

How to Plan for a Community Recreation and Sports Hub



Government of South Australia
Office for Recreation, Sport and Racing

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Purpose of this guide

Designed to supplement the South Australian Regional Level Recreation and Sport Facilities Planning Guidelines, this guide explains the concept of a Community Recreation and Sports Hub (the hub), why hubs create value, and how to plan, deliver and operate them. It is intended for local government officers, elected members, planning consultants, state agencies, peak sport bodies and community partners involved in sport and recreation infrastructure.

Background

To maximise community benefit, facilities should be flexible, inclusive and financially sustainable. Co-location and coordinated management enable a broader mix of participation opportunities, strengthen community connection, and improve utilisation across the day and week.

Hubs integrate sport and recreation with complementary community services (e.g., health, education, youth, arts). This intentional clustering can reduce duplication, create economies of scale, and anchor precincts with strong transport and land-use links. Where feasible, retrofitting or expanding existing facilities can accelerate delivery and build on established user bases.



What is a Community Recreation and Sports Hub?

A hub is a multi-use, multi-program precinct designed and operated to deliver a broad range of outcomes. Although centred on recreation and sport, hubs can incorporate other community programs and services in the same location to increase activation and impact.

Potential co-located services:

- Health club (24/7 gym)
- Childcare centre
- Allied health services
- Education and training
- Toy/sports library
- Youth/other community services
- Retail and café
- Arts, music and dance
- Community gardens
- Youth centre / neighbourhood house
- Sport administration offices
- Community events and conferences/trade shows

Hubs should be physically and functionally integrated with their surroundings—near schools, shops, health services and public transport—and designed to connect with walking and cycling networks.

Under the hub approach it may not be necessary to physically build completely new assets to meet demand. Retrofitting or enhancing/expanding current facilities to enable a hubs model to be achieved is also feasible and may have the added benefit of an already established user base and community support.

Benefits of Community Recreation and Sports Hubs

Strategic benefits

- Integrates a variety of community services in one accessible location (sport, recreation, allied health, education, arts).
- Improves collaboration between clubs, service providers and partners (e.g., schools) to deliver targeted programs.

Economic/financial benefits

- Economies of scale in capital delivery and operations; reduces reliance on long-term subsidy where feasible.
- Shared facilities across multiple sports (indoor/outdoor) enable overhead and maintenance efficiencies.

Community/recreation and sport benefits

- Increases participation through diverse, inclusive offers across ages, abilities and interests.
- Builds social capital and cohesion; improves knowledge sharing among clubs via co-location and shared services.
- Provides opportunities for exposure to new / diverse recreation and sport activities and new community groups.

How to plan for hubs

STEP 1: Establish the need for the facility

To be successful and sustainable hubs need to be designed and programmed to meet the needs of the community. It is important from the onset that the drivers for a hub are clearly articulated and where possible quantified.

Key step	For consideration	Possible method
Establish the catchment of the hub.	Define the hub catchment: distance, population density, barriers (rivers/arterials), and accessibility.	Circular catchment analysis.
Establish the demographic and socio-economic profile of the catchment area.	Key characteristics of the population: - Age, gender, income, cultural background, employment - Access to transport modes - Participation levels and recreation and sport preferences and needs.	- Review Census data - Review available participation data - Engage sports clubs and associations.
Identify any future growth areas or urban regeneration areas that may be connected to the hub.	What will the future needs of the community be?	- Review state, regional and local strategic plans including the SA Governments Greater Adelaide Regional Plan and Country Regional Plans. - Seek input from the developer.
Audit existing facilities and services in the catchment area.	- Existing facilities and programs in the area. - Key user and representative groups in recreation and sport provision. - Work with State Sporting Organisations to determine desired standard, and gaps or deficiencies in existing provision. - Identify opportunities for organisations to co-locate.	- Review records - Site inspections - Review Council and/or State Sport and Recreation Plans.
Demonstrate how the hub fits into the strategic and policy framework for the region and the relevant sport and recreation plans (including State Active Recreation and State Sporting Organisation plans).	- Strategic planning. - Alignment with SA Governments Greater Adelaide Regional Plan or relevant SA Country Regional Plan	- Review state and local policy, sport and recreation plans - Develop a business case.

STEP 2: Vision and objectives

To determine the meaning of success facility providers must identify what they want to achieve through their proposed facility. Setting objectives for the facility should also clearly determine the relative commercial and community focus of a facility. Some Community Recreation and Sport Hubs may have greater focus on commercial success, while other hubs may weigh delivery on social objectives (social inclusion, health, participation, safety).

