

MONITORING & TRACKING THE FIELD



CFLRI'S BULLETIN SERIES MONITORING SPORT AND RECREATION IN CANADA

Impact of COVID-19 within Sport Organizations

The Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute's (CFLRI) 2020-2021 *Sport Organizations* survey asked administrators about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on organizational capacity, including resources, programming and facilities operated by sport organizations. This particular study surveyed sport organizations at a national, provincial, territorial, and community level. In particular, sport organizations were asked about the impact of the pandemic on their:

- revenue sources or financial sustainability;
- number of staff or human resources;
- ability to provide quality *programming*; and,
- ability to open, maintain or sustain sport and recreation *facilities*.

Overall, the overwhelming majority of sport organizations have been impacted by the pandemic to *at least* some extent (that is, to *some* or a *great* extent) in providing

Overall, the overwhelming majority of sport organizations have been impacted by the pandemic in providing sport and recreation opportunities to their membership.

Table 1: Impact of COVID-19 on organizational capacity within sport organizations

	% of sport organizations indicating impact of COVID-19 on:		
	A great extent	Some extent	Not at all
Revenue sources or financial sustainability	61%	32%	6%
Number of staff or human resources	37%	39%	24%
Ability to provide quality programming	71%	24%	5%
Ability to open, maintain, or sustain facilities	72%	23%	4%

Source: CFLRI, 2020-2021 *Sport Organizations* survey

sport and recreation opportunities to their membership. Table 1 describes the extent to which administrators within these organizations rate these impacts.

Region

Perceptions about the extent of the pandemic's impact on sport organizations' organizational capacity, programming and facilities are lower in the Atlantic, compared to the national average. More specifically, *lower* percentages of sport organizations in the Atlantic indicate that the pandemic has impacted their revenue, ability to provide quality programming, or ability to open and maintain facilities *to a great* extent compared to the Canadian average.



Organizational size

Organizations were categorized based on the number of registrants or participants that they serve (i.e., 150 or less registrants or participants and greater than 150). Generally speaking, there are no significant differences in ratings of the impact of COVID-19 on organization capacity between smaller and larger organizations (in terms of the registrants or participants).

Assistive supports

Organizations were also asked what resources and supports would be most helpful for financial sustainability, human resources, providing quality programming, and opening and sustaining facilities. As one would expect, financial support, grants, or sponsorship topped the list as the type of support most needed; this includes support for lost revenues due to closures or restrictions, or extra staffing to help support the extra sanitary requirements, as examples. Secondly, between 10% and 20% of organizations mentioned that having their membership return to full participation and

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being allowed to resume operations would be most helpful. For programming, assistance and support for providing online or virtual programming was also cited as an important support (including assistance with technology, internet access, training, or content, as examples). For facilities, 11-15% of responding sport organizations indicated that having access to facilities (their own, or municipal or school-based facilities) would be required for their programming.

Discussion

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the lives of Canadians. Government imposed health measures (i.e., restrictions, closures) aimed at preventing significant morbidity and mortality from the spread of the virus has created additional challenges both at the individual and organizational level. At the organization level, many businesses have expressed difficulties in providing services as they were forced to close or operate with restrictions. The findings from this CFLRI survey suggest that during the pandemic, sport organizations in Canada faced many challenges in providing sport and recreation opportunities. The majority of sport organizations reported impacts to revenue, human resources, ability to deliver quality programming, or the ability to open and maintain facilities. Similar findings were reported in another national study conducted by Sport for Life in June 2020, assessing the impact of COVID-19. According to this Sport for Life study, almost all of the sport organizations participating in the study indicated that they were affected by the pandemic¹. More than half of local sport organizations reported financial hardships as a result of decreases in revenue from sales of goods, registration/membership fees, program/event cancellations, and facility closures¹. Moreover, roughly 7 out of 10 sport organizations reported not being able to reduce operating costs (both fixed and variable) during this time. When asked about concerns they have about the future

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impact of COVID, a quarter of organizations cited concerns for long-term operational impacts, ability to recover and membership retention, while slightly fewer (21%) did not think they would be able to recover in the absence of financial supports or return to play¹. Sport organizations also identified needs (beyond funding) that would help with operations such as clear communications and guidelines regarding return to play, affordable access to space, promotion to increase membership, and long-term funding commitment from governments¹. Results from the CFLRI survey and Sport for Life's study indicate that sport organizations were, and continue to be, impacted to some extent by the pandemic, and that recovery efforts will require support from government. As restrictions ease, it will be important to monitor the situation to determine whether or how sport organizations are able to recover over time and what additional measures, if any, are required.



FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS



Consider long-term support

Sport organizations have identified funding as a key operational need. Many organizations reported losses in revenue during the pandemic, and according to some, where not able adjust their operating costs or secure emergency funding during this time¹. The federal government has recognized this need and the importance of sport programs, and as result has invested \$80 million over two years (2021-2022) to help support organized sport². While this is an important first step in the recovery process, governments need to consider long-term financial commitments to help make these organizations sustainable, for example finance support for hiring and training of new staff, development and retrofitting of facilities, technology and equipment.



Consider new ways to adapt

Sport organizations may need to consider alternate ways of providing sport and recreation programming to remain viable during and in the post-pandemic era. Virtual

programming has gained popularity in the wake of the pandemic as an important option for retaining participation³. Pivoting to virtual programming undoubtedly will have its challenges, for example in providing adequate training to coaches on how to coach athletes virtually, providing necessary equipment and software (e.g., computers, zoom), and ensuring access to internet. Coaches and sport providers will also require training for the provision of safe and quality in-person programming. Training will be critical to ensure staff are knowledgeable about any new processes or guidelines³.



Consider accessibility

Covid-related restrictions impacted many organizations outside the sport sector; for example many schools and municipal facilities were required to close or restrict access. As a result, many sport organizations were unable to provide programming as they rely on access to these facilities. Sport and recreation providers will need to consider alternative options for providing programming, particularly in the event of future pandemics to ensure the sustainability of their programs and services.

References

¹ Sport for Life. 2020. Impacts of COVID-19 on Local Sports Organizations-Nationwide Survey Results. Available from: <https://sportforlife.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/National-Report-Impacts-of-COVID-19-on-Local-Sports-Organizations-1.pdf>

² Canadian Heritage. 2021. More Sport Opportunities for All Canadians Following the Impacts of COVID-19. News Release. Available from: <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/news/2021/08/more-sport-opportunities-for-all-canadians-following-the-impacts-of-covid-19.html>

³ Baxter H., Misener K., Kappelides P., Williamson L. 2020. Virtual Volunteering in Community Sport. Sport Information Resource Centre. Available from: <https://sirc.ca/blog/virtual-volunteering/>



Canadian Fitness
and Lifestyle
Research Institute

230-2733 Lancaster Rd.
Ottawa, ON K1B 0A9
(613) 233-5528
www.cflri.ca

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