



Row Nova Scotia Masters Rowing Survey

Key Themes and Recommendations

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Prepared by: Row Nova Scotia's Masters Rowing Committee

Jennifer Devitt

Karen Kinley

Patrick Thompson

Jonathan Tyson

Bruce Sparks

Introduction:

In late 2020, the Row Nova Scotia (RowNS) Masters Rowing Committee posted an online survey to gather information about masters rowers in Nova Scotia, their rowing experiences, what would make their rowing experience better, and how RowNS could help better support masters rowers. Fifty-seven rowers, 80% from Nova Scotia and 20% from the other Atlantic Provinces or elsewhere, completed the survey. This report highlights the key themes from the survey and a list of recommendations from the Masters Rowing Committee to the RowNS board.

Key Themes:

1) While rowing goals vary slightly by age, other survey results were very similar across all masters rowers no matter their age

Masters rowers responding to the survey ranged in age from 21 to 74 years old. A majority of responses were from rowers aged 50 to 64 (44%) followed by those aged 36 to 49 (33%).

2) Masters rowers are very active, participating in a range of physical activities in addition to rowing

Masters rowers are active and participate in many other fitness and sport related activities during both the on-water and off-water seasons. Cycling is the number one, non-rowing activity performed during the on-water season, followed by hiking/walking and then running/jogging. During the off water season running/jogging and hiking/walking tied for the most commonly performed activities, followed by organized fitness activities (Crossfit, boot camps, fitness classes), strength training /weights, and then skiing (both cross-country and downhill).

80% of respondents participate in winter training activities, almost all train on an indoor rowing machine. Only about 50% of respondents said they participate in indoor rowing events (regattas / challenges) and participating in indoor rowing regattas or challenges was ranked lowest in terms of interest.

3) Learn-to-Row programs are vital to attract new masters rowers

Almost 75% of masters rowers indicated that they started to row through a club learn-to-row program, and usually because someone they know recommended it to them (coach, friend, family member; 87%), and/or because they saw people rowing (on TV, on the water) and wanted to try it (53%). A small percentage (12%) stated they started rowing because they were no longer able to continue on in an activity they previously enjoyed due to injuries.

4) The social and teamwork aspect of rowing is very important to masters rowers

A friendly, social atmosphere at the rowing club was ranked first in terms of overall importance of the eight options provided. Respondents indicated that having a welcoming / social atmosphere at the Rowing Club helps to make masters rowing more attractive and accessible.

Almost 80% of those responding indicated that they participate in club organized rowing events (fun regattas / social rows). Additional opportunities to participate in non-competitive rowing and non-

rowing / social activities with members from their own and other rowing clubs was seen as important to make rowing more enjoyable from a social perspective.

5) Clubs need to make new masters rowers feel welcomed and included

Novice rowers indicated that feeling welcomed and included was very important to their early enjoyment of rowing. A lack of support / 'poor attitude' of experienced rowers, and not feeling welcomed were all noted as contributors to rowing dissatisfaction for new rowers. Novice rowers also indicated that being involved in club events and club organized social activities was important to them.

6) Masters rowers row for a variety of reasons but general physical and mental health is of primary importance.

Almost 89% of masters rowers said that their primary reason for rowing is 'general physical and mental health' and that being active, exercising, training and improving fitness was what they enjoyed most about rowing. Training hard, training with others, and improving fitness was also a key reason why people like to row, although this was not necessarily linked to racing or being competitive.

As already noted, respondents also indicated that they row because it is a fun and social activity and a friendly, social atmosphere at the rowing club was ranked first in terms of importance.

7) The things masters rowers enjoy about rowing are very similar to why they say they row.

As would be expected, responses suggest that people enjoy rowing for the reasons they row. Training, fitness and exercise are the number one thing that people enjoy about rowing. A close second is being outside and on the water followed by socializing and friendships, and the mental health benefits. The challenge of rowing, the opportunity to gain new skills, and teamwork were also noted as things people enjoy about rowing but less frequently mentioned.

When asked what would make racing more enjoyable set crews, crew goals and training plans was the number one item.