Key step	For consideration	Possible method
Scale and function	• Facility catchment. • Activities the hub will host. • Formal and informal groups that will use the hub. • Mix of facilities and services that will be offered.	• Stakeholder consultation. • Review relevant plans.
Objectives	• Links to needs identified in the catchment. • Participation outcomes. • Particular groups to be serviced. • Social inclusion. • Social capital. • Sports pathways. • Broader community benefits. • Safety outcomes.	• Stakeholder consultation.
Environmental	• Environmentally Sustainable Design (ESD) considerations.	• Design opportunities.
Financial and commercial	• Financial sustainability. • Revenue generating activities. • Lifecycle asset management and future upgrade. • Recurrent costs of running programs.	• Detailed analysis.

STEP 3: Stakeholders and co-design

It is important to engage in a meaningful way with all key stakeholders including recreation and sporting clubs and the broader community at the earliest opportunity.

Use a co-design approach to the planning process through early and active involvement with those impacted (users, local community etc.) will provide greater “buy in” and ownership of the Community Recreation and Sports Hub.

Key step	For consideration	Possible method
Identify and engage potential partners.	- Partners in the successful development and operation of a Community Recreation and Sport Hub can include user groups, clubs and associations, councils and commercial service providers. - Do all partners share the vision? If not, how can they be aligned? - Are there any partners missing that are needed to deliver on the vision? - Is there potential for a shared use model and if so, who should be engaged? - Garner “buy in” from stakeholders as early as possible in the process.	Prepare and implement a Community Engagement Plan.
Engagement Strategy	- Identify communities of interest. - Who will have input and who will be informed. - How the community will be engaged and when. - The organisations, groups, and individuals to be consulted with may be different at different stages of the project.	Community Engagement Plan may include individual meetings/ briefings, group workshop.

STEP 4: Site selection

Selection of an appropriate site is a critical factor in the success of the facility. Where possible, co-location with existing infrastructure including public transport, education, health and community services, existing local sports clubs, business and shops can contribute significantly to the success of hubs.

It may not be necessary to physically build completely new assets to meet demand. Retrofitting or enhancing/expanding current facilities to enable a hubs model to be achieved is also feasible and may have the added benefit of an already established user base and community support.

Key step	For consideration	Possible method
Location	• Areas of growth/demand. • Accessibility for pedestrians, cyclists, private vehicles and public transport (including those with a disability). • Physical barriers such as rivers and major roads. • Existing infrastructure.	• Engage stakeholders. • Site inspections. • Strategic Land Use Assessment.
Availability	• Land ownership. • Land tenure. • Land cost and affordability.	• Maps and GIS data. • Stakeholder consultation.
Site analysis	• Size and shape. • Topography. • Vegetation. • Exposure to wind. • Views. • Watercourses. • Land contamination. • Compatibility with surrounding land uses.	• Maps and GIS data. • Site inspections.
Linkages	• Proximity to and ability to link with adjacent or nearby complementary facilities or services (e.g. schools, childcare, existing sport and recreation facilities, libraries, community centres, shopping centres, medical centres etc.).	• Urban design framework.

Functional and iconic potential	• Gateway site. • Site well known to the regional community. • Extent of support and interest in the site as a Community Recreation and Sports Hub by stakeholders and the community; network of existing clubs and organisations willing to participate. • Interest of potential private sector partners ◦ are there areas of the site that will be attractive to them?	• Urban design framework.
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STEP 5: Management and operation

Selecting an appropriate management model will depend on several factors, including:

- The objectives of the hub.
- The in house expertise and resources of the hub owner, and their ability to deliver on the intended outcomes.
- The scale and nature of activities that will occur at the hub.
- The level of control the hub owner wishes to retain.
- The availability of experienced and capable contractors (where contract management is being considered).
- The capacity to fund, operate, maintain and continually improve the facility.
- Clarity around who holds responsibility for key decision making processes.

It is important to determine the preferred management model early in the planning process. Once the intended users and uses of the facility are understood, the hub owner should assess which management arrangement best ensures that needs are met while the centre operates efficiently and cost effectively.

A central consideration is the rationale for service delivery: whether the facility is intended to primarily serve community groups, operate on a commercial basis, or provide a blended model. At one end of the spectrum is a community focused facility that maximises access but may require ongoing subsidy. At the other is a commercially oriented centre that may achieve financial sustainability but offer more limited access for some community groups.

