



**DIVISION III ANALYSIS WORKING GROUP
ATHLETICS DIRECTORS & CONFERENCE COMMISSIONERS
SURVEY RESULTS INFOGRAPHIC**

June 2026

Survey Overview: How to Read the Survey



1. Survey Design: Two parallel surveys were distributed in spring 2026: one to Athletics Directors on behalf of their institutions, and one to Conference Commissioners. The surveys shared a core set of overlapping questions to enable direct comparison across roles, with additional questions tailored to the distinct perspective of each group. Each survey included a mix of quantitative prompts and open-ended fields for additional commentary.



2. Response Base: Findings reflect responses from 254 Athletics Directors (60% response rate) and 33 Conference Commissioners (78% response rate). All responses are reported in aggregate; no individually identifiable information is shared.



3. Governance Note: These findings inform the Division III Analysis Working Group's review. Any proposed changes resulting from the review will follow the regular Division III governance process.



4. How to Read These Pages: Each page summarizes a single tension, consolidating all related questions and answers from the two surveys into key themes. These tensions reflect systemic pressures that shape both the student-athlete experience and the changing landscape of membership responsibility and oversight, highlighting the need to balance modern challenges with Division III's core mission.



5. Themes and Responses: Each row in the table represents a key theme derived from one or more survey questions. The "Response" column summarizes the results attributed to that theme.



6. Survey Source (Tag Column): The "Tag" column identifies which survey a question was drawn from: AD, Commissioner (CC), or BOTH when the question appeared in both surveys.



7. Featured / Linked Chart: Rows highlighted in light blue correspond to the chart on the right side of the page, which provides a representative visualization of a question from the tension.



8. Percentages: All percentages reflect the share of total respondents within each respective survey population (ADs and Commissioners reported separately).

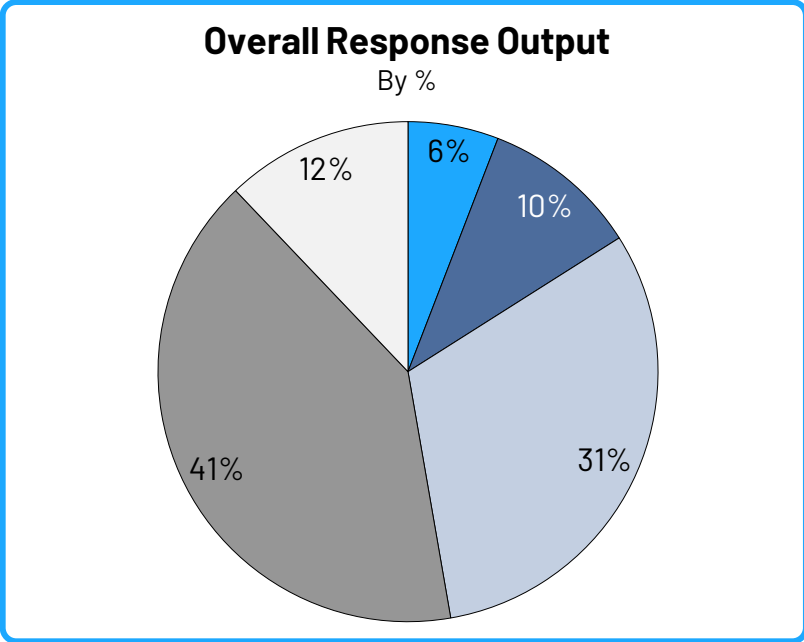
Survey Overview | Tension 1 – Championship Selection Criteria

Tension 1 Key Themes

Tag	Theme	Response
AD	Championship goals skew toward conference success and at-large access, not national titles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 41% cite competing for conference or regular-season success and 31% cite qualifying for the NCAA postseason as their primary goal 12% prioritize providing a well-rounded student experience, ranking higher than the 6% of schools that's top priority is chasing national titles
AD	NPI literacy is strong	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ~94% of ADs say they have at least a moderate level of familiarity with how NPI is used for post-season
BOTH	Both groups agree that NPI provides equity, but questions still prevail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 72% of ADs and 69% of Commissioners say they either agree or strongly agree that NPI is an equitable method for determining postseason selections There is still a minority of ADs/Commissioners expressing skepticism about the NPI postseason selection method being equitable ADs and Commissioners cite resource, geographic, and competitive-tier differences within the DIII membership as key reasons for inequities
AD	At-large bid access faces competitive and structural barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Budget limitations, strength-of-schedule hurdles / opponent access, and coaching / travel / facilities constraints lead the list of challenges to securing at-large bids
BOTH	Travel cost and geography shape scheduling decisions and postseason access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 40% of ADs report that travel costs limit non-conference scheduling, which can hurt at-large postseason bid resumes 85% of commissioners noted that non-conference scheduling is limited by travel cost and 24% cited limits due to geographic isolation
CC	Conferences actively work to improve member NPI positioning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 76% of commissioners state they are actively communicating and educating their conference members on NPI methodology and postseason criteria updates Most conferences report taking at least 1-2 deliberate steps to support member NPI standing, including scheduling support and competitive structure adjustments

