

# CANADIAN MASTERS FIELD HOCKEY PROGRAM EVALUATION

## REPORT OF THE WORKING GROUP

April 2025

### **Introduction**

In January, 2025, the Masters Committee formed a working group<sup>1</sup> to prepare, distribute and review a questionnaire to be disseminated broadly within the Canadian masters hockey community, including male and female athletes, indoor and outdoor athletes, coaches, managers, administrators and others interested in masters hockey. The objective was to canvas the masters community for their views on a broad range of questions as part of a project to comprehensively evaluate the program in its current form.

The introduction to the questionnaire read as follows:

*Although the Masters Program has been a part of Field Hockey Canada (FHC) for several years, it has lacked appropriate governance and structure. In 2023 FHC restructured the Program, and a new Masters Committee was established, together with several Program specific policies. The intention was to implement the new structure for the 2024 indoor and outdoor Masters world cup cycles and FHC recognized that, after those cycles concluded, a review of the restructured program should be conducted to assess what worked well and what could be improved. This questionnaire is a key part of that review process.*

The questionnaire was distributed in February 2025. Responses were analysed by the working group in late March and early April.

Respondents were invited to describe their role, gender, and age, but anonymous responses were also accepted. A total of 65 responses were provided.

This report is submitted to the Masters Committee by the working group to summarize the responses to the questionnaire.

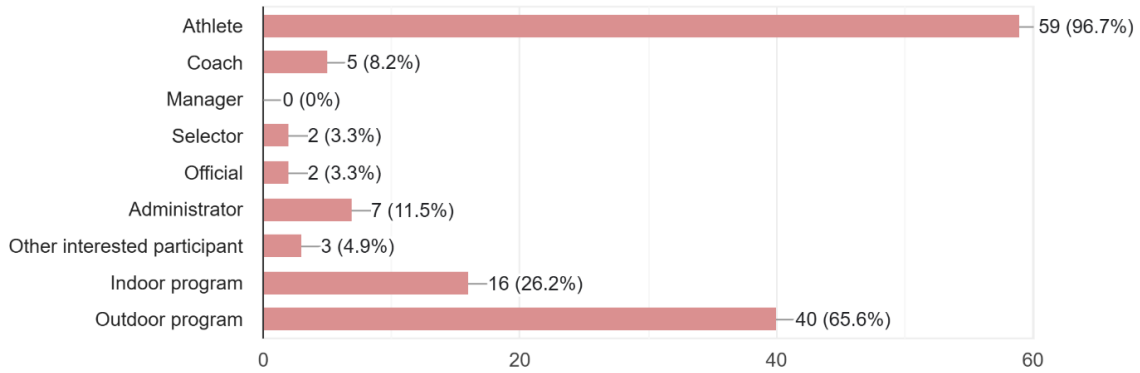
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<sup>1</sup> The working group was comprised of Cara Jay, John McCulloch, Patrick Oswald, Gord Plottel, Heather Wheatley and Lori Wills.

# 1. A breakdown of the non-anonymous respondents:

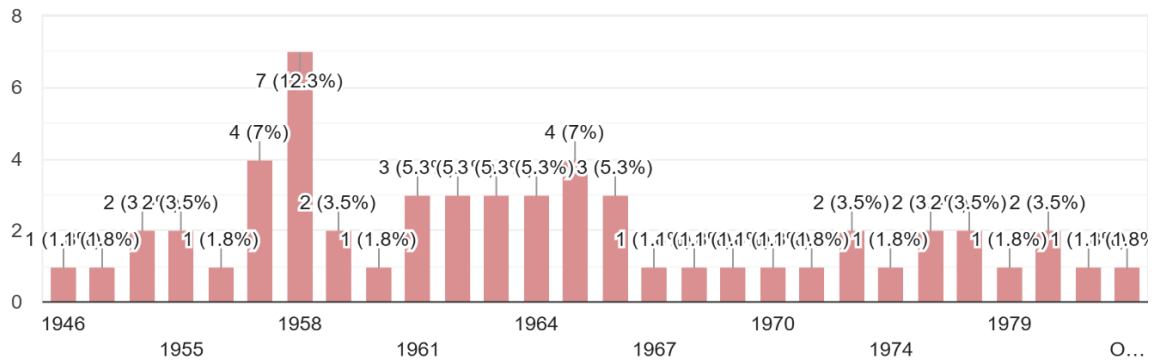
## Role, or Roles (check multiple boxes)