Understanding the purpose of the precinct—and being able to clearly articulate the expected community benefit—is a critical outcome of the planning process. Defining the intended service level (local, regional or state) will also guide the management approach. Smaller, localised hubs with a strong community focus are often best suited to lease or licence arrangements with local organisations, whereas larger, more commercially viable facilities may be better managed through outsourced arrangements supported by formal procurement and performance frameworks.

Key step	For consideration	Possible method
Are other parties able to contribute to operating costs?	- Contribution to operating costs will partly determine the financial sustainability of a hub. The following will inform the selection of the operating model: - Will operating costs be met almost entirely by the host council with little or no contribution from operating income. - Will operating costs be met by operating income from multiple partners and some subsidy required from council. - Will operating costs be met entirely from user fees and operating income.	- Stakeholder consultation. - Review relevant plans.
Will the facility or program facilitate full-time use	- Facility/program is primarily out of hours. - Facility/program requires all hours.	- Shared use with an educational institution (shared use). - Multiple options.
Resourcing	- Will there be very minimal staff input required for facility/program and skills are available. - Will there be considerable staff requirements and local employment/training - Requirements and resources needed to administer the facility, and specific skills that are not readily provided in-house.	- Self-management. - Outsourced delivery.

STEP 6: Design

The design of a Community Recreation and Sports Hub will involve consideration of the size, location and nature of the site and its surrounds, the facilities to be developed, the objectives of the hub, who the primary user groups will be, and the budget.

Implementing a facility design that suits activities and users is a key component of success. Critical to this are facilities that meet the sport's standards to enable competition and training at the appropriate level.

Responsive design can create a place where people come to play, meet and connect with the local community, and that is inviting and stimulating, visually sensitive and expressive, and has a positive atmosphere for people of all ages and cultures.

Key step	For consideration	Possible method
Definition of objectives	• Areas of growth/demand. • Accessibility for pedestrians, cyclists, private vehicles and public transport (including those with a disability). • Physical barriers such as rivers and major roads. • Existing infrastructure.	• Engage stakeholders. • Site inspections. • Strategic Land Use Assessment.
Concept design	• Site analysis: ◦ Size and shape ◦ Topography ◦ Vegetation ◦ Exposure to wind ◦ Views ◦ Watercourses ◦ Land contamination ◦ Compatibility with surrounding land uses ◦ Opportunities and constraints. • User requirements: ◦ Facility users' needs in terms of total floor area, characteristics of spaces, linkages between spaces, accessibility requirements. ◦ Relevant sport's governing bodies playing field and supporting facilities standards.	• Maps and GIS data. • Stakeholder consultation.

Concept design (continued)	• Identity of facility: ◦ User groups, club identities, desired facility outcomes. • Flexibility and changing functions. • Shared use. • Passive surveillance and Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED). • Cost estimates. • Approvals. • Whole of life economic and financial costs associated with constructing, procuring and operating a facility.	
Asset Management Planning	• Size and shape. • Topography. • Vegetation. • Exposure to wind. • Views. • Watercourses. • Land contamination. • Compatibility with surrounding land uses.	• Maps and GIS data. • Site inspections.
Linkages	• Proximity to and ability to link with adjacent or nearby complementary facilities or services (e.g. schools, childcare, existing sport and recreation facilities, libraries, community centres, shopping centres, medical centres etc.).	• Urban design framework.
Asset Management Planning	• Whole of life economic and financial costs associated with constructing, procuring and operating a facility.	• Life cycle cost planning.

STEP 7: Asset management and funding strategy

Community Recreation and Sports Hubs are long term assets that generally require large amounts of public money to develop, operate and maintain. Consequently, it is important that councils consider what level of funding support, if any (through mechanisms such as subsidies and/or grants) will be provided to offset some or all the costs of managing, operating and maintaining the facility.

Council must decide whether:

- It will utilise a 'user pays' model for a facility where user groups and/or participants pay all the costs associated with the facility (full cost recovery), or
- Especially where the facility and the programs and services it delivers supports council meet its social and community priorities and targets:
 - Fully fund all or some costs of managing the facility including the programs and services it delivers to the community, or
 - Use a shared cost subsidy model to reduce the cost to user groups and/or participants.



