

Advancing Women in Golf through the Charter.

CASE STUDY: GOLF AUSTRALIA

Golf Australia is the national sporting organisation responsible for managing golf across the country. Its remit spans elite tournaments, grassroots participation, handicapping systems, rules of golf, and engagement with volunteers, industry bodies, and communities. The organisation's vision is clear: **More Australians playing more golf.**

In 2021, Golf Australia, the PGA of Australia, and the WPGA Tour of Australasia aligned under the banner of 'Australian Golf,' delivering a shared national strategy. Central to this has been The R&A Women in Golf Charter, which Golf Australia oversees through its Women and Girls Engagement Team. The Charter commitment was signed in 2018 as part of a wider programme, Vision 2025, to advance women and girls in golf.

The following case study features an interview with **Virginia Irwin, Women in Golf Charter Manager at Golf Australia.**

Virginia Irwin is The R&A Women in Golf Charter Manager at Golf Australia. Virginia has over 30 years of personal experience in golf and began her career as a Participation Officer in Queensland before moving into her current national role.

She now oversees the Charter's national implementation and works directly with clubs, facilities, and industry partners to embed structural and cultural change.



BACKGROUND

Tell us more about the Women in Golf Charter.

Golf Australia committed to the Charter in 2018 under the directive of The R&A. The commitment was grounded in Vision 2025, a strategy running from 2019–2025 focused on participation, high performance, workforce leadership, and governance. The Charter process is deliberately tangible: clubs and organisations go through a detailed baseline assessment, action planning, and quarterly review process to ensure real change occurs. To date, 159 signatories have committed nationally."

When did you get involved in the Women in Golf Charter at Golf Australia?

Virginia's involvement began in Queensland, where she managed Charter implementation at state level, working with 249 clubs. Her role expanded nationally in 2022, where she streamlined the process and ensured more consistent delivery across the country.



Have you been through the WIGLP? How many women in your company have?

Virginia was mentored early in the process by Megan Carr, an R&A Women in Golf Leadership Programme graduate. Golf Australia staff have engaged with leadership development initiatives, though formal WIGLP participation has been more prominent overseas.

What are your motivations for being part of the Charter?

For Virginia, the motivation is both professional and deeply personal, having herself faced exclusionary practices as a young female golfer. Organisationally, Golf Australia sees the Charter as essential to future-proofing the sport, closing the gender gap in participation and ensuring golf is a sport for all Australians.

How did Golf Australia initially hear about the Women in Golf Charter?

Golf Australia committed to the Charter following direct engagement with the R&A in 2018, aligning it with Vision 2025 and embedding it as a national strategic priority.

Pictured above: Queensland Government Celebrations - Endorsement of Golf Australia's commitment to elevating the R&A Women in Golf Charter

LEADERSHIP & OWNERSHIP

Who initially led the development of Golf Australia's Charter commitment?

The Charter commitment was driven by Golf Australia's leadership and board following direction from The R&A. It was embedded within Vision 2025 and championed by the Women and Girls Engagement Team. Virginia Irwin now leads national implementation, supported by state managers and the participation team.

Was there a sponsor or steering group advocating for the Charter implementation?

Yes. The Golf Australia board fully endorsed the Charter, with buy-in cascading through management committees and state teams. Implementation has also been supported through steering groups and external stakeholders such as the PGA, WPGA Tour, club managers associations, and superintendents' associations.

Was there any official funding or budget allocated for the implementation initiative?

Yes. Initial funding of AUD \$75,000 was provided by The R&A in 2018 to kick-start implementation. This enabled Golf Australia to allocate staff and develop processes. Over time, delivery became embedded into core participation roles, with staff incorporating Charter delivery alongside other responsibilities.

Can you tell us about the implementation team & their roles?

The Charter sits within the Participation Team, the largest and most forward-facing unit in Golf Australia. State Managers, Development Officers, and National Staff all contribute. Virginia coordinates nationally, while the State Managers support delivery locally, liaising with clubs, volunteers, and professionals.

Did they have any prior experience of managing change projects?

Staff had significant experience in grassroots development, participation growth, and programme delivery. However, implementing cultural and governance change at club level was new, requiring collaboration with the Human Rights Commission and the Australian Sports Commission to build best practice.