61 responses



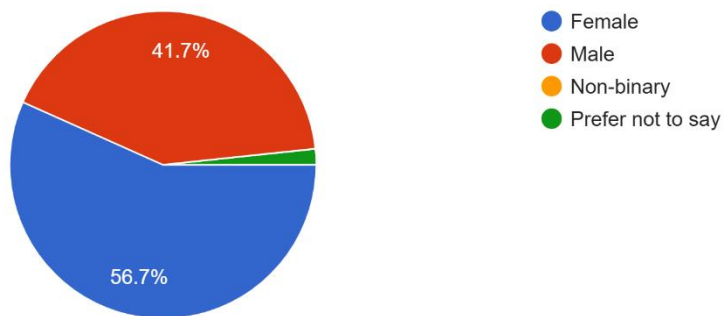
## Year of birth

57 responses



## Gender

60 responses



## 2. Governance and Structure

**Q. Should the decision-making bodies for indoor and outdoor masters hockey be separate?**

**Why, or why not?**

Total Responses - approx - 53

**Yes** / Keep separate - 29

**No** / Should be one body - 14

- General feeling that there is enough difference in the disciplines, geography and players to merit separate committees or representation.
- Strong theme from “status quo” voting group that there needs to be better coordination of schedules between indoor & outdoor, and better representation of indoor on the Masters Committee.
- Fair number of respondents felt that they did not have enough knowledge to comment.

**Q. Should the men’s and women’s programs be independent, operating under different policies?**

**Why, or why not?**

Total Responses - approx - 51

**Yes** / Separate them - 8 (with 1 - 3 feeling unsure / that difference should be recognized)

**No** / Keep under one body - 43 (strong views about increasing bureaucracy & promoting gender bias)

- General theme or acceptance that we should be flexible enough to accommodate some difference in approach where it makes sense or is practical. This could be delegated and exercised at the Masters Committee level.
- While differences can be recognised & tolerated, there is a strong feeling that the governing policies must be the same / that there should be one “Canadian” approach.

**Q. Should there be more sub-committees, dealing with more specific aspects of the Program (such as domestic events, international events, officials, managers, etc.) ? If so why, and what specific aspects do you suggest should be the subject of additional sub-committees?**

Total Responses - approx - 57

**Yes** / More sub-committees- 13 ) taken together with “depends” answers = 30

**Depends** - 17 )

**No** / fine as is - 27

- If you take the “Yes” + “Depends” together the responses are evenly split between those in favour of more sub-committees and those against.
- In addition several “Yes” votes were qualified by “if it helps to delegate some tasks” (like AGC responsibilities) to the “event” level, or makes sense to split international events and domestic events.
- Several Yes votes also specific to having more oversight on officials, managers, umpires as the program develops, or suggested these could be handled as temporary “task forces” within the existing sub-committees.
- The “No” votes were characterised by a strong view that more committees means more chance of power struggles and cliques developing, politics within the program and more opportunity for divisions to emerge. Also more volunteer time needed!

**Q. Are there any other elements of the Program’s structure or governance that you wish to comment on?**

Total Responses - approx - 51

**No comment** - 24

**Comments**

- We should work on Marketing & Social Media in general. Related comment is that Masters should have a clear Mission Statement / Objectives - like “Serve members, grow the game, succeed internationally”.
- Using FHC for uniforms is expensive, poor quality, and needs to be addressed. Related comment questioning the value that FHC and FHC systems (both financial and database) bring to the program
- Ensure “cliques & clubs” don’t form within age groups and genders. Be aware of geographic / other bias & work to improve it / neutralise it actively.
- More definition is needed on the people in key positions on the various committees and clarity on the decision making process so that if disagreements arise they can be sorted out quickly. The current Masters Committee - Sub-Committee structure (with MC members sitting on the sub-committee) is right, but not working well enough. Need to assign individuals who do what is expected of them in terms of ensuring communications flows.
- Related comment that we should focus on strong policies & delegate decision making to sub-committees and/or event sub-committees, if these develop.
- We should prepare for growth with good structure now

