



STRENGTHEN & ADAPT PLAN

ALIGNING & STRENGTHENING THE SOFTBALL NETWORK



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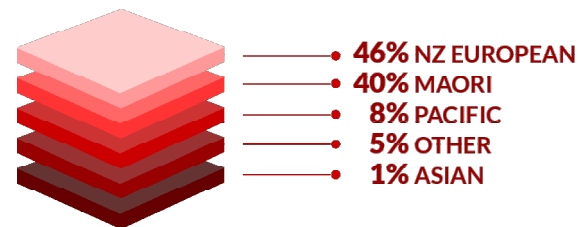
ALIGNING & STRENGTHENING THE SOFTBALL NETWORK

Softball has played an important part in the history of sport in Aotearoa. Over the last couple of decades, softball has become less visible and relevant to our communities.

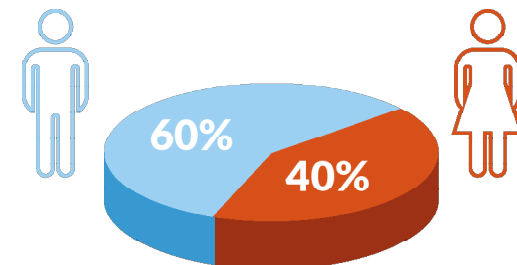
There is a lack of cohesion and collaboration, and delivery is impacted by workforce capability and capacity. Softball has the opportunity to strengthen our story and network to better prepare ourselves for the future.

14,000 MEMBERSHIP STRENGTH IN DIVERSITY 2021/22

ETHNICITY



GENDER



Capacity Issues at Softball NZ and within the network has led to weakened relationships, a lack of engagement and buy-in to national initiatives, and missed opportunities for learning and connection across the sport.

There are many **Strengths & Opportunities** for softball but these are not well understood across the sport let alone outside current members and participants.

The softball community are asking for more work and support to lift the reputation or improve the understanding of the value of softball and increase the **Visibility & Exposure** at all levels within the sport.

There is **Limited Workforce** (paid and volunteer) capacity throughout the country, which is limiting player development opportunities being delivered, coaches being trained, and greater connection to the wider community.

The **Voice of the Participant** Survey 2021 results showed that softball's overall satisfaction rating was 5% lower than 'All Sports 2020/21 average', and the Net Promotor Score (NPS) score was 8 points lower than 'All Sports 2020/21 average'.

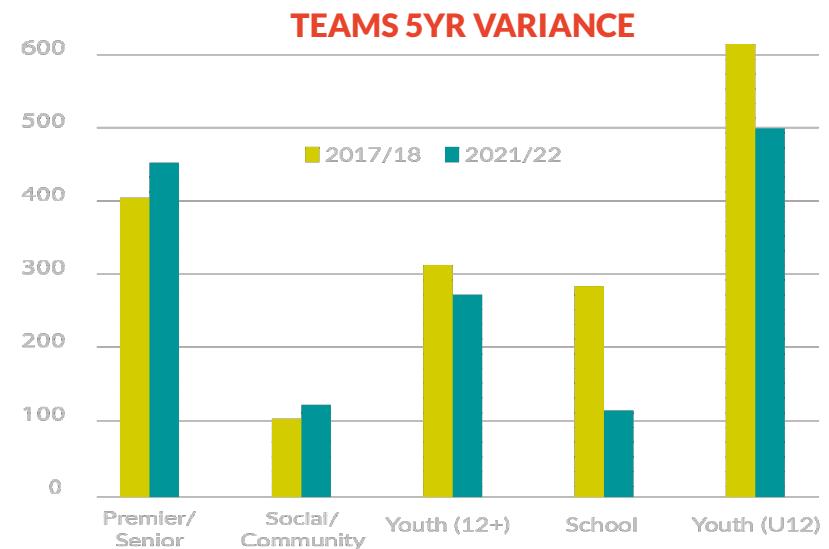
- 60%

of softball's registered teams are **Youth**, teams, but the number of youth teams registered has been declining for the past five years. Between the 2017/18 season and the 2021/22 season.
- 19.4%

