Check that answer options 'agree' with the question wording • Use a consistent scale throughout, where possible
The right answer options	Make your answer options complete and mutually exclusive (not overlapping). Enable everyone to answer every question by including options such as: • 'Not sure': so people aren't forced to choose an option that may not apply • 'None of the above': when you need to know who *didn't* as well as who *did* • 'Other': as a mop-up when your options don't cover everything
Be fair and objective	Check your questions aren't leading (presuming something that may not be true). E.g. 'In what ways did the project help you become more active?' assumes that it did.

4. Communication and buy-in

How you communicate about your evaluation and data collection can make or break it. Creating 'buy-in' (empathy and understanding about the value of collecting the data) among participants, partners and project staff will mean they are more willing to get involved.

Be transparent	Tell people why you're collecting the data and how you'll use and store it.
Inform project staff	Hold training or prepare guidance for coaches and other staff about the value of good evaluation and the role they can play in supporting it.
Use positive language	Use positive language that focuses on the value of evaluation, rather than negative language that talks about it as a burden or a problem.
Use social norms	Using language such as 'lots of people have already taken our follow-up survey' can nudge more people into doing it to feel like they have contributed too.
Tell participants how they help	Telling participants how their help with evaluation can lead to improvements and/or future funding and delivery can increase their likelihood of completing follow-up surveys.
Part of the conversation	Make evaluation and surveys a normal part of your communication with participants – perhaps even as part of the behaviour change process.
Manage expectations	Tell participants when they start the project that they will be asked to provide follow-up information later on, and give them a heads-up before it comes.
Name it research	Describing your intervention as (part of) a research project means people will see data collection as an intrinsic part of it, not an optional requirement.
Visible evaluators	Having very visible evaluators will raise the profile of evaluation – invite them (whoever they may be) along to sessions to talk to participants informally.
Use familiar faces	Ask staff who already have a good rapport with participants to put in a good word for evaluation. This can include coaches, instructors, volunteers, community champions, translators – anyone who can be a useful advocate.

Here's an example statement you might like to adapt for your form:

> "As part of this project we're conducting important research to find out about you and your experience. We use this to promote our work and improve the project for you and others like you. We would be very grateful if you could complete this short questionnaire to help us. It should take around 10 minutes – and in return we'll enter you into a prize draw to win one of five £20 High Street vouchers. Your session leader can tell you more about the research and how we use the findings, or you can contact us at hello@hi.com. Thank you!"

5. Collecting the data

How, where and when you collect the data all play a role in supporting a good response rate.

Choice	Providing a choice of how participants can complete forms and surveys can increase response rates. No-one completed the online survey? Then take some paper copies with you to the next session. No-one done the paper copies? Try asking people to complete them face-to-face.
Monitor return rates	Monitor and communicate to project staff what your return rates are and use it to encourage greater engagement.
Set a target	If you need a certain number of responses, setting a target will help you get there. Even if you don't, you could set a target based on previous or expected rates to keep you on track. A 'good' response rate will vary by survey, audience and format. For a typical online follow-up survey a 20% response rate might be good going; whereas for a paper survey completed at sessions you might aim higher as you have a captive audience.
Incentives	Incentives like prize draws, vouchers, freebies, loyalty cards or donations to charity can encourage responses. Think about 'selling' the survey, e.g. '15 minutes of your time = entry to £50 prize draw'.
Timing	Think about when your audience might be most receptive. If it's a paper form, will you get a better response before a session or after? If it's online, send out your invitation on a day and time when you think your audience is most likely to act on it rather than delete it or 'save it for later'.
Set a closing date	Adding a closing date – even an arbitrary one – can prompt people to complete it sooner rather than later (or worse: put it off altogether).
Send reminders	Sending reminders can encourage more people to respond – but limit it to two so you don't start to annoy people. Don't forget to build in other tips, e.g. 'lots of people have already responded' or 'last chance to support our research'.
Focus on your target audience	Concentrate your efforts on the people you most need surveys from – e.g. inactive people or people in a certain age group. Think about your project's outcomes and target audience.
The right place	If you can, raise or conduct surveys in a social setting over a coffee and cake.
Avoid online pitfalls	If your form is online, check that it works on different devices, and check relevant settings – e.g. does it allow multiple responses from the same device?
Say thank you!	Thank people for their time!

6. Share the findings and how they are being used!

Share and show	Once you've collected and analysed the data – share relevant findings with project staff, coaches and participants and tell them how you are using it. This will reinforce the buy-in you created earlier by showing how valuable the data is and how it's being used to improve your project and the service you provide.