Question Spotlight: Athletics Directors

Which best describes your institution's primary goal when it comes to NCAA championship participation across all sports?



- Win national championships: competing for the title is the goal
- Reach the national tournament and advance deep: qualifying isn't enough, we want to advance
- Qualify for the NCAA postseason: earning a bid is the success marker; advancement is a bonus
- Compete for conference/regular-season success: the NCAA postseason isn't the primary measure
- Provide a well-rounded student experience: athletics participation itself is the goal, not competitive outcomes

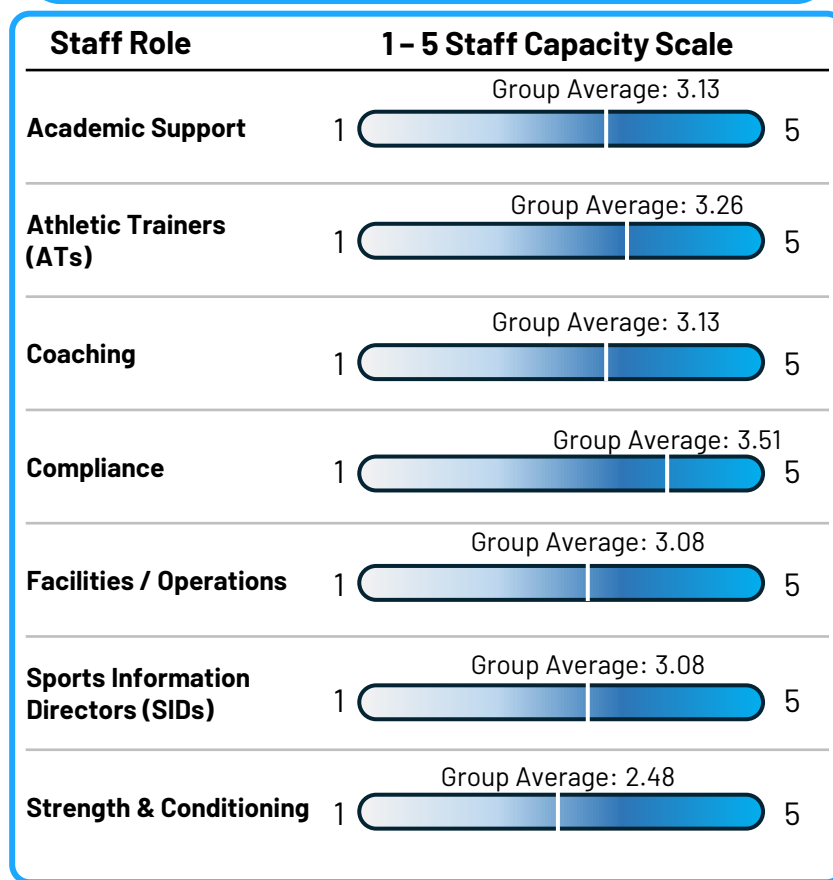
Survey Overview | Tension 2 – Playing Seasons and Resources

Tension 2 Key Themes

Tag	Theme	Response
AD	Staff capacity is stretched in several functions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SIDs, athletic training, facilities / operations, and strength & conditioning frequently rated understaffed relative to current responsibilities Athletic trainer FTE counts run lean across the division as 20% of schools reported having 1-2 AT FTEs and 62% reported employing 3-5 AT FTEs
AD	Most schools play the maximum allowed schedule for both playing season and competition days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 93% of schools use max traditional playing season days, 89% of schools use max non-traditional competition days 88% of schools use max traditional competition days, 87% of schools use max non-traditional competition days Cross country, soccer, tennis, volleyball, softball, and rowing see the highest rates of schools not utilizing maximum allowable playing season and competition days
CC	Conferences are not adding their own restrictions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 76% of conferences noted they have not implemented nor is it under discussion to implement policies more restrictive than NCAA maximums to address financial or resourcing challenges 18% of conferences stated they have not implemented more restrictive policies, but are actively discussing restrictions due to financial/resourcing pressures Cost and resource management remains an institutional decision