Was a formal initiative set up with dedicated resources or was the work integrated into current roles?

Work was largely integrated into existing roles. While initial funding provided short-term capacity, most implementation has been delivered by existing staff as part of their wider work plans.



Pictured above: Federal Government Celebrations - Endorsement of Golf Australia's commitment to elevating the R&A Women in Golf Charter

How was the Charter implementation planned and communicated within your organisation?

Implementation was embedded into organisational work plans and communicated through the board and leadership team. Externally, communication to clubs and facilities has been through direct engagement, state-based participation staff, and industry networks. Rather than a centralised comms campaign, Golf Australia deliberately adopted an opt-in model to ensure genuine commitment.

Does everyone know there is a Charter?

Within Golf Australia there is clear awareness. Across the broader industry, awareness is growing, but still uneven. Clubs engaged in the Charter process are highly aware, while some industry stakeholders are less familiar.

Did you elicit any external help (consultants, reference groups) when planning the implementation?

Golf Australia partnered with the Australian Sports Commission to embed the Charter process into their Game Plan platform. The Human Rights Commission also provided input to align baseline requirements with the Sex Discrimination Act 2019. Benchmarking was conducted against other countries' approaches.



STRATEGY & IMPLEMENTATION

Did you use any specific process to support the implementation of the Charter?

A structured three-stage process was developed:

1 Baseline requirements

Clubs assess governance, policies, participation, and culture.

2 Action planning

Clubs develop measurable actions via the Sports Commission's Game Plan platform.

3 Quarterly reviews

Golf Australia staff check progress, provide support, and monitor impact.

The process ensures change is tangible and measurable, rather than symbolic.

Were any pilot initiatives first tested prior to roll-out?

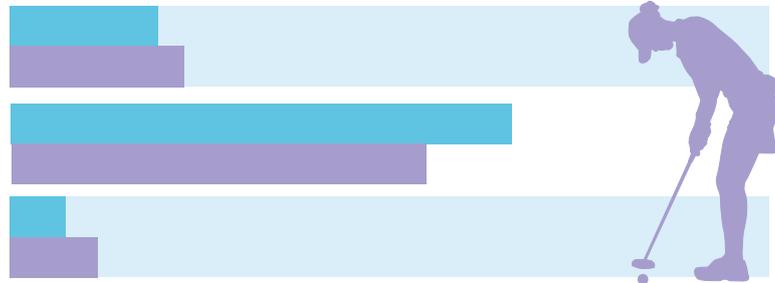
An incremental approach was taken. Early pilots in Queensland tested the baseline and action planning process. Learnings were then scaled nationally from 2022 onward.

Photo courtesy of Golf Australia, PGA of Australia & WPGA Tour of Australasia

Did you set any specific targets, goals, OKRs (Objectives & Key Results) or KPI's (Key Performance Indicators) when committing to the Charter?

Targets focused on:

- Increasing female membership (from **19% in 2022** to **22% in 2025**).
- Reducing average age of female members (from **63.7** to **53.3**).
- Increasing proportion of women under 45 in clubs (from **7%** to **11%** over three years).



These indicators demonstrate real demographic shifts within clubs engaged in the Charter.

What challenges have you faced in implementing the Charter and how did you overcome them?

Key challenges included:

- Cultural resistance from long-standing members, particularly older women hesitant about change.
- Historical practices such as 'associate' memberships that excluded women from equal access.
- Capacity constraints, with each club requiring ~12 hours staff time for Charter onboarding.

Solutions included education on legal risks, personal storytelling to build empathy, and phased cultural change.

How have they been accepted by other colleagues within your organisation?

Acceptance has grown steadily. Early scepticism has shifted as clubs and staff see tangible impacts: younger women joining, multi-day championships enabling access, and recognition at industry level.

How have the change in the times (e.g. working from home) impacted any Charter initiatives within the organisation?

The COVID-19 pandemic initially disrupted delivery but also accelerated golf's popularity. However, 88% of new participants post-COVID were men, highlighting the need for targeted initiatives to engage women. Remote engagement also enabled national consistency in club support.

What have been the most impactful actions or initiatives in achieving your Charter goals? Why?

