



RECRUITING & RETAINING WOMEN COACHES

coach 

INTRODUCTION

The introduction of the AFL Women's (AFLW) competition in 2017 led to a boom in Women & Girls participating in football across the country.

Since the establishment of a national competition, the number of girls and women playing has increased from circa 319,000 in 2015 to 353,000 in 2021 with nearly 2700 women's & girls community football teams competing across the country.

Women who umpire, coach and administer our sport are still under-represented at all levels of the game. This is particularly evident in our elite competitions. The AFL is committed to Gender Equality at all levels of the game.

Greater diversity in Community Football will drive greater innovation and improved decision making, shaping a future that benefits us all.

The better the balance, the better the world. It is important that there are strong women role models in our sport, both on and off the field. To develop these role models, we need to provide opportunities for growth, development, and leadership.

The purpose of this guide is to support clubs in;

- » Promoting coaching opportunities to women and girls;
- » Providing ongoing coaching development opportunities; and
- » Recruiting the right people to support their teams.

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WHY SHOULD WOMEN COACH AT YOUR CLUB?

The benefits of having women involved at your club are;

- » **Variety of role models** - All athletes need role models, regardless of gender. Coaches as role models helps shape attitudes, motivation, and impact upon participants wellbeing^{1,2}.
- » **Expanded talent pool** - Women make up approximately half the Australian population and half the Australian workforce.
- » **Increased gender balance** - at a leadership level, this can encourage greater gender diversity more broadly throughout the club³.
- » **Actively creates inclusive environments** - for all women & girls at your club.
- » **Gender diversity** - at all levels can contribute to an improved club reputation and will help position your club to meet the needs of the community³.
- » **Challenges and breaks down gender stereotypes** - Women in leadership positions aids in breaking down traditional gender stereotypes that can be associated with male-dominated sports².

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Sport is an important cultural element of Australian society and a perfect vehicle to promote gender equality.

We need more women as coaches, to role model women as strong, determined, successful and respected leaders in our communities. This in turn will create a greater level of respect for women and girls, both in sport and more broadly in our society.

Inclusive clubs lead to more supportive and safer communities.



RECRUITING WOMEN COACHES

The following tips may be useful when recruiting women coaches;

1. Ask & Encourage.

Women may be reluctant to put their hands up at first. This could be caused by not feeling competent or by a lack of other women role models in coaching roles⁴. So why not take the first step and approach women around the club who could assist in coaching roles. Promote an inclusive club culture by recruiting and promoting opportunities to women and girls from diverse backgrounds. Encourage them to apply and provide support and advice to give them the confidence to step into a coaching role.

2. Ensure the language around your club and in recruiting advertisements / position descriptions is gender neutral.

This helps women see that your club is inclusive and encouraging of women coaching³.
Instead of "the experience he will bring" use, "the experience they will bring"
Instead of "his coaching philosophy" use, "their coaching philosophy"
Instead of referring to the team/group as 'guys' - "let's go guys" use 'team' - "let's go team!".

3. Look for transferable skills.

There is often the belief that the 'best' players make the 'best' coaches and that their sporting abilities are judged as superior to women however this is not the case. A good coach is one that brings the right mix of skills to the role⁵. Rather than focusing only on the candidates' football experience, think about what transferable skills they may have. For example, are they a teacher? Do they have good communication skills? Have they coached another sport - particularly an invasion sport like Basketball, Netball or Rugby?

4. Look at co-coaching opportunities.

If women are new to coaching, look at opportunities to pair them up with a more experienced coach. This helps give women the confidence to know that they have someone to lean on when they need it.

5. Be open to flexibility.

Some women may have work, family or study commitments that compete for their time⁶. If you have a great coach who is keen to be involved but is only available for one training night a week, think differently - what coaching role could they fill that suits their level of time commitment?
Consider how you can be family friendly - e.g. Allow women to bring children whilst coaching or assist with child minding.

6. Tell them how they will be supported in the role.

It is important that women know they will be supported. This will help give them the confidence that they can take on the role and make it their own! Ensuring they have their necessary coaching accreditation is the first step.
Beyond that, talk to them about how the club will support them. What coaches will be around them? What development opportunities can you give them? Can you provide them with a mentor?

