

FIT-FOR-GROWTH

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Introduction – Table Tennis - *A Sport-For-Life*

Table Tennis is truly a *sport for life*.

Table Tennis Ireland (TTI) supports players ranging in age from childhood to old age. At league matches every night of the week, old and young, able bodied and Para players, men and women compete on an equal basis. Very few sports can boast that range. Equally, few sports have touched so many people. Almost everyone has played Table Tennis at some stage in their life. This general popularity is both a strength and a weakness. Some see Table Tennis as a game, others as the Olympic sport it is. TTI wants to grow the sport, increase participation and membership, improve our national teams and international players and ensure the long term viability and health of the sport. In order to do that, we need a strategy and we need to focus all elements of the organisation on that strategy. This document sets out the 2017-2019 strategy.

Executive Summary – Getting *Fit-For-Growth*

This document is honest and to-the-point and it seeks to challenge TTI as an organisation. The members of TTI who volunteer their time and skills, work tirelessly for the organisation. One thing that this strategy will not suggest is that volunteers should work any harder. So, the reader is urged to approach this document with an open mind and not to mistake honest analysis for negative criticism.

TTI has been moderately successful in achieving many of the objectives in the previous strategy. However, the organisation has struggled to grow, and using some measure, it is in a slow decline in numbers and has been for well over twenty years. Clearly the previous strategy, although well-conceived, has failed to significantly grow the organisation due to changed lifestyle choices and the availability of alternative sporting activities. The strategy itself was well intentioned but the organisation struggled to fully execute the plan and we need to understand why that was, to ensure we can implement a new strategy.

The challenge is to both develop a new strategy and to position the organisation so it benefits from that strategy.

Declining membership has been rationalised by many to changes in the external environment such as less volunteer time and lower engagement in sports by children due to social media etc. There is no doubt that the world has changed around us. But, blaming the world around us is futile. If we are to grow and flourish, we need to take responsibility for our results. We will need to change Table Tennis Ireland.

The central plank of this strategy is to make TTI fit-for-growth.

That will require a significant organisational restructure and modernisation, including improved governance. Some of these changes may be unpopular and many may be resisted, but they are essential. It will also require cultural change from the ground up and from the top down. That means we will have to challenge ourselves and other members in our behaviour. That is never easy. Other priorities include improving the financial health and sustainability of the organisation, supporting the establishment of more clubs with a pivot towards participation, more volunteers and improved member engagement through a digital strategy, amongst other things noted below.

The plan is, firstly, to make TTI *fit-for-growth*. During the initial stage (12 months), we will focus on getting the organisation fit-for-growth and therefore other incremental changes will be reduced to a minimum. We do not suffer from a lack of good ideas, but we cannot execute them all.

A key element of any strategy is deciding *what not to do*. We will have to say *no* to many good ideas, until we are *fit-for-growth*. That discipline will be crucial to our success. In fact, some of the challenges with the last plan are due to the tendency to adopt further good ideas which were beyond our capacity within the timescale of the Plan.

Why did we find it difficult to fully implement and benefit from the previous strategy?

The following are not excuses, but are noted to ensure the success of the next plan. It is suggested that:

- 1) There was a major restructure of the TTI during the period of the plan, with 100% staff turnover within a few months and with little notice
- 2) The previous plan was too ambitious given our resources. While all of the ideas were good, the plan was overly operational and not adequately strategic. In particular, it made no hard choices as to what activities were not to be carried out, a classic weakness in any strategy. According to Michael Porter, arguably the most influential thinker on strategy in the last 100 years, *the essence of strategy is choosing what not to do*. We made no such choices.
- 3) We did not show adequate discipline in declining some ideas and opportunities – thereby losing focus on the strategic plan
- 4) We did not have adequate capacity due to a lack of volunteers or by not setting those volunteers clear objectives based on the plan
- 5) We wasted time managing disciplinary issues and disputes due to an inadequate rule book

Strategy – Choices We Make

Summary

The objective is to make the organisation *fit-for-growth* and that will be achieved through the following five general strategies