8) Racing is not a high priority for the masters rowers who responded to the survey but there is significant interest in racing

Racing seems to be of relatively unimportant to the masters rowers who responded to the survey. Only 35% of rowers said that they row to compete in races and only 22% of novice rowers said that having novice level races would make novice rowing more enjoyable. Less than 60% of those responding said they have participated in a regatta, and having other rowers who are interested in racing was ranked last in terms of importance of the eight options provided, with having the cost of regattas being affordable being ranked seventh in terms of importance.

Also, 35% of respondents said they are interested in racing but don't because they don't feel they are good enough, feel that the time commitment for regattas is too high, or that there aren't enough other rowers who want to race.

Somewhat conversely, improved racing opportunities (regattas, head races, masters races, masters awards, lightweight masters categories, attending regional / national regattas) was the number one thing that survey respondents felt RowNS could do to better support existing rowers.

9) Masters rowers want better access to good, consistent coaching and clear training goals and plans

More coaching and defined / individualized training plans and goals were the two top ways masters rowers felt that their rowing could be more enjoyable. Related to this, the third most important factor was 'coaching and feedback'. These results were consistent for both novice and experience rowers and both indicated that a lack of coaching / need for improved coaching was key driver of rowing dissatisfaction and lack of enjoyment.

10) Equipment and facility issues were ranked as the primary reasons why masters rowers didn't enjoy their recent rowing experience

Equipment and facility issues were seen as important to many of the respondents. Better and/or more equipment and improved facilities was the fourth most commonly cited issue that would make masters rowing more enjoyable. Properly sized equipment and equipment being in good condition was also noted as something that would make masters rowing more attractive and accessible.

A lack of equipment, equipment that didn't 'fit' the rower, and poor equipment condition was the number one thing that people didn't like about their recent rowing experiences.

11) Masters rowers in the Atlantic region are interested in coastal rowing opportunities

Coastal rowing tours received the most interest for participation of eight different types of events. More than 70% of respondents indicated that they were interested or very interested in participating in these tours, and 60% indicated that they would be interested in participating in coastal rowing regattas with masters specific events

12) Making masters rowing more attractive / accessible

A number of ideas were put forward for how to make masters rowing more attractive / accessible including:

- providing more options and flexibility for rowing times and programs in order to accommodate masters rowers with families or work demands;
- more recognition, promotion and support for masters rowing at provincial and national levels
- ensuring clubs and provincial associations support and promote diversity and inclusion in rowing
- flexible payment options to reduce cost being a barrier to rowing and/or racing
- ensuring that LTR and novice programs are designed with masters rowers in mind, are welcoming and provide support to allow new rowers to transition into other club programs
- promoting / organizing come-and-try events especially with other sport / activity groups (e.g. cross-country skiing, cycling, running, etc.)

Recommendations:

1) National and provincial rowing associations need to support and promote masters rowing

The masters rowers that completed the survey indicated that the national and provincial rowing associations need to do a better job of recognizing, promoting and supporting masters rowing. In addition, they need to promote the full scope of opportunities for masters rowing, including recreational / fitness and racing, for all ages, and highlight the physical, social, and psychosocial benefits of rowing, being outside, and rowing with others.

It is recommended that RowNS:

- a) Create and maintain a section on the RowNS website that is dedicated to masters rowing focusing recreational and competitive masters rowing, the benefits of masters rowing, how to become a masters rower, fit-for-life, stories from masters rowers, rowing tourism, coastal rowing, etc., and to provide information to masters rowers (training plans, injury prevention, etc.)
- b) Use social media channels to promote and increase awareness of masters rowing, and the range of options available for masters rowers
- c) Develop and implement a strategy for increasing the diversity of rowers in Nova Scotia, promoting rowing as an inclusive activity, and providing clubs with support to ensure that clubs and equipment used make rowing more accessible.
- d) Create a communications and outreach plan with sport and community groups to highlight and promote masters rowing
- e) Work to influence Rowing Canada to have them actively support and promote masters rowing, and masters level regattas, across Canada

2) Masters rowers need learn-to-row and novice rowing programs that are designed for masters rowers

The survey responses suggest that learn-to-row programs for adults, and the subsequent novice / first-year rowing programs offered by clubs, may not be well-designed to meet the needs of adults. Learn-to-row programs for adults need to focus on making the new rowers welcome, included and ensure that the needs for a friendly / social atmosphere is created. In addition, it may be that more flexible, less structured opportunities need to be provided to prospective adult rowers (e.g. smaller groups, immediate mentoring by more experienced rowers, etc.). Novice rowing programs need to also make rowers feel welcome and included, and find a way to integrate these rowers into boats with more experienced rowers in a fun and friendly way.