increase in **Premier / Senior** team numbers.
- 35.8%

increase in **Social / Community** team numbers.
- 37%

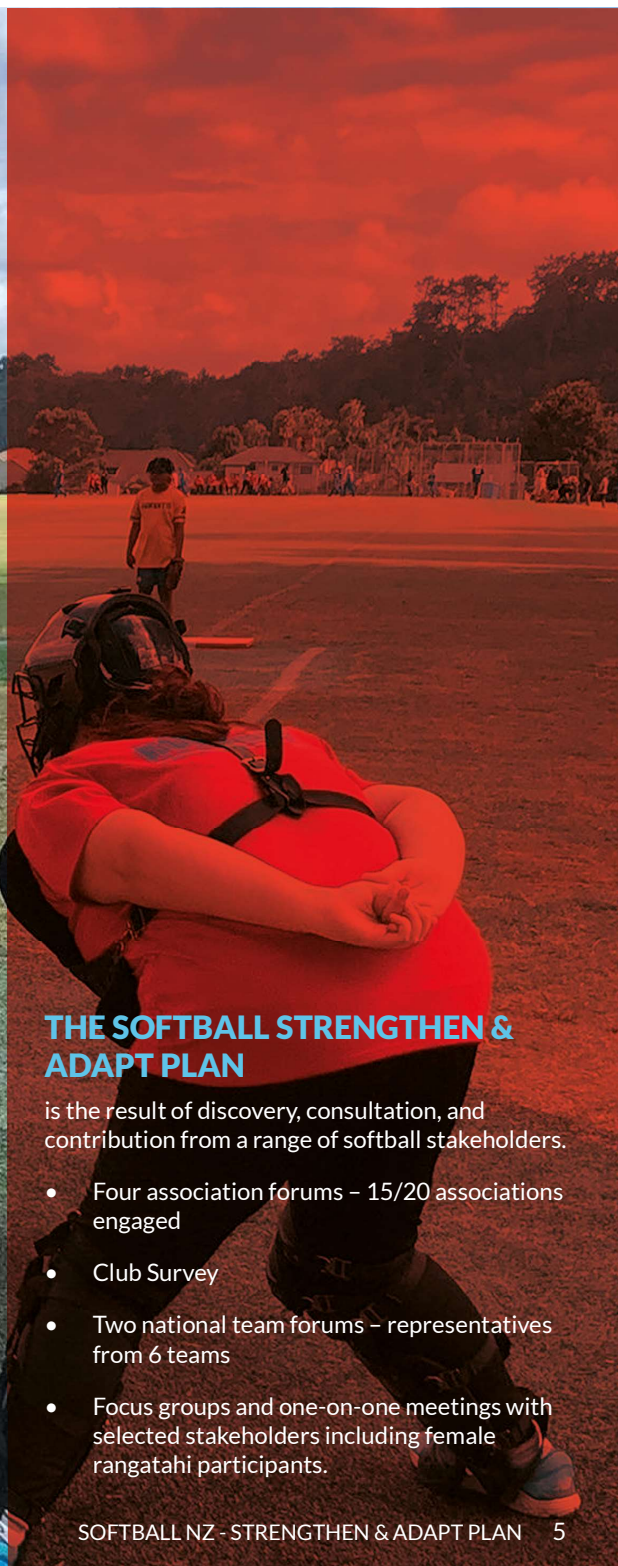
reduction in all **Youth** teams reduced by 37% with a significant 49.3% reduction in school teams (some attributable to COVID but the largest decline was between 18/19 and 19/20 seasons).



RANGATAHI

- Retention is currently an issue but is not well understood across the sport nor measured.
- 5-18-year-olds are significantly more likely (than others within the sport) to be detractors and are significantly less likely to re-join (VOP Survey 2021).





THE SOFTBALL STRENGTHEN & ADAPT PLAN

is the result of discovery, consultation, and contribution from a range of softball stakeholders.