### 3. Team Formation

**Q. Should AGC's be appointed in advance of forming a team? Why, or why not?**

Total Responses - approx - 61

Yes - 50 (combining with probably & important role)

No - 6

- Overwhelmingly, Yes AGCs should be in place before team formation
- Suggestions for a specific term leading up to a major event and having that resource early on in the process
- Concern over bias if AGC is also competing to be an athlete

**Q. Should a team be approved for an event only if it appears it will be competing to win, or should teams also be approved to provide athletes with competition experience?**

Total Responses - approx - 62

Competition Experience - 36 (combining with compete to medal, competition experience with communication, grow competitiveness, maple leaves, participation and positive experience)

Compete to win - 26 (combining with mix, team choice, and difference between national and SoM teams) but strictly winning was - 12

- Canada should be sending teams for competition experience
- General theme was that Canada does not have the depth to have competitive teams and would need experience because of the self-funding model - though if we grow the program there is the possibility to have both a competitive team and a SoM team (which was represented in the mix and team choice responses)
- Some suggestions for experience were domestic tournaments and Spirit of Masters/Maple Leaf teams

**Q. How should AGC's recruit athletes for a team?**

Total Responses - approx - 58

Multiple Mediums - 22

Regional Recruitment - 16 (combining with training camps, multiple selection locations, local leagues, in person tryouts, personal contacts, feeder system, and club system)

Current Master Lists - 10 (combining with communication, EOI thru PSOs, keep registration open, reach out to former teams, and track regular athletes)

- Multiple ways for AGCs to recruit from using current lists, emails, EOIs, masters festivals, networks, PSOs, leagues, clubs and social media
- Other arising themes were around regional recruitment and using current lists
- Some didn't understand the process and felt that it shouldn't be part of the AGC role

**Q. What other comments do you have about the Masters team formation process?**

Total Responses - approx	- 49
None	- 11
Regional selections/training	- 7
Squad competition	- 6
Skill level and fitness	- 4

- Major theme was there was nothing to add to current process
- Other themes were about regionalization and squad competition focus where a group of athletes would be considered a squad and selections for the team would be made closer to the event
- Focus on increase fitness of athletes with early communication of expectations and videos to keep costs down
- Some comments about growing the sport informally and coach training

Comments:

- AGCs should help organize the selections, but there was concern of bias, selections should happen independently with the coach having the final say
- Full process isn't known so marketing and communication could improve
- Ideas to keep costs down, using prior lists as initial squad identification, regional training/selections, and video analysis/alternate forms of trial process

## 4. Athlete Selection

### **Q. Are any eligibility or selection criteria inappropriate?**

1. Generally well structured. Many responded that they are happy with the criteria.
2. ID camps are athlete pay, possibly excluding financially challenged athletes
  - a. Idea: fundraising and sponsorship efforts to support the financially challenged
3. Provide guidelines for decisions re exemptions for athletes playing in younger age groups:
  - a. Create a record of all decisions made to help with future situations
  - b. Establish criteria for allowing age exemptions
  - c. Introduce an appeal or review mechanism
4. Create a policy regarding non-binary or gender diverse athletes
5. Selection criteria should include both Skill and Commitment to the Masters Program
6. Minimal fitness levels should be met for each age group: bronco or YoYo
7. Opinion: scrap age categories. Allow the best players to play where they can. This will help the younger age groups.
8. Have clear rules about who authorizes the opening and closing of registration portals.
9. Athletes known to coaches and with prior MWC experience, but who cannot make a selection camp, should not have to send in videos ... if they are know to be good they should be eligible for selection.
10. Athletes need to be honest about injuries after they have been selected
11. A policy about reserves, and when they can replace a selected athlete, is needed.

### **Q. Should there be time limits for registering as a Masters athlete with FHC?**

1. Mixed responses. But most say no time limit. FHC should continuously build its registry of athletes interested in Masters hockey.
2. Not everyone understood the question ...

### **Q. Should athlete selection occur before a team is formed?**

1. Yes. You need to know you have enough competitive athletes before a team can be formed.
2. Barring injury or a failure to register, a core group of players should be allowed to stay

together so the team grows stronger over time.