1. Restructure and modernise the organisation and strengthen governance
2. Develop a healthy and supportive culture
3. Establish new clubs and help existing clubs to grow and improve
4. Improve the financial health and balance of the organisation
5. Strengthen our High Performance Profile

Elaboration

Strategy 1 - Restructure and modernise the organisation and strengthen governance

The organisation is arranged in four geographically based branches with some functions managed there and others managed centrally. All four branches operate differently from each other, with varying degrees of success and autonomy. There are no clear objectives or standards set for branches. Decision making authority can be unclear. Many players are unaffiliated. Players are found in leagues, clubs, schools and colleges. Several affiliated organisations or groups operate (successfully) with little reference to the TTI strategy (Veterans, Referee and Umpires, Schools Leagues, Local Leagues, Intervarsity, Para and more). The Board deals with operational, governance and sporting issues. We must align the entire organisation to one overarching goal i.e. to grow and flourish.

Action: Develop necessary internal support for the changes and then bring these changes to the AGM in 2017 for review. Implement the changes by the end of 2018.

While TTI has an online presence, its general IT systems are inadequate and hamper growth.

Action: Develop a digital strategy specific to TTI that will increase member engagement, reduce costs, increase affiliation revenue and create a new value proposition for clubs, branches and affiliated organisations. Introduce GoMembership system and recruit a Chief Technical Officer (volunteer) to implement the digital strategy and propose a path forward to a modern IT system.

TTI has many policies and regulations. However they could be described as somewhat piecemeal and, in places, inconsistent. This is due to the rapid increase in the number of policies that had to be adopted as compliance and governance demands grew generally. While they allow TTI to meet minimum requirements, they could be improved. The recent introduction of the new constitution has provided an opportunity to resolve these issues.

Action: Introduce a new, updated rule book by recruiting a volunteer to lead a review and alignment of all procedures and policies and ensure they are simple, effective and complied with.

Action: Complete the Governance Pathway and adopt best practice.

Strategy 2 - Develop a healthy and supportive culture

Organisational culture can be difficult to measure or even explain. Culture is often described as 'the way we do things here'. In an organisation as diverse as TTI it can vary by location and by club. While TTI should not try to force a particular culture on its members, it is entitled to ensure that the culture is healthy and appropriate. No one wants to destroy the combative nature of a great table tennis match; that is an attractive element of the game. However, when that spills out of the playing arena or where it is inappropriate, it cannot be tolerated. When volunteers are criticised for mistakes they make, where a blame culture arises, this does not support the organisation. There also, at times, seems to be a low level of engagement with or loyalty to TTI from its members and from those who should be members but who avoid affiliation. Developing a healthier culture is also likely to support more engagement from women and girls, a critical issue.

The first step in this values process is to measure the organisational culture through a questionnaire. Following that, a wide consultation should take place to explain the culture and to agree the values that the organisation wishes to uphold. A written value statement will be introduced and all members will be asked and challenged to live up to it.

Action: Recruit a suitable volunteer to manage this values process through a sub-committee supported by the Board. Other supporting actions previously noted are the digital strategy, the new rule book and the organisational restructure.

Strategy 3 - Establish new clubs and help existing clubs to grow and improve

This is a fundamental element of any participation strategy. The objective is to increase the number of clubs (by three a year) and to strengthen existing and nascent clubs thereby increasing the membership. That will be achieved through the following four measures:

- 1. Identify with Branches suitable locations and coaches willing to run a club. Provide active support, in coordination with the branches, for the first two years of operation including helping with business plans, insurance advice, equipment costs, coaching courses etc.**
- 2. Enhance the existing club development manual and run a club seminar in each province**
- 3. Provide a digital platform for clubs to manage their membership and web site, at low cost to the clubs – see digital strategy.**
- 4. Ensure that WIS funding is allocated where appropriate, to areas close to active or new clubs. This will benefit WIS and also clubs.**
- 5. Provide more coaching course for clubs that are establishing or willing to grow. Specifically,**