- Four association forums – 15/20 associations engaged
- Club Survey
- Two national team forums – representatives from 6 teams
- Focus groups and one-on-one meetings with selected stakeholders including female rangatahi participants.

ONE SOFTBALL STRATEGY

The two areas for improvement within this strengthen and adapt plan have been selected because they will have the most impact on softball at this time to address the current and future challenges. These change initiatives align with the One Softball Plan 2019-2029 and are focussed on STRENGTHENING softball in Aotearoa, and preparing better for future agility and adaptation.

A BIGGER, MORE DIVERSE PARTICIPANT BASE

Players | Coaches | Umpires | Scorers | Other Volunteers

CAPABLE, ALIGNED & CONSISTENT DELIVERY

Delivery of softball is consistent and of high quality and the efforts of all softball organisations are towards achieving the strategic outcomes of our One Softball Plan

STRENGTHEN THE BUSINESS OF SOFTBALL

Softball organisations are more financially sustainable, have a variety of strategic and commercial partnerships and are guided in their work by improved softball data

HIGH PERFORMANCE SUCCESS

Our Black Sox and White Sox teams remain competitive and successful on the world softball stage.

The scope of the project included consideration of the performance environment, in particular pathway clarity and alignment, performance traits and cultural behaviours.

Across the consultation that was undertaken, including with those involved in national teams, there was consistency in the view that success for softball in the future would include an uplifted reputation and better understood value, improved skills and pathways, and increased participation numbers at all levels within the sport.

Change Initiative **1**

Aligning softball behind a revitalised story

Change Initiative **2**

Increasing understanding, capability and collaboration to provide quality experiences

ALIGNING & STRENGTHENING THE SOFTBALL NETWORK

CHANGE INITIATIVE 1

ALIGNING SOFTBALL BEHIND A REVITALISED STORY

PROBLEM STATEMENT/S	IMPROVEMENT OPPORTUNITY	HOW WE DO IT	WHAT THE TRANSFORMATION WOULD DELIVER
<p>The sport's ability to respond to community need has been limited by a lack of cohesion, alignment, collaboration, and capacity. There is an opportunity for Softball NZ to lead the change and inspire all to work smarter, for community, together.</p> <p>Capacity at Softball NZ has led to a lack of engagement and buy-in to national initiatives and missed opportunities for learning and connection across the sport.</p> <p>Retention of rangatahi is currently an issue but is not well understood across the sport nor measured. Between the 2017/18 season and the 2021/22 season all youth teams have reduced by 37% (a trend that was exasperated by Covid).</p> <p>There are lots of innovative ideas happening in isolation and Associations want to hear and learn about what is working, and how they can help each other.</p> <p>There is limited workforce capacity</p>	<p>Softball in Aotearoa has the opportunity to raise above its origin story, above its rich history of success, and embrace the diversity within the sport (and within Aotearoa) to build an aligned story to spark a revitalised future.</p> <p>Softball has a 40% female participation base, and outside NZ is predominantly female. The opportunity to brand and tell the story of softball as a female sport is uncommon in NZ and presents a funding, stakeholder engagement and participation reach opportunity.</p> <p>Softball has many innovative products and there is an opportunity to realign these with the revitalised story and encourage greater uptake by the community.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Discover – evaluate existing core identity, develop participant personas, market research and competitor analysis (e.g. baseball), evaluate how brand is currently perceived.2. Develop a revitalised story of softball – define core brand identity, articulate brand positioning ('special sauce'), develop brand assets, develop brand voice and how to communicate.3. Execute – via the environment of our sport (clubs, on the diamond), print collateral and signage, website/on-line, internal communications, participant-generated content, stories of impact.4. Each of the above activities will include engagement with key stakeholder organisations to support alignment in the network. <p>Note: Assets should reflect our different communities and have te reo Māori options.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A well-articulated and relatable story of softball in Aotearoa, its associated values, and value proposition, as it is now and into the future.• New partners that support quality experiences in softball.• Increased trust and alignment across the softball network.• Increased visibility and exposure at multiple levels, making it attractive for current participants to stay or ex-participants to return as players or volunteers.• Increased understanding by clubs and volunteers of the value they add to social cohesion, and community, whanau and individual well-being.