It is recommended that RowNS:

- a) Work to create guidance materials for Nova Scotia rowing clubs describing best practice options for adult learn-to-row programs, and subsequent novice / first-year rowing programs. The guidance could identify ways to provide participants with a fun, friendly and social experience, and to make them feel like they are included as a valued member of the club.

3) Masters rowers need learn-to-row instructors and coaches who understand how to teach, coach and support both recreational and competitive masters rowers

It is recommended that RowNS:

- a) Ensure that the learn-to-row instructors course provides participants with key information about teaching adults to row and the differences between adults and juniors.
- b) Ensure that programs to train coaches include a section / information about coaching and supporting masters rowers, identifying and planning for both recreational and competitive masters rowers, etc.

4) More flexible membership / fee options need to be available for masters rowers

The survey suggests that many masters rowers feel that the cost of rowing is a barrier to people participating. This was noted for both the cost of learn-to-row programs and for on-going membership fees.

It is recommended that RowNS:

- a) Work with clubs to identify ways to support masters rowers who may find the cost of learn-to-row programs and on-going rowing programs to be a barrier to participation
- b) Consider work with clubs to allow for pay-per-row options, or multi-club memberships

5) A new approach is needed to encourage and support masters rowers who are interested in racing

Many of the masters rowers that completed the survey indicated that they are interested in racing but didn't feel ready to race, or no one asked them if they wanted to race. If they didn't self-identify and/or train with the 'competitive' rowers they felt like racing wasn't an option. The amount of time required to participate in a regatta was also noted as a barrier to some masters rowers.

It is recommended that RowNS:

- a) Work with clubs to promote racing with all rowers, and hold fun races / regattas to generate interest and confidence; both intra- and inter-club for masters rowers. Include a social activity / aspect to these regattas.
- b) Have more specific masters novice events at regattas, or work with clubs to provide novice level racing opportunities
- c) Ensure that club coaches ask about the goals of masters rowers and indicate that racing is an option for all those who are interested.
- d) Target masters rowers with information about masters level races, both on-the-water and indoors, with recognition and awards for those who participate.
- e) Ensure that masters races are included in all regattas, including coastal rowing regattas
- f) Register a RowNS Masters Rowing club to allow masters rowers from different clubs to race together at national and international events

6) The needs of masters rowers need to be considered in rowing programs

The masters rowers that completed the survey indicated that current rowing times often don't work for adults who are not retired and/or have children at home. As previously stated, the social aspect of rowing is very important to masters rowers, as is having training plans and goals that are clear and well-communicated.

It is recommended that RowNS:

- a) Work with clubs to identify best practice guidance on designing and implementing masters rowing programs, with a focus on team work, communication, providing training plans and identifying goals, and also on looking for ways to support rowers who work and/or have children at home.

7) Other recommendations for how RowNS can make masters rowing more attractive / accessible

A number of ideas were put forward for how to make RowNS can help make masters rowing more attractive / accessible including:

- a) Promoting and supporting clubs to purchase and use more stable equipment (e.g. coastal boats, recreational shells)
- b) Promoting / organizing rowing tours, coastal rowing tours and 'come & try' events, masters rowing camps (inter-club masters training) and/or inter-club masters rowing 'leagues'
- c) Promoting / organizing 'come & try' events with other sports associations / groups, community groups, and at/during other sporting events
- d) Negotiating perks for members (discounts on services, at retail stores, etc.)
- e) Promoting Nova Scotia as a place for rowers from other provinces / countries to come and row, and support clubs to implement policies and eliminate barriers to this (e.g. charging fees to visiting rowers).