7. Succession Planning.

Identify women who are leaders within your club and provide them with opportunities to develop under current coaching staff. Talk to them about potential opportunities and gauge their level of interest. Encourage players to pursue the coaching pathway.

BUILDING A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT & RETAINING COACHES

Building a supportive environment at your club is crucial to recruiting and retaining women coaches.

There are many reasons a coach may leave a coaching role. This may include a perceived lack of support, an unwelcoming environment, lack of development opportunities, and other personal commitments.

There are a number of ways in which your club can create a supportive environment for your coaches, including;

Language

The language you use is very important, as it can be very influential to the circumstance⁷.

Comments like, “Wow, a woman coach. You don’t see that often”, do not promote an inclusive environment. In fact, quite the opposite. Comments like this can make a woman feel like their position is not valid, and they are not up for the job.

It is important that your language is inclusive, welcoming, and supports the coach in their position with the team.

Development

Coaching football is often new to many women, so it is important the club invests in them as a coach and supports them with opportunities to develop. Ways you can support their development may include;

- » Paying for the coach’s annual CoachAFL membership and their accreditation - encourage them to access all the online education and training resources on the CoachAFL platform.
- » Promote and encourage them to attend workshops put on by the league or State body

- » Invite them to attend training/games of other teams and observe/learn from other coaches
- » Consider other coaches around them, who they may be able to connect and learn from

Mentoring

Many women may not have coached or played football in the past, so partnering them with a more experienced coach at your club as a mentor can help them further develop. Mentoring can help strengthening their communication and leadership skills, as well as their overall coaching experience⁸. Be mindful to match them with someone who best fits their needs and area of development.

Resources

Make sure they have the equipment and resources they need to do their job effectively. Ask them if they have what they need and work with them to support areas that can be improved or introduced.

Have their back

Whilst as a club committee you may proudly embrace all coaches equally, not everyone in football will have the same attitude.

Actions such as the opposition coach shaking the male assistant coach's hand instead of the woman head coach, or parents of participants displaying unsupportive behaviors towards a woman coach will lead to a negative experience.

As a committee, ensure you are supporting them in their coaching position! If you see unsupportive behavior, call it out and show your confidence and respect for that coach.

Treat them like any other coach

Ensure you involve all coaches in the club meetings and activities. For example, if you have social events for coaches, ensure all are included, regardless of gender.

Once again, pay careful attention to language. Male coaches and club officials may have never had women coaches around the club before. It is important that the language these officials use is also inclusive and supportive of women in coaching roles.

Celebrate their success - share announcements around appointments of women to coaching roles, share coaching milestones, etc.