Question Spotlight: Athletics Directors

Rating of Institutional Staff Capacity in the Below Functions, Relative to Current Number of Sports and Season Demands (1 = severely understaffed, 5 = fully resourced)



Survey Overview | Tension 3 – Eligibility Evolution

Tension 3 Key Themes

Tag	Theme	Response
BOTH	Student-athletes largely do not report concerns to ADs and Commissioners about accessing four-year experiences like study abroad, clinical rotations, internships, or stop-outs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Both ADs and Commissioners report never-to-rare frequency (~60%) of student-athletes expressing that the four-year window limits holistic experiences, with ~30% reporting they occasionally hear remarks Only 12% of ADs and 6% of commissioners reported hearing frequent concerns
BOTH	DI/DII five-year model is reshaping DIII thinking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Majority of ADs and Commissioners (~60% each) say the DI/DII model has changed how they view the DIII four-year model Responses are mixed on how the five-year model influences thinking, with ADs and Commissioners falling into two camps: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pro Five-Year Model: Proponents argue that adopting a five-year model is necessary to remain competitive with DI/DII in recruiting/transfers, and that it better reflects the reality that college is no longer a four-year experience for most students Maintain Current Four-Year Model: Opponents contend that a five-year eligibility window conflicts with DIII's core identity as a four-year, co-curricular focused division, and could place private institutions built around a four-year experience philosophy at a competitive disadvantage
AD	Waiver volume is dominated by health-related categories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Medical/injury and mental health hardship requests make up the largest share of waiver activity reported by institutions COVID-19 and academic/enrollment waivers form a lower-requested tier of waiver activity

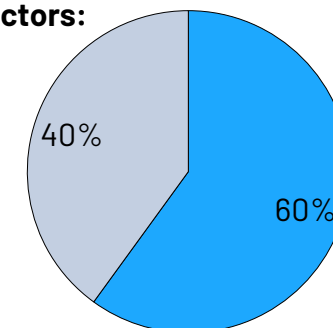
Question Spotlight: BOTH

Does the concept of a five-year eligibility model being considered at DI and DII impact how you think about the DIII four-year eligibility model?

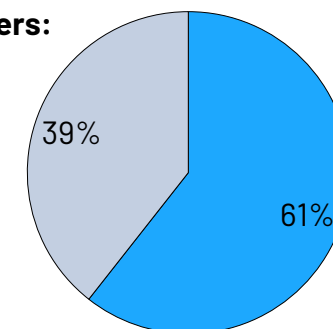
Overall Response Output

By %

Athletics Directors:



Commissioners:



Survey Overview | Tension 4 – Economic Implications

Tension 4 Key Themes

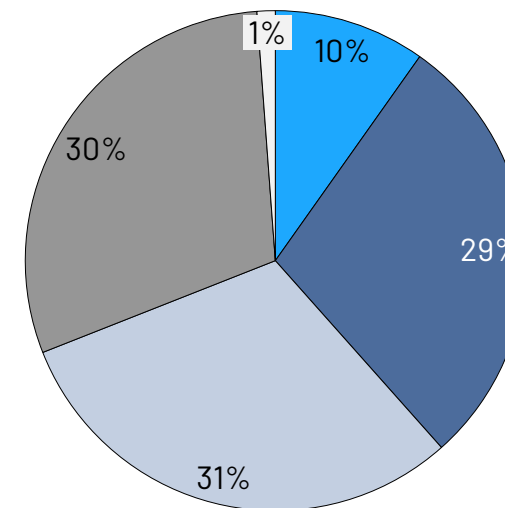
Tag	Theme	Response
AD	Budgets are not keeping pace with department growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ~90% of ADs say their budget has not kept pace over the past three years
AD	Cost pressure is real and schools are actively considering tradeoffs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Travel and scheduling cuts and self-funded models lead the list of cost-management approaches Group purchasing emerges as an NCAA-level opportunity with 30% support from ADs
AD	Enrollment driver remains the dominant role of athletics today and looking forward, though schools anticipate a gradual shift	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When asked to rank the role athletics plays at their institution, ADs identify “enrollment driver” as the top role both today and looking forward (65% vs. 49%), though the notable drop suggests schools anticipate athletics serving a broader set of institutional purposes over time
BOTH	NIL is arriving faster than policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NIL is already making inroads at DIII institutions, with 60% of ADs reporting some level of activity, including 11% with active arrangements, 32% who have been approached by donors, alumni groups, or external parties but seen nothing come of it, and 17% who anticipate being approached soon 54% of conferences have no NIL policy and only 11% have formal standards
CC	Commercial and media revenue lags member appetite	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 43% of conferences have media/streaming deals, but only 27% generate meaningful revenue 82% of Commissioners support pursuing commercial deals; only 37% have implemented any collective strategy The division is split almost evenly on paywalls for live-streamed DIII championships: 42% agree they run counter to DIII’s branding and visibility, 39% believe paywalls are necessary media revenue generators, and 18% are neutral or mixed
CC	The resource gap is widening, and it is a top concern	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 70% of Commissioners say the gap between most and least resourced members has widened in the past three years Commissioners are more concerned about resource disparities across all of DIII (82% moderately to extremely concerned) than within their own conference (61%)