CHANGE INITIATIVE

1

ALIGNING SOFTBALL BEHIND A REVITALISED STORY cont...

HOW WILL WE KNOW THAT WE ARE SUCCESSFUL?

OUTCOMES

1. Brand assets are being used to promote and market softball
2. Better aligned network that has a shared understanding of the revitalised story
3. New partners contributing to softball outcomes

MEASURES

- Improved Stakeholder Survey results re: Softball brand and value to community
- Reported feedback on the impact of brand assets from RSOs



CHANGE INITIATIVE **2**

INCREASING UNDERSTANDING, CAPABILITY AND COLLABORATION TO PROVIDE QUALITY EXPERIENCES

PROBLEM STATEMENT/S	IMPROVEMENT OPPORTUNITY	HOW WE DO IT	WHAT THE TRANSFORMATION WOULD DELIVER
<p>Softball has become less visible and relevant to the wider community. Softball has many values and strengths we can offer but these are not consistently understood or promoted.</p> <p>The softball network is asking for more work and support to lift the reputation, improve the understanding of the value of softball, and increase the visibility and exposure at all levels within the sport.</p> <p>We aren't focussed on our strengths - Maori and Pasifika participation is at 48% and there are great female pathways.</p> <p>Those external to softball have indicated that the story of who softball is and what softball stands for is hard to unpick from the strategic plan.</p>	<p>Enhanced relationships and collaboration between current softball organisations, and increasing capability and capacity of our workforce.</p> <p>Increasingly, New Zealanders are looking for different ways to participate (as players and volunteers).</p> <p>There is an opportunity to work together to learn to become more responsive to specific needs of different communities and individuals by working together or with partners effectively.</p> <p>Softball NZ and various associations have been very innovative in developing products and participation structures to retain (and attract) participants.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Build network of aligned softball organisations by hosting regular virtual and in-person hui and forums. These will be based on geography, size, and/or topic.2. Increase our insights and data regarding formal and informal participation, non- and ex- participants, volunteers, and the needs of softball deliverers.3. Increase capability, build knowledge and provide tools to leaders and volunteers to enable them to better respond to community needs, including their own e.g. volunteer recruitment.4. Explore and encourage collaboration opportunities building on current examples and broadening to include external partners such as RSTs, Councils, and other local providers.5. Provide funding and support for innovative, experimental, and adaptive locally-led (and co-designed) initiatives that accelerate, scale, and emphasise quality experiences for players and volunteers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increased trust, understanding, alignment and collaboration across the softball network and with new external partners.• Improved retention of participants (players and volunteers).• Improved capability and capacity at local, regional and national levels to understand and deliver quality experiences (for players and volunteers).• Delivery of innovative and locally-led (and co-designed) opportunities to participate in softball that have used local insights. <p>Note: Coach development is core to the provision of quality experiences for players. Coach development is a core part of the current work being undertaken by Softball NZ and we will use any additional insights provided by the Strengthen and Adapt Project to adapt and prioritise Coach Development delivery.</p>

CHANGE INITIATIVE

2

INCREASING UNDERSTANDING, CAPABILITY AND COLLABORATION TO PROVIDE QUALITY EXPERIENCES cont...

HOW WILL WE KNOW THAT WE ARE SUCCESSFUL?

OUTCOMES

1. Collaborative delivery / partnerships established (internal and external)
2. Better aligned network
3. Reliable softball landscape data and insights
4. Improved understanding of community need

MEASURES

- Reported value of partnerships and networks (via stakeholder survey)
- Reported feedback on softball data and insights (feedback from Softball NZ team and stakeholder survey)
- Year on year increase in # of RSOs aligned with 'One Softball Strategy'

