# Helper Helper

## Bridging communities with volunteers

# A CASE STUDY: University of Wisconsin-Madison

How one university with a robust community outreach program improved its platform, streamlined its volunteer process and saved its coordinator time by implementing the Helper Helper app.

## BACKGROUND:

The University of Wisconsin-Madison is a large Division I public research institution that supports 23 Varsity sports and more than 800 student-athletes. The student-athlete charitable involvement is housed in its own department comprised of one full-time staff member and ten undergraduate student interns. The department created and unveiled its community relations initiative, Badgers Give Back, and the new department in September 2012 to streamline the volunteer process, ensure compliance with NCAA regulations and better publicize student-athlete involvement. The community relations department transports the student-athletes to all charitable appearances and also manages three outreach programs targeted at area youth.

**8,100** hours volunteered in 2013-14

**280** appearances in 2013-14

**79%** of student-athletes volunteer

## PRE HELPER HELPER:

Prior to acquiring Helper Helper in January 2015, the Badgers utilized email and text messaging to notify student-athletes of appearances. The staff would send out a weekly email listing the available volunteer opportunities for the coming week. The student-athletes would then "commit" by clicking on Google Forms link embedded in the email and entering their name and sport. They would also text student-athletes who were available during the necessary time frame.

Once a student-athlete had committed to an event, a member of the community relations staff would send him or her a text reminder the day before an event to remind the athlete of the commitment.

To track the involvement, the community relations staff would enter hours volunteered and events attended in Excel Spreadsheets.

## CHALLENGES:

University of Wisconsin's method posed two challenges:

**1) It was immensely time consuming for the coordinator:** A member of the staff had to create Google Forms on a weekly basis and spend hours entering volunteer hours and events attended in a spreadsheet. Additionally, sending text messages was time consuming and bothersome. The student-athletes would often reply at odd hours because of their schedule commitments.

**2) Opportunities and involvement data were not easily accessible:** The information compiled on the Google Forms and the spreadsheet was not easily shareable with coaches or other team members and the student-athletes had no way of verifying their commitment. It was also time consuming to pull involvement statistics for student-athletes who were applying for internships or creating a resume. The student-athlete had to wait until a staff member was able to pull the information and send it via email.

*"We are fortunate to have an undergraduate student whose entire internship is focused on fielding requests, ensuring that student-athletes are signed up to fulfilll our appearances and tracking student-athlete involvement. An* **entire** *internship. The app just saves so much time that he can now dedicate to other projects."*

*– Kayla Gross, Community Relations Coordinator*

**Badgers Give Back**

# IMPLEMENTATION:

University of Wisconsin started using the Helper Helper app in January 2015. The coordinator first introduced the app to the student-athletes and staff via email. She also stopped by team meetings and briefly described how to use the app and its benefits. Prior to the meeting, the coordinator would send the team a registration email so they could log-in with the given password and download the app while she talking. It was most effective when there were opportunities on the app that the student-athletes could see and commit to the very first time they opened it. Most importantly, she set and communicated a deadline by which she would stop communicating opportunities via email.

The coordinator also utilized the Student Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC) to get student-athletes on-board. She printed the "What Is This Helper Helper?" flyer provided by the Helper Helper staff and distributed it at a SAAC meeting, asking the representatives to hang the flyers in their respective locker rooms.

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*"Fifty-percent of student-athletes were tracking their hours via the app within the first three months."* - *Kayla Gross*

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## Team Percent Participation