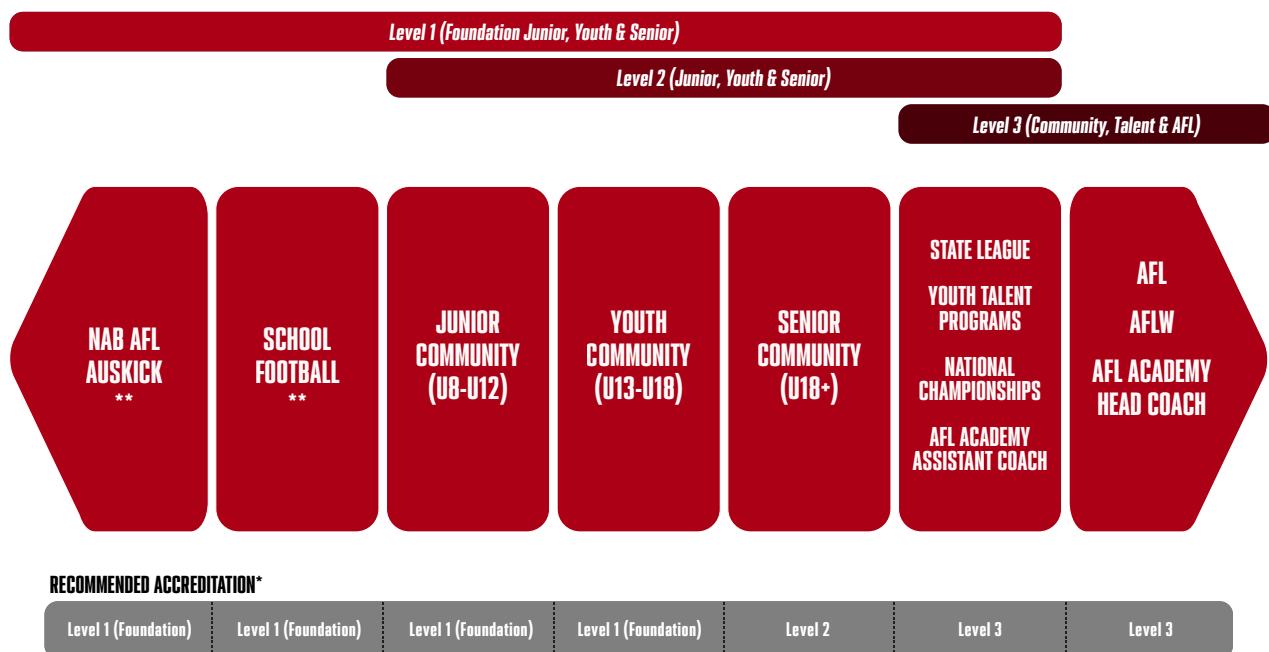


DEVELOPING WOMEN COACHES

Like players, coaches have the opportunity to continue to progress in their coaching journey. The coaching pathway is not a linear pathway, but coaches can move across the pathway to suit their abilities, level of development and their level of commitment at any given time.

There are three coaching levels; Level 1 (Foundation), Level 2 and Level 3 which all have an associated accreditation.

Clubs are encouraged to support their coaches on their development journey with opportunities to progress in the coaching pathway.



*Some leagues will have minimum accreditation requirements to coach at certain levels. Refer to your League's By-Laws for specific local requirements.
** Level 1 (Foundation) is not compulsory to coach NAB AFL Auskick or School Football but will provide great benefit to the coaches.

There are also a range of tailored coaching courses and education programs for women delivered Nationally and within States & Territory's to support women in football.

For more information regarding course or supporting your coaches in their continual development, please contact your State Coaching Manager or Coach.AFL.

RECRUITING THE RIGHT COACH

Research conducted by the Women's Sport Foundation highlighted the importance of coaches creating a positive environment and the impact this has on the retention of participants⁹.

Recruiting the right coach, regardless of gender is therefore imperative.

Here's some things to keep in mind when recruiting the coach;

- » Follow a transparent recruitment process - one that promotes inclusion and diversity
- » Focus on the needs to the team, not just on the credentials of a potential candidate
- » Make decisions based on the cultural fit, leadership, ability to develop players and their communication style
- » Be very clear on the role and what you are looking for in a coach
- » Ensure your candidate is in it for the right reason and committed
- » Consider involving someone from the team's leadership group in the interview process

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Personal support from an experienced coach 'on-the-job' is invaluable.

This helps improve the quality as well as the motivation of the coach. Culture is driven by the behaviours of a club, shaped by its leaders with strong processes.

Diversity in all roles in football reflect how we exist in society.



RESOURCES

AFL Junior Coaching Curriculum

The [AFL Junior Coaching Curriculum](#) and its subsequent resources have been designed for coaches of players aged 7-12 years. The prescribed training sessions make it simple and easy for parent and volunteer junior coaches to deliver.

Coach.AFL

The [Coach.AFL](#) platform has a variety of resources available that will assist coaches develop. All registered coaches have access to these resources and learning modules as part of their membership.

Female Community Football Guidelines

The female football landscape across the country is developing rapidly and at varying stages of evolution. As such, the [AFL National Female Community Football Guidelines](#) have been developed to provide clarity and guidance to community leagues and community clubs in establishing best-practice frameworks for female football.

National Coaching Female Football Forum 2018

The [2018 Coaching Female Football Forum](#) provided coaches of young girls and women the opportunity to learn from leading coaches in the field and interact with their coaching peers.

Prep to Play

Ensure your players are best prepared for training and match-day with the '[Prep-To-Play](#)' resources.

Toyota AFL Club Help

[Toyota AFL Club Help](#) is a platform of templates and tools that are designed to assist volunteers to run their clubs.

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