- a. **Establish an active coaching committee**
- b. **Review and enhance coaching courses with supporting material**
- c. **Operate 4 Level 1 courses per year**
- d. **Operate 1 level 2 courses per year**
- e. **Level 3 qualified coaches - develop 1 coach to level 3 standard**
- f. **Qualify 3 additional coach tutors**
6. **Establish a Register of Clubs and register all**
7. **Investigate the viability of partnering with bodies that care for or represent older people with a view to engaging in Therapeutic Table Tennis¹**

Strategy 4 - Improve the financial health and balance of the organisation

Currently, TTI revenue comes from affiliations, commercial, sponsorship and player levies with the balance coming mainly from grant funding. This strong reliance on grant funding is a serious risk to the organisation. Very little money comes from sponsorship and none from commercial ventures.

We also need to be purposefully strategic in allocating funds

The objective is to balance the sources of revenue and to pivot spending towards participation, while maintaining HP at an adequate level. This will be achieved by the following strategies:

- 1) **Gradually target 50% of net revenue² to come from commercial and affiliation charges**
 - a. **Develop a commercial offering targeting major companies for TT fun days and staff engagement events or coaching.**
 - b. **Increase revenue from affiliations either by increasing the affiliation fees or numbers affiliated or both. Develop an offering to Branches based upon the affiliation revenue from their province.**
 - c. **In 2017, target 10% of net revenue from these sources, rising to 25% by the end of 2019, with a framework in place to grow it to 50% beyond that.**
- 2) **Increase allocation of funds for participation.**

Strategy 5 – Strengthen our High Performance profile

TTI's HP program has been a fantastic success over the last 3 years, building on decisions and actions taken in the last ten years. We have developed internationally recognised skills and expertise and have begun to truly compete at international events as never before. Unlike many years ago when some of our national team squad were not professional players, it is now the case that there are more professional players not on the national squad than on it. We have strength in depth and the best pipeline of young talent ever achieved. However, our success is not known to the public and much of our membership is also unaware. In order to increase the profile of HP in Ireland we will

- 1) **In coordination with the Digital Strategy, promote through social media the successes of our HP squad, generating interest as matches are happening and also after the fact.**

Some actions from the previous plan remain as ongoing strategic objectives and these are included in the table of actions below – reference 6.x.

¹ **Therapeutic Table Tennis is based on academic research suggesting that Table Tennis has positive effects on Alzheimer patients and is a brain sport.**

² Net of player levies

Actions during the three year plan (2017-19):

Ref.	Objective	KPI/Measurement	Timescale	Responsible
1.1	Develop necessary internal support for organisational changes, bring these changes to the AGM in 2017 for review. Implement the changes by the end of 2018.	Reviewed at AGM 2017 Implemented by the end of 2018	End 2018	Board
1.2	Develop a digital strategy specific to TTI that will increase member engagement, reduce costs, increase affiliation revenue and create a new value proposition for clubs, branches and affiliated organisations. Introduce GoMembership system and recruit a Chief Technical Officer (volunteer) to implement the digital strategy and propose a path forward to a modern IT system.	Strategy developed in 2017 Implementation begins in 2018 Implementation complete by the end of 2019	End 2019	CTO
1.3	Introduce a new, updated rule book by recruiting a volunteer to lead a review and alignment of all procedures and policies and ensure they are simple, effective and complied with.	Recruit a volunteer to manage this task Consultation through branches Approve and adopt new rule book	Recruit in 2017 Consult and develop by the 2018 AGM Approve at 2018 AGM	Board
1.4	Complete the Governance Pathway and adopt best practice.	Map out tasks 2018 Full Compliance achieved by the end of 2019	End 2019	Board
2.1	Recruit a suitable volunteer to manage a 'values process' through a sub-committee supported by the Board. Other supporting actions previously noted are the digital strategy, the new rule book and the organisational restructure	Recruit volunteer 2018 Adopt values at 2019 AGM	Mid-Year - 2019	Board
3.1	Identify with Branches suitable locations and coaches willing to run a club. Provide active support, in coordination with the branches,	Identify a specific plan for 2018 and 2019 period	End 2017 – plan developed	Club Development Officer