Sum of Percent Participation
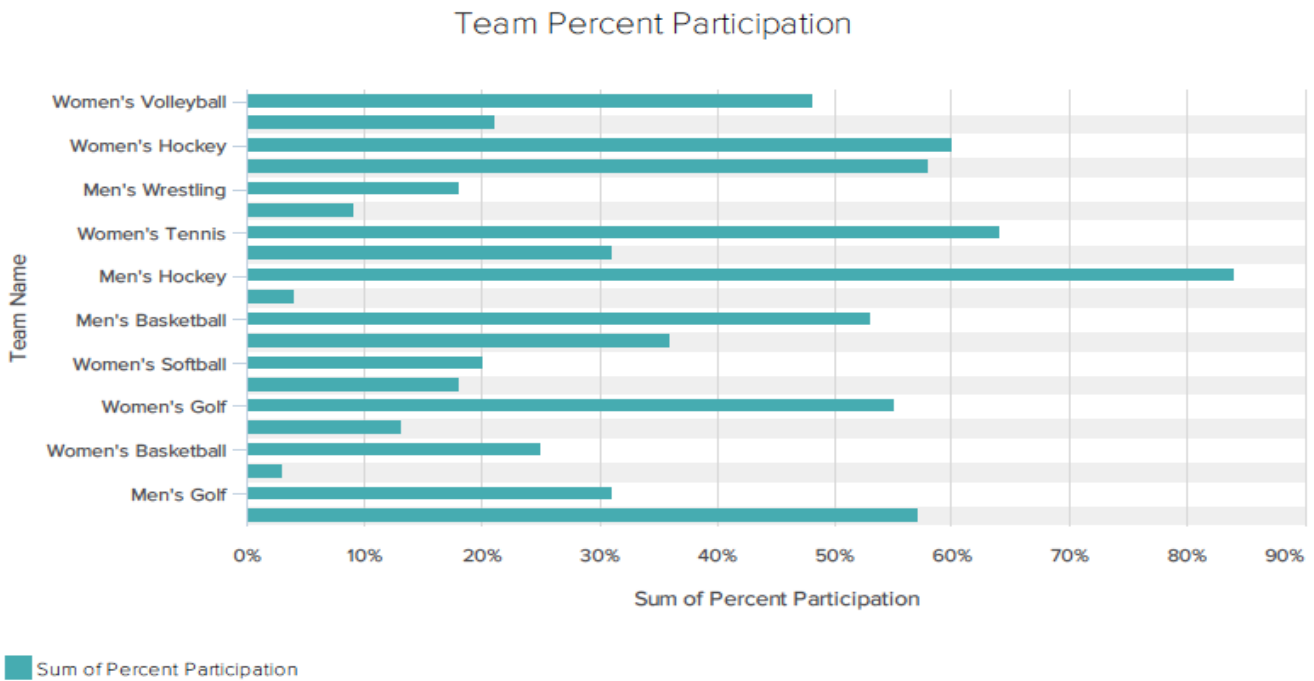
## USAGE:

The Helper Helper platform greatly simplified the volunteer process for the Badgers. The scheduling intern still fields all requests and works with compliance staff to ensure they are compliant.  Once the request has been approved he now simply enters the information in the app and allows Helper Helper to do the rest. The coordinator relies on the email reminders to see who has signed up for appearances and will reach out personally to student-athletes if the first coordinator reminder shows low numbers.



Number of Opportunities by Team
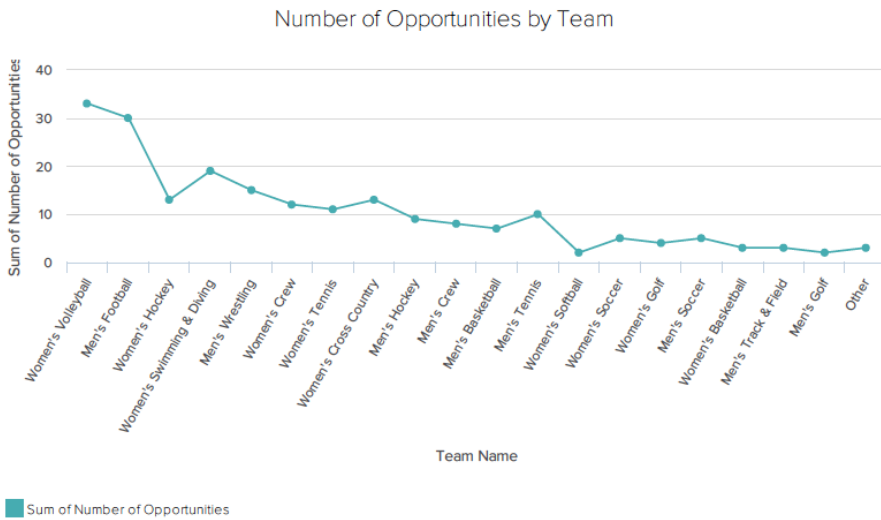
*"I was pleased with how many student-athletes we had on the app in the first three months, especially since we started using it mid-year and at a busy time for most students. I envision an even smoother transition this coming year because we can introduce it from the start and so many student-athletes are already familiar with it."*

*– Kayla Gross, Community Relations Coordinator*

## OUTCOMES:

**1) Time saved:** Prior to using the Helper Helper app, the University of Wisconsin dedicated one intern to scheduling and tracking. That student now has time to dedicate to other impotant projects.

**2) Postiive student-athlete and staff feedback:**  The feedback has been overwhelmingly positive from the student-athletes and coaching staffs. The student-athletes feel that volunteering is easier than ever and the staff appreciate the real-time updates and that the app helps them stay informed on the involvement of their athletes.

**3) New opportunities:** Wisconsin started its Badgers Give Back program to provide more opportunities for student-athletes to volunteer and to do a better job of sharing the work the student-athletes are doing in the community. The app saves the coordinator an average of six hours per week that she can reinvest in locating and improving engagement opportunities for the student-athletes. The reporting features also make it easier than ever to share the program's involvement story.