1 Case Studies

Sharing success stories from early-adopting clubs has motivated others.

2 Baseline Requirements

Embedding legal and cultural standards ensured accountability.

3 Action Plans

Clubs develop ownership by shaping their own commitments.

4 Personal Advocacy

Virginia's personal story has been powerful in overcoming resistance.

What has made these successful?

Success stems from a combination of management backing, staff drive, and personal advocacy. Leadership provided formal support, but progress has relied heavily on staff passion and authentic engagement at club level.

Is the same person or team still driving the work today, or has it become embedded across the organisation?

Responsibility now sits across the organisation. Virginia provides national coordination, state managers deliver locally, and leadership continues to provide visible sponsorship. The work is embedded, not siloed.

How would you describe leadership support for the Charter now?

Leadership support remains strong. The board maintains gender-balanced representation (50:50 since 2020) and references inclusion in strategy and communications.

How are you reviewing & measuring progress and impact internally?

Progress is tracked via action plans, demographic data (membership, age, participation), and quarterly reviews. National reporting aggregates club-level commitments into overall trends.

Is there a committee with a diverse range of colleagues on for a wide opinion? What is the make-up of your committee? Has it given the diversity across the business you required?

Steering groups include Golf Australia staff, State Managers, and external stakeholders. Diversity comes from representation across genders, roles, and geographies. This ensures that decisions reflect a broad cross-section of the sport.

Do different people in different areas of the business think differently?

Perspectives vary between office staff, tournament staff, and club managers. The consultation process through Game Plan captures these differences and feeds them into action planning.



The board maintains gender-balanced representation (50:50 since 2020) and references inclusion in strategy and communications



Photos courtesy of Golf Australia, PGA of Australia & WPGA Tour of Australasia

CULTURAL IMPACT

Have you seen a change in organisational culture or behaviours as a result of the Charter work?

The Charter has shifted culture within clubs and within Golf Australia. Clubs now review constitutions, modernise policies, and adopt inclusive formats such as multi-day championships. Internally, inclusion is now a recognised and normalised part of Golf Australia's work.

What feedback have you received, specifically from women in your organisation on their experiences of the impact of the Charter work?

Feedback has been positive, particularly around visibility, support, and pathways. However, some women in older cohorts remain resistant to change, preferring traditional models.

Are there any individual stories or staff experiences that show how women have progressed due to the changes you've made either at leadership or employee level?

Yes. Examples include women advancing into board positions and younger women entering clubs previously inaccessible to them. Virginia's own story, moving from being excluded as a junior to leading the Charter nationally, exemplifies this impact.



Have you done anything to celebrate your progress & successes, internally or externally?

Early adoption stories were widely shared, showcasing clubs leading the way. More recently, focus has shifted to celebrating outcomes - demographic shifts, cultural change, and legal compliance. Digital assets, decals, and national recognition help celebrate signatory clubs.

Have internal conversations about inclusion expanded to include other areas beyond gender – such as disability, age or ethnicity?

Yes. While gender remains central, discussions have expanded to cover youth engagement, age diversity, cultural inclusion, and broader equity issues across Australian sport.



Pictured above: Kingaroy Golf Club Presentation/Celebration of their commitment to R&A Women in Golf Charter

BROADER INCLUSION & INDUSTRY IMPACT

Do you think your organisation's work has contributed to a broader shift in the golf industry?

Yes. Golf Australia's structured and tangible approach has been recognised internationally as best practice. By embedding the Charter into legal and cultural frameworks, it has influenced other federations and sports to adopt similar models.

Do you work with other organisations to share learnings and best practice?

Yes. Golf Australia collaborates with The R&A, the Australian Sports Commission, Australian Human Rights Commission, and other sporting bodies. It also shares case studies and resources with clubs and facilities to spread learning.

What impact do you think this will have in the future?

The Charter is already producing measurable demographic shifts in women's golf participation and governance. Over time, it is expected to normalise equality in Australian golf, strengthen club sustainability, and influence broader industry inclusion.

Photo courtesy of Golf Australia, PGA of Australia & WPGA Tour of Australasia



For more information on The R&A Women in Golf Charter, visit www.randa.org

