

Rowing Ireland – Women in Coaching Networks

What are Women in Coaching Networks?

Women in Coaching (WiC) Networks are a unique opportunity where female coaches from different clubs come together to make new connections and support each other in their development. Rowing Ireland established nine regional WiC Networks across Ireland. The Networks meet every 6-8 weeks. At the end of each meeting, the Network leader completes a feedback form summarising the topics discussed, educational bursts delivered, and actions for the next meeting. The initiative runs year round with a national WiC Network event planned.

Why did Rowing Ireland set up the Women in Coaching Networks?

Most rowing clubs in Ireland have a small number of female coaches (on average one/two per club). The Networks were set up to enable female coaches of neighbouring clubs to get together and provide opportunities to share coaching experiences, challenges and advice. Lack of confidence has been identified as one of the barriers to women getting involved or progressing in coaching. The purpose of the WiC Networks is to provide a support setup in coaching that will encourage the coaches and give them confidence to develop. The Networks also act as a way of creating a link between Rowing Ireland staff and female coaches around the country.

How were the Women in Coaching Networks set up?

1. Irish Rowing Clubs were divided per region and assigned to a regional Network.
2. Rowing Ireland circulated information to the club captain and secretary by email to outline the initiative and steps required by the clubs.
3. Club captains were requested to promote the Networks in their club and ask female coaches if they were interested in becoming involved.
4. Contact details of those interested were forwarded to the Rowing Ireland WiS Lead.
5. Rowing Ireland reached out to female coaches known to them to explain the initiative and identify potential members who would like to get involved.
6. A WhatsApp group was created for each regional Network to arrange the time and venue of the first meeting. Members of this WhatsApp group were encouraged to add other female coaches from their club, or those who potentially might coach in the future.
7. The WiS Lead attended and chaired the first meeting of each regional group.
8. At the first meeting, the group were asked to nominate a leader. The roles of this leader were; to chair the conversation of the Network and complete the feedback form after each meeting.

What is the structure when the Networks meet up?

Questions/topics for discussion are set prior to the meeting. Examples of these included; challenges coaches face in their coaching, the benefits of having female coaches in their club, different learning resources and experiences. At the end of each meeting, a new topic or learning burst is set for the next meeting. The leaders provide feedback to Rowing Ireland WiS Lead and outlined support required to facilitate the topics at the next meeting.

What has been the benefit of setting up the Networks?

The Networks have created an ability for coaches to voice challenges they face and provide support and advice to overcome them. There is a real openness and willingness to share information and ideas between coaches and across clubs. The benefit of the regional set up means coaches have support from those outside of their own club and feel they have a stronger connections within the rowing community. Due to the bespoke nature of the Networks, the groups are able to organise education and training requested by the coaches. The WhatsApp groups provide positive support to the coaches and have resulted in the sharing of articles, podcasts and training ideas. Rowing Ireland's WiS Lead has benefited from establishing the Networks. It has helped her identify challenges faced by female coaches and highlight initiatives that will support their development. The WiS Lead now has direct contact with female coaches across most of Rowing Ireland's clubs.

What are the aims for the future?

Rowing Ireland aim to have nine Networks established across the country by the June 2020. Those established have become self-sufficient. The experience and knowledge base of the coaches involved supports the delivery of different learning bursts for other coaches to benefit from, i.e. peer to peer learning is occurring. Aim for each WiC Networks

- They become sustainable and are led and kept active by the members themselves,
- The women develop skills and confidence in their coaching,
- The women feel they have a stronger support system in their rowing community.

Tips for other NGBs who might want to set up something similar

- Design each Network to be flexible to meet the needs/requirements of the group. For example, some groups focus on coach education, other groups discuss coach recruitment.
- As Rowing Ireland is relatively small, it was easier to communicate the Networks through the club captains and a number of key women in each club. Larger organisations may require a more formal recruitment process.
- Rowing Ireland believe the key is to identify someone to lead the initiative in the region as they will have the contacts to reach all the female coaches in the clubs.
- A potential risk is that the group leaders do not manage to host interesting or constructive conversations at the meetings. Developing a bank of topics, learning materials or articles for discussion is a way to avoid this.
- Maintain regular contact with each Network so they know they are supported by the NGB and the needs of the groups can be identified and supported.