3. a large squad should be maintained, with “semi-permanent” coaches monitoring the

skills and fitness of the individual athletes in the squad. The USA is abandoning costly

tryouts for continuous monitoring via tournaments and league participation.

4. In a perfect world an age group would have a large squad that trains before members of

a travelling team are selected.

5. Getting EOI's to gauge athlete interest should be done before “forming” a team and holding selection/training camps.

**Q. Should an older player be allowed to play down an age group if there is an age group for the player?**

1. Lots of No's

2. Some Yes's:

a. Allow siblings to play together if both fit and skilled

b. If the older player is better than other age-appropriate athletes

**Q. Should the appointed coach be the sole selector, or is it useful to have additional selectors?**

1. Generally good to have additional selectors, but the coach should have the final say.

2. athletes hoping to be selected should not have any say.

**Q. How best to accommodate athletes who cannot attend selection camps (who live far away)?**

1. Local coach recommendations

2. video plus input from local coach or other local athletes who can assess

3. get local coaches/athletes to hold practices/selection/fitness and skill sessions

4. objective fitness tests authenticated by third parties

5. Hold regional events where data about athletes in each region can be collected.

6. Have more than one tryout camp with dates published well in advance

7. Consider previous national events history for far flung athletes

**Q. Should PSO membership be required?**

1. Large majority say yes, provided an athlete lives in a province with a PSO.

2. For athletes in provinces without a PSO, or living outside Canada, then no.

**Q. If an athlete is injured, must a coach choose a replacement from the reserves list only?**

1. Large majority say only from the reserve list, but that everyone who tries out and who has the requisite skill and fitness should be on the reserve list. Athletes can be added to the reserve list at any time. Ultimately the coach needs freedom to pick the best player, considering the position on the field that needs to be replaced ... so no ranking or order to the reserve list.

**Q. Other issues**

1. Minimum fitness standards should be published
2. Camps east and west
3. If a player can meet fitness & skill requirements via video and references they shouldn't need to incur additional expenses
4. Have regular evaluations over time: better than one-off camps.
5. There needs to be a safe place to make decisions for the program, with clearly defined roles.
6. A clear set of minimal skills should be established: can a goalie slide, can a field player trap, scoop, sweep hit, etc.
7. One person said Athletes must attend in person to be eligible for selection.
8. Another person said video and other options must be available given then cost of travelling to camps.
9. There should be a head coach to evaluate and mentor all Masters coaches.

## **5. Coaches and Managers**

**Q. Is the current method of selecting Masters Coaches appropriate? Why or Why Not?**

Almost all responses were yes

Comments:

- Coaches need to be of good quality
- Should not assume that those that coached last time are best
- Some teams not happy with the selection

- Athletes from previous session could be part of the selection committee
- Should be the masters committee that selects coaches
- Selection should be transparent
- Fair and open to all
- Good process

Comments that don't reflect the question:

- Coaches need to be in for the experience not remuneration
- Coaches need to be compensated appropriately for all the extra requests
- Full expenses covered – too much

**Q. Should coaches be required to have specific training to coach masters athletes?**

Almost every response was a yes should have training

Comments:

- NCCP or similar certification
  - Specific training dealing with older/Master athletes
  - NCCP modules for older athletes available and should be taken
- Lots of comments recognizing that coaching kids vs older athletes are very different

**Q. Do you have any other comments about selecting Masters Coaches**

Mostly no

Comments:

- Player coach should be considered to keep costs down
- Make selection criterion and compensation clear
- Contract for 2 years for consistency
- Consider a head coach to maintain consistency
- Have a variety of coaches
- Good coaches at club level that could be approached
- Wider coach search / coaches from across the country
- Need to be the “right fit”
- Been happy with coaches so far.
- Coach data base would be beneficial

**Q. Sometimes managers are spouses of athletes on the team, is that appropriate? Why or why not?**

Generally Yes responses. Comments:

- Acceptable way to manage costs – lots of responses said this
- If a spouse of a team member, should not pay travel costs
- No role in coaching, so not a conflict
- If free or a quarter of expenses paid yes, if all expenses paid – no
- Often only way to get a manager
- History shown that this can work well

