

An aerial, high-angle photograph of a large, modern stadium at night. The stadium's seating bowl is illuminated with a vibrant blue light, creating a grid-like pattern of seats. The central field is a bright green, with white markings for a soccer pitch. The stadium is surrounded by city lights and buildings, suggesting an urban setting. A large, curved green graphic element is visible on the right side of the image, partially overlapping the stadium's edge.

# Can sports events play a role in government communication with hard-to- reach groups?

A study by BCW Sports  
December 2023

# The answer is 'Yes'!

According to the recent [Leaders' Report](#) from WPP Government & Public Sector Practice, communicating with hard-to-reach audiences has become more important - and even a priority in some cases - for the public sector since the COVID-19 pandemic.

While sports has proven to be a uniquely powerful platform for engaging and connecting people, there has been little research on the potential of sports events to play a role in government communication with hard-to-reach groups.

This is why BCW Sports decided to ask city, regional, and national governments for their views: Do they see potential, or even better, are they already actively using sports events as a platform to connect with hard-to-reach groups?

The following pages will provide you with some key learnings that - we hope - will bring value to your organisation!

Lausanne, Switzerland December 2023

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## Who are hard-to-reach groups?

The term 'hard-to-reach', as used in this study, refers to segments of the population displaying lower levels of engagement in social, political or economic activities.

These diverse groups encompass young individuals, those facing disadvantages, the homeless, people living with disabilities, those with mental health challenges, linguistic minorities, indigenous populations, and ethnic minorities.

## Our methodology

This study is inspired by a comprehensive report from WPP's Government & Public Sector Practice on the evolving future of government communication and its ability to keep pace with how citizens communicate in the 21st century. Our methodology consisted of:

- **Online survey:** An online survey was completed by over 30 host cities spanning all five continents.
- **Interviews:** In-depth discussions were held with senior representatives from more than 10 active host cities involved in bidding and hosting.
- **Knowledge and research:** We conducted a review of current knowledge and initiatives, complemented by best-in-class communications and sport insights provided by BCW.

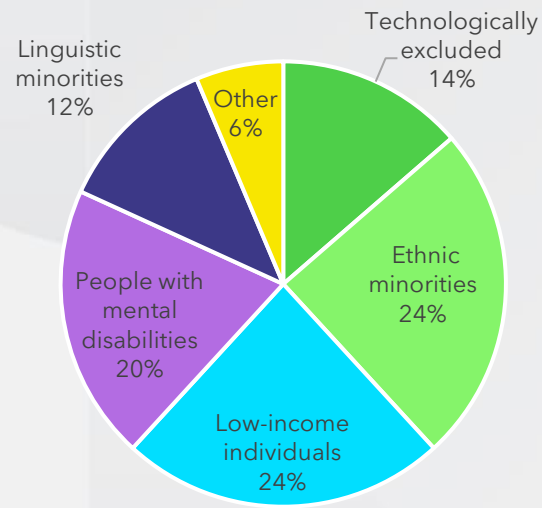
# A snapshot of the survey results

**84%** of cities believe that **sports events** could serve as a **platform** for **reaching out** to hard-to-reach groups

**62%** of cities **factor** in reaching out to hard-to-reach groups **when deciding to host** events

**47%** of cities **already use sports events to communicate** with hard-to-reach groups

## Cities equally target different segments of hard-to-reach groups



*"We require all host cities for our events to have a social impact programme, to ensure major sports events have a positive impact on groups across cities."*

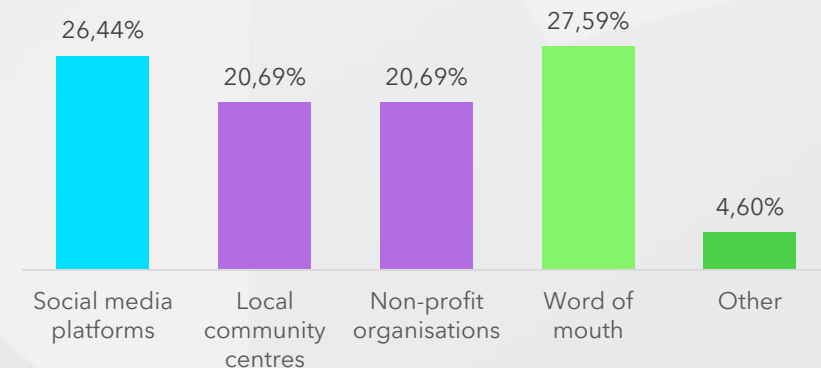
- A public institution from the UK

**53%** of cities would **be willing to allocate additional resources** for developing communication campaigns targeting hard-to-reach groups through sports events

*"We work closely with government youth centers across Korea to ensure that at least 30% of our programme participants come from youth with disadvantaged backgrounds."*

- A city from South Korea

## 'Word of mouth' and social media platforms are believed to be the most effective channels



## KEY LEARNING #1

# Cities recognise the potential of sports events for outreach, yet only half are seizing the opportunity

Results show that there is a gap between the objectives set by cities and their vision of what would be beneficial for their citizens, and their ability to effectively communicate with hard-to-reach groups when hosting sports events.