Key step	For consideration	Possible method
Asset Management Planning	• Whole of life economic and financial costs associated with constructing, procuring and operating a facility. • It is important that the outcomes and targets set are consistent and align with the council asset and financial management plan targets. • Consider implementing a 'Community Facilities Subsidy Policy' which provides a framework to standardise the level of subsidy provided to community groups who use facilities (e.g. sports clubs) based on the extent to which they meet councils' priority community/social outcomes for the facility (e.g. provides programs for men and women, provides membership concessions or discounts to low-income earners). • To offset costs, consider other income generating opportunities for the facility that can such as inclusion of an onsite commercial tenancy for example: ◦ Health Club (24/7 Gym) ◦ Child Care Centre ◦ Retail Shop ◦ Office/administration ◦ Allied Health Service (e.g. Sports Physio) ◦ Neighbourhood House ◦ Youth/Other Community Services ◦ Explore sponsorship opportunities (i.e. facility naming rights) ◦ Monthly Community Markets.	• Life cycle cost planning

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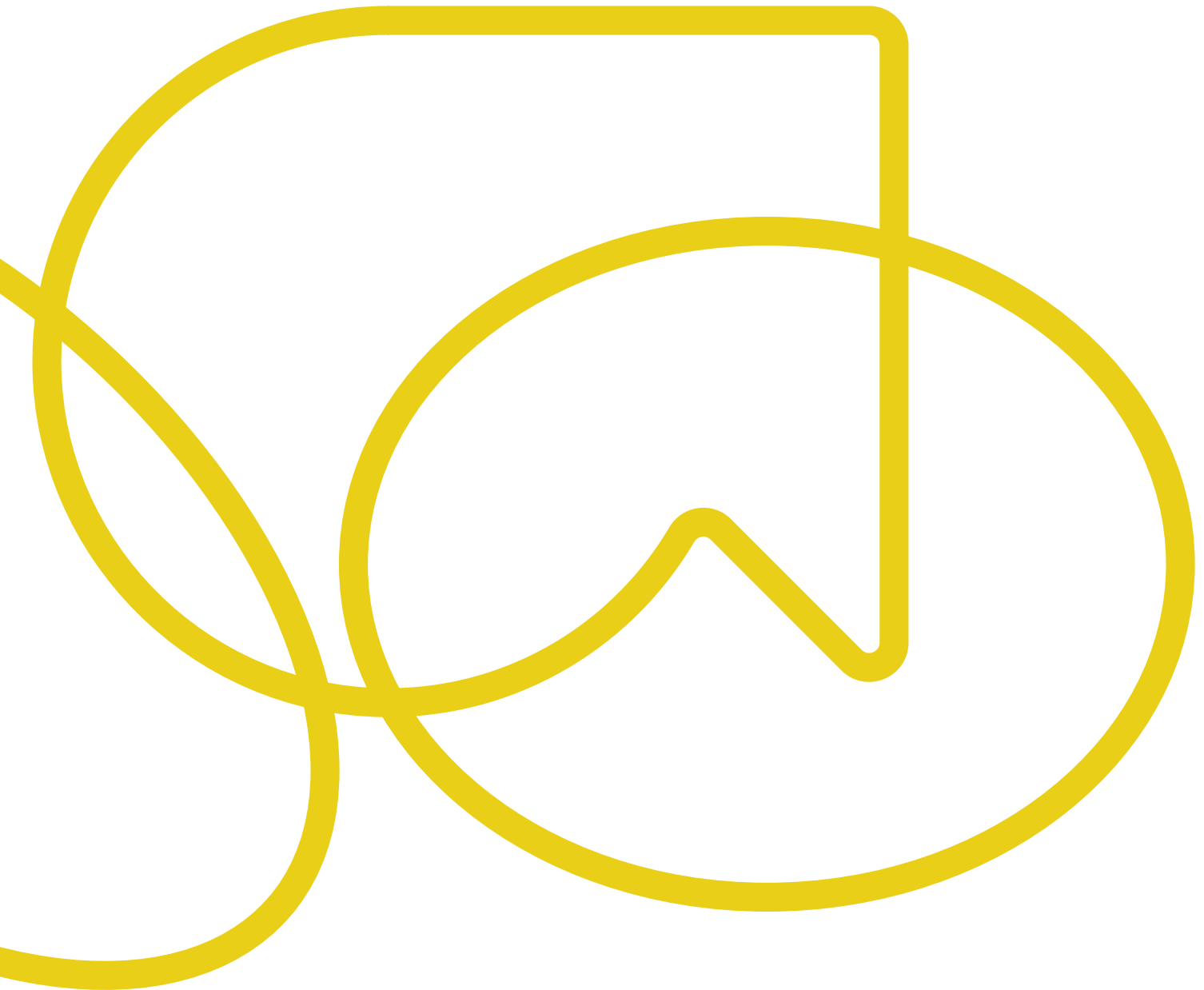
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