No responses:

- Needs to know field hockey and assist coach
- Conflict of interest - just a cost savings – not setting team up for success

**Q. Some of the work of the manager and AGC could be done by a dedicated Masters Administrative Assistant. Should FHC hire a Masters Administrative Assistant, and if so, should the athletes be asked to fund the cost of this position?**

Generally, no. Comments:

- No already too expensive / tournaments already cost a lot
- AGCs and managers are mostly volunteers, should not fund this position
- Appoint a manager earlier to assist AGC and be worthwhile for expenses paid by team
- not getting value from FHC now for money spent
- need to keep costs down as we are self funded
- People already not participating in Masters programs because it is so expensive
- FHC has admin that assists national teams they should have time to assist masters teams

Yes responses: only about 5, but said athletes should not fund it. There would need a clear and concise method of tracking hours and workload

**Q. Do you have any other comments about selecting managers for Masters teams?**

- Athletes should not be paying for their expenses
- Should have coaching experience/ know hockey
- Managers play a vital role – cannot play without them
- Make sure given tools to guide them in responsibilities
- To reduce costs – share manager duties with players

- AGCs players – managers should be appointed earlier to take over some of their Responsibilities

## **6. Spirit of Masters, Communications, Registration & Additional comments**

### **Q. “Should FHC encourage Maple Leaf teams to be entered in WMH [Spirit of Masters] events? Why, or why not?”**

The respondents were evenly mixed in response to this question.

Twenty-nine respondents answered “yes”, and twenty-eight answered “no” or only on condition.

The reasons for the “yes” responses were generally:

- to encourage participation in the program,
- to provide international experience to athletes, which would ultimately broaden the pool for national teams,
- to allow for reserves and non-selected athletes to have an opportunity to participate in WMH events.

The reasons for the “no” and conditional responses were generally:

- the masters program should focus only on competitive teams, as masters sport is inherently competitive
- it would diminish the available pool of athletes for national teams
- Maple Leaf teams should only be encouraged if an excess number of athletes for a competitive national team was sufficient to warrant, or if there was no other option available.

### **Q. “Should FHC be involved in forming non-national teams in Masters events? Why or why not?”**

The respondents generally answered “no” in response to this question. However, based on the comments and inconsistency with the previous question, it appears that the wording of the question may have misled some of the respondents into believing that the Masters Committee was independent of FHC, such that the Masters Committee could be independently involved in forming non-national teams, yet FHC should not.

Twenty-nine respondents answered “no”, and fifteen answered “yes” or partly.

The reasons for the “no” responses were generally:

- FHC is a national sport organization and, as such, should focus on national teams
- FHC has enough work with its national teams, and should not stretch its resources on developing non-national teams,

- Alliance and other clubs are an alternative for athletes to play for a non-national team.

The reasons for the “yes”, or partly, responses were generally

- To encourage participation and experience
- FHC has the infrastructure in place to develop teams
- FHC should support, but not develop, non-national teams
- To ensure that FHC policies would be applied consistently.

**Q. “Are these forms of communication [email] effective for you? Are there other preferred methods?”**

The respondents generally answered that email communication was effective.

Many respondent athletes indicated that their AGC preferred email communication, which was effective.

Some respondents suggested a dedicated masters website and use of social media would be useful.

**Q. “Do you have any suggestions for improving the registration process?”**

Most respondents answered that the RAMP process is generally satisfactory, but the time limits for registration were too short. The registration system should allow registrations for a much longer period of time, and collect all necessary data.

One respondent noted that due to the system’s automatic confirmation email—which includes personal information-- there was risk of personal information being exposed.

**Q. “Please provide us with any other comments, good or bad, you may have about the Masters Program.”**

The comments generally noted the following points:

- Uniform costs were too expensive—there should be more opportunities to re-use uniforms from previous events
- The [outdoor] program should avoid being too focussed on BC, which prejudices non-BC athletes for selection and increases their expenses to participate
- Costs generally should be reduced
- The program should focus on expanding the numbers of athletes and coaches
- Team selections should be made as early as possible
- Masters hockey is a great experience, and the work of the volunteers is appreciated
- Appreciation for having the opportunity for input into evaluating the program.