

CLUB DEVELOPMENT

HELPFUL INFORMATION



INTRODUCTION

This document provides practical guidance for bowls clubs aiming to grow their membership, improve facilities, and build long-term sustainability. It builds on insights gathered from development seminars and workshops, while incorporating shared “good practice” from clubs across the region. One of the clearest messages to emerge from this work is that clubs benefit greatly from working together, sharing ideas, and learning from what has been successful elsewhere. Clubs that understand their local community and adapt accordingly are far more likely to succeed than those that remain static.

Please note the information in this document is intended to be helpful and was accurate at the time of writing. It will be reviewed and updated regularly to maintain accuracy. The views expressed are personal and do not carry legal or statutory authority. For specific guidance, please view the contact details page at the end of this document. For legal matters, such as land ownership, you should seek independent legal advice.

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APPENDIX 1

If you want your club to grow, you need a clear plan. The development plan process should begin with answering a few key questions:

1. What is the current status of your club? For example, is membership declining? Does equipment need replacing? Take a thorough look at all aspects of your club and write down your observations so you can refer back to them later.
2. What changes would you like to see in the next 3 years? Think ahead and identify your goals and targets. What would you like the club to achieve in this time? Create a “wish list” of improvements or developments for future reference.
3. What resources are needed to make this happen? Who will carry out the work? Who is available to help? Consider whether committee members or other club members can contribute time and effort. Break tasks down and assign responsibilities to individuals or groups.

Also consider finances:

What funds does the club currently have? What additional funding might be needed? Will you need to apply for external grants or funding for specific projects or equipment?

If you're unsure where to start, consider using the Club Health Checker tool from the BDA. These tools typically take around 30 minutes to complete and may require input from your committee (e.g., financial details from the treasurer). They can generate a useful report as a starting point for your plan. By answering these questions, you will begin to form your club development plan. This provides a foundation for discussions with committee members and helps focus attention on key priorities.

Helpful tips:

Set realistic and achievable targets.

Aim for small early successes to build momentum.

Avoid setting goals that are too difficult, as this can discourage progress.

Encourage members to contribute, not just participate, ask what they can do to help the club grow.

*Additional resources, including funding information and a template club development plan are available via request.

APPENDIX 2

Identifying suitable grants can be confusing, but the following steps will help you get started:

1. Do your preliminary research

Before applying, be clear about what you need funding for and estimate the total cost realistically.

Some funders require “match funding,” meaning your club contributes part of the cost. For example, if your club contributes £2,000 and the funder provides £2,000, the total project budget would be £4,000. This is an important factor to consider early on.

2. Understand funding windows

Grant funding is not always available year-round. Many funders operate within specific “windows” or “tranches” (e.g., 1 January to 30 June).

You must check when applications open and close. Applying late in a funding period may reduce your chances of success, as funds may already be allocated. Ideally, submit your application early in a new funding round.

3. Check eligibility and priorities

Many funders target specific groups or outcomes. For example, some aim to increase overall participation, whilst others prioritising inclusion, such as supporting disabled people or older adults. Make sure you understand and meet the funder’s criteria before applying.

4. Seek advice before applying

After completing your initial research, it is strongly recommended that you discuss your application with a funding advisor or the grant provider.

They can help you understand requirements, ensure your application meets the criteria, and potentially save you significant time.

5. Use reliable sources for up-to-date information

Grant information changes regularly. Check official websites and funding portals for the latest opportunities. You can also subscribe to newsletters that share updates on new grants.

At the time of writing, the “Movement Fund” offers grants of up to £15,000. Check the relevant funding website for the most current details and eligibility criteria.

APPENDIX 3

Feedback gathered from running open days highlights that simply opening your doors does not always attract new members. It's important to think about how your club fits alongside other activities in your area and how you can reach potential members. While having a club website and using social media is often essential, another way to grow membership can be through personal recommendations, encouraging current members to invite friends, neighbours, or colleagues. Although social media and websites are useful tools, not everyone uses these platforms, so consider other methods of outreach, such as local newsletters, community noticeboards, or press releases. Building relationships with local media can also help spread awareness of your club.

Taster sessions and open days can be very effective. Inviting specific groups, such as local walking clubs or community organisations, can increase participation. Offering incentives such as free sessions, refreshments, or social events (like a barbecue) can also help attract newcomers. Consider reaching out to local businesses. Some companies may be interested in offering team-building or “away day” experiences for their staff, which could introduce new people to your club. There are also organisations that promote physical activity in the community. Partnering with these groups can help you connect with individuals who are already interested in staying active. The medical sector can be another valuable connection. Some healthcare providers now recommend physical activity as part of treatment. Building relationships with local clinics or practitioners could lead to referrals.

Maximising member retention is just as important as recruitment. When new people show interest, welcome them warmly and introduce them to others. Assigning a “buddy” can help them settle in and feel included. Simple gestures, like remembering names and following up after their first visit, makes a big difference. Creating a friendly, supportive environment will encourage people to return and become long-term members. It's important to understand what your members want, a successful club recognises differences and adapts accordingly. Regularly asking for feedback, through informal conversations or surveys, can help ensure the club meets members' expectations.

Listening to members and being willing to make changes will help create a more inclusive and enjoyable environment. Ultimately, a club that responds to its members' needs is more likely to retain them and continue to grow.

APPENDIX 4

The primary source of income for most clubs is membership subscriptions. However, if a club is facing financial challenges, simply increasing fees may lead to a loss of members. It is therefore important to consider alternative ways of generating income.

Club Development Funding

Visit the Bowls England website and explore their club development section. By enrolling in a development programme, clubs may be eligible for grants of up to £500.

Facility Hire

Consider allowing other groups to hire your club facilities. Many local organisations are looking for regular meeting spaces, making this a potentially valuable source of income.

Social Events


Hosting social activities, such as short mat bowls during the winter or bridge clubs, can help maintain engagement with members during the off-season. These events also provide an opportunity to introduce new people to the club.

Sponsorship Opportunities

Sponsorship, such as advertising boards around the green, can be an effective way to raise funds. Start by identifying local businesses and learning about their activities. Many companies are keen to support their local community, and by approaching them, you may secure sponsorship. As this involves a formal agreement, it is important to ensure both parties clearly understand the terms, expectations, and any responsibilities.

Development Loans

Organisations such as Bowls Cornwall offer development loans of up to £10,000, primarily for equipment. These loans are typically repayable over a period of 2 to 5 years and can help address short-term cash flow issues. For further details, contact the Bowls Cornwall administrator.



USEFUL LINKS

Bowls England

- <https://www.bowlsengland.com>
- Access to club support documents and the funding portal.

Bowls Cornwall

- <https://bowlscornwall.co.uk>
- Offer development loans for equipment/facilities.


Active Cornwall

- <https://www.activecornwall.org>
 - Run national and local initiatives to get more people active.
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CONTACT FOR FUTURE SUPPORT

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