Ref.	Objective	KPI/Measurement	Timescale	Responsible
	for the first two years of operation including helping with business plans, insurance advice, equipment costs, coaching courses etc.			
3.2	Enhance the existing club development manual and run a club seminar in each province	Club Development manual enhanced and published	2018	Club Development Officer
3.3	Provide a digital platform for clubs to manage their membership and web site, at low cost to the clubs – see digital strategy.	Platform implemented 2019	End 2019	CTO
3.4	Ensure that WIS funding is allocated where appropriate, to areas close to active or new clubs. This will benefit WIS and also clubs.	WIS program aligned to club development plans from 2018 onward	2018	WIS officer and Club Development Officer
3.5	Provide more coaching course for clubs that are establishing or willing to grow. Specifically, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish an active coaching committee • Review and enhance coaching courses with supporting material • Operate 4 Level 1 courses per year • Operate 1 level 2 courses per year • Level 3 qualified coaches - develop 1 coach to level 3 standard • Qualify 3 additional coach tutors 	Coaching committee established by end 2017 Actions completed by end 2019 and for 2018	End 2019	Coaching Manager
3.6	Establish a Register of Clubs and register all	Club Register finalised by mid 2018 and kept up to date there after	Mid 2018	Club Development Officer
3.7	Investigate the viability of partnering with bodies that care for or represent older people with a	Plan developed – 2018 Pilot program end 2018 Roll out in 2019 if viable	2019	Participation Manager

Ref.	Objective	KPI/Measurement	Timescale	Responsible
	view to engaging in Therapeutic Table Tennis ³			
4.1	<p>Gradually target 50% of net revenue⁴ to come from commercial and affiliation charges by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a commercial offering targeting major companies for TT fun days and staff engagement events or coaching. • Increase revenue from affiliations either by increasing the affiliation fees or numbers affiliated or both. Develop an offering to Branches based upon the affiliation revenue from their province. • In 2018, target 10% of net revenue from these sources, rising to 20% by the end of 2019, with a framework in place to grow it to 50% beyond that. 	<p>Commercial offering available by end 2017</p> <p>Plot program for commercial offerings by mid 2018</p> <p>Rolled out H2 2018</p> <p>Update affiliation scheme – propose by AGM 2019</p> <p>Introduce revenue sharing model with Branches in Jan 2018</p> <p>Budget process 2018, 2019 to target objectives for non-grant sources</p>	Throughout plan period	Board and Commercial Director
4.2	Increase allocation of funds for participation.	Annually	Throughout plan period	Board and Financial Director
5.1	In coordination with the Digital Strategy, promote through social media the successes of our HP squad, generating interest as matches are happening and also after the fact.	Selected online metrics to indicate improved engagement with members and public in relation to HP squad	Commencing January 2018	Marketing and promotional Manager
6.1	Create and streamline Talent ID structure from grassroots through to National Squad.	Talent ID Coaches appointed in each province by High Performance Manager with responsibility to identify/nominate talent for progression through the system.	Throughout plan period	HP Manager

³ Therapeutic Table Tennis is based on academic research suggesting that Table Tennis has positive effects on Alzheimer patients and is a brain sport.

⁴ Net of player levies

Ref.	Objective	KPI/Measurement	Timescale	Responsible
6.2	Create a licensed ITTA coach database of all coaches who have met the criteria for involvement.	Database created, recording coaches who wish to be included and who have met the necessary standards as set by the Association, and database then available for reference by the Association or members seeking coaching assistance. Database to be renewed periodically, with coach accreditation/licensing to reflect same.	2019	Coaching Manager
6.3	Implement a review mechanism to measure progress against this plan	Board to review at least annually and to report to the AGM	Annually	Board
6.4	Oversee and manage full integration of IWA/IPC rules/portfolio under the ITTA.	Reinvigorate Para Committee with appropriate involvement from all stakeholders to enhance this important opportunity for TTI	2017	Para Manager
6.5	Anti-Doping Strategy adopted and implemented	Develop an effective and appropriate, TT specific AD strategy and implement	2018	Anti-Doping officer