It appears that cities are willing to engage with hard-to-reach groups and have thought carefully about the impact they would like to make and the audiences they should target during sports events to achieve their objectives.

However, host cities still have, to this day, limited experience in using sporting events to reach segments of the population that are difficult to reach otherwise.



## DID YOU KNOW\*?

**Connecting with and supporting citizens has become more vital - but more challenging - for governments today than ever before.**

This is due to:

- A significant and continuing decline in trust in government
- An exponential growth in mis-, dis-, and mal-information
- Shifting and complex demographics
- The constant atomisation of audiences

\*Extract from [The Leaders' Report](#) from the WPP Government & Public Sector Practice.

## KEY LEARNING #2

# Hosting smaller scale events can be a better platform to connect with hard-to-reach groups

It seems smaller sports events could have more impact than major ones. While major sports events draw in large crowds of fans, they are not always the ideal platform for communicating with hard-to-reach audiences.

Smaller events offer the advantage of facilitating precise communication, allowing for targeted outreach to specific hard-to-reach groups and enabling better customization of the event to meet their specific needs.

According to several cities' insights, the best way to engage with hard-to-reach groups is through minor events, such as small urban sport events. Other cities have testified that participation events, such as homeless football tournaments or events taking place in specific underserved neighbourhoods, have the added benefits of targeting and including directly hard-to-reach groups.



## KEY LEARNING #3

# City sports units, often without dedicated communication teams, pursue partnerships to broaden their outreach

The public sector units responsible for bidding for and hosting sports events often are not responsible for, nor have expertise for, the communication and promotion of their events to hard-to-reach groups. To address this challenge, they have proactively formed collaborative partnerships, both:

- Internally, i.e., communication units within their own municipal structures that develop the right messaging and tactics to reach the target audience, and;
- Externally, such as event right-holders, NGOs, clubs, and community organisations. These entities, being closer to the target audience, possess an intimate understanding of their needs and concerns. Moreover, they have earned the trust of the community, which is invaluable in establishing effective communication channels.



## DID YOU KNOW\*?

**The main challenges in communicating with hard-to-reach groups include** a lack of insight into marginalised communities, failure to fully understand the audience needs, minimal engagement of minority groups in mainstream channels, digital exclusion, insufficient budget, and a lack of diversity within the staff of communication teams.

\*Extract from [The Leaders' Report](#) from the WPP Government & Public Sector Practice.

# Success stories from the field

## CALI, COLOMBIA



### **A communications campaign that uses football to encourage more women to report violence**

In Colombia, the number of femicides and violence against women continues to rise. Empowering the hard-to-reach group of female victims, who often do not report such violence, has become a priority. Consequently, the City of Cali has taken the lead in implementing strategies to empower women in sports, creating better conditions for their athletic practice to contribute to a broader vision of gender equality. A concrete example is the positioning of the City as the 'Home of the Women's National Football Team', which has increased the visibility of women in sports and garnered additional public and private support.

## MONTREAL, CANADA



### **Partnering with event organisers to achieve the city's objectives to connect with hard-to-reach groups**

One notable example of a participatory sports event fostering engagement with hard-to-reach groups is the annual *Born Again Basketball Enlightenment Tournament*, which is held in Montreal's peripheral neighbourhoods. This tournament attracts 2'500 participants, including junior men and women aged 10 to 22. Most participants are from the city of Montreal, with a significant representation from hard-to-reach youth groups. The promoter demonstrates a strong commitment to community engagement, reinforcing connections with youth in local communities and contributing to the event's significance beyond the sports arena.

## SCOTLAND, UK



### **Leveraging the high-profile nature of international golf events to bring benefits to the local community and, in turn, develop new audiences**

The AIG Women's Open demonstrates a forward-looking approach by reimagining the golf audience with a focus on women and families. The 2023 events featured a popular music act during championship week, and under-16s were allowed free admission with a paying adult. Additionally, The Open provides an excellent example of adapting accommodation models to enhance affordability, incorporating tent/camping options into ticket prices to attract a younger generation to the event.



## About BCW

BCW is a global communications agency that partners with clients in the B2B, consumer, corporate, crisis management, healthcare, public affairs, purpose and technology sectors to set strategic direction for all communications and create powerful and unexpected ideas that earn attention. BCW is a part of WPP (NYSE: WPP), a creative transformation company. For more information, visit [www.bcw-global.com](http://www.bcw-global.com).

Based on extensive experiences, BCW Sports, the specialised sports unit of BCW based in Lausanne, Switzerland, launched BCW Eventus™, a tool designed to Attract, Activate and Assess sports events - and therefore supports cities in moving up to the next level.

## Contact us

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