



Insights into changing participation trends

Youth drop off – Athletics Australia



The challenge



Participation 'churn' among teenagers is 17 times higher than for other sports.



The existing pathway is either not appealing or understood by potential participants.



Performance-orientated competition products do not meet the needs of many teens.

The task of attracting and retaining teenagers is a significant challenge for athletics.

Teens drop out of the sport at a rate 17 times higher than the industry standard, and research suggests this may be due to the sport not meeting their needs.

Teens between 12 and 15 who drop out do so for a number of reasons. The first is boredom; the second is time – study and athletics commitments begin to clash at this age; the third is that a move into 'serious' athletics is of little interest.

Athletics Australia has often struggled to transition socially oriented children from the children's programs – which focus on fun and having a go – into the more competition senior programs. While the sport provides a great pathway for talented kids, those who just want to have fun often find they are at the end of the line – leading to the high dropout rate.

Athletics Australia is addressing this by creating a new program that will bridge the gap between the age groups and often a 'fun' experience for both. The program – which is in the early stages of development – is based on research that asked target groups what they want from their experience with Athletics Australia.



The approach

Athletics Australia used the Australian Sports Commission's (ASC) industry research to gather insights across the industry to understand why people participate in athletics.

The ASC also part-funded Athletics Australia to commission consumer insights that would find out what the target market want from their athletics experience. Athletics Australia recently presented those findings to key stakeholders and reached a national agreement on the case for change, as well as the need to focus on consumers.

What's next?

Athletics Australia is currently working with the ASC's Sports Governance and Capability branch to develop a go-to-market strategy, including brand architecture, value proposition and financial modelling.

The changes being pursued by athletics will:

- ↓ address teen drop out by creating a pathway for socially oriented participants
- ↓ increase the number of participants by broadening the base
- ↓ create a product that meets the needs of consumers and is more likely to have commercial appeal.

What Athletics Australia has discovered

The journey being undertaken by Athletics Australia has highlighted some key lessons:

- ↓ Challenge traditional thinking and realise the needs and wants of consumers are changing – making it critical to stay up to date and relevant
- ↓ Don't assume to know what consumers want: ask them
- ↓ Focus on the best interests of the sport and work under national behaviours rather than as separate organisations.