Question Spotlight: Athletics Directors

Over the past THREE years, has your athletics budget kept pace with the growth across your department?

Overall Response Output

By %



- Yes - budget has grown proportionally with department growth
- Partially - some growth but not keeping pace with department growth
- No - budget has stayed flat while demands grew
- No - budget has been cut while demands grew
- Not applicable - our department size and budget have both remained stable

Survey Overview | Tension 5 – Membership Standards

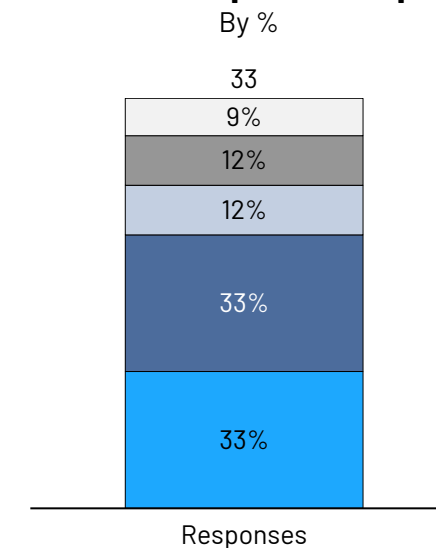
Tension 5 Key Themes

Tag	Theme	Response
AD	40% of schools have at least considered dropping a sport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Financial pressure is translating into real program cuts, with 11% of schools having dropped a sport in the past three years and another 29% having considered it
AD	Sport sponsorship minimums seen as broadly appropriate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 82% view current NCAA DIII sport sponsorship minimums as at the appropriate level, 14% as too high, 4% as too low However, comfort with current sponsorship minimums declines as endowment size decreases, with 92% of the highest-endowed institutions viewing minimums as appropriate compared to 79% among the lowest-endowed
AD	Most institutions support sport sponsorship minimums but want flexibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 39% say DIII should have firm minimums and 32% say minimums should exist but be more flexible (e.g., waivers, tiered standards) 12% say DIII should not have minimums at all
CC	One third of Commissioners are fielding membership sustainability concerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 21% report hearing from many or nearly all members about concern to sustain DIII membership, sponsorship, or cost pressure Enrollment pressure and rising costs dominate the concerns shared
CC	Conference financial support is concentrated in revenue sharing and tech cost-sharing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revenue sharing and technology cost-sharing are the most common support methods Conference-level financial support remains limited, with fewer than 40% of conferences offering cost-relief mechanisms like group purchasing, shared staffing services, or early-warning monitoring to identify members at financial risk Nearly 1 in 4 conferences provide no direct financial support to member institutions at all
CC	Most conferences add no supplemental membership requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 64% of conferences report no conference membership supplemental requirements beyond NCAA minimums Where supplemental requirements exist, number of sports sponsored and academic/admissions standards are the most common

Question Spotlight: Commissioners

Member Institutions Expressing Concern About Membership, Sponsorship, & Cost Issues in the past Three Years

Overall Response Output



- None - no members have raised concerns
- A few - isolated conversations with a small number of members
- Some - a meaningful minority of members have raised concerns
- Many - a majority of members have raised concerns
- Nearly all - concerns are widespread across our membership

Survey Overview | Tension 6 – Governance and Oversight

Tension 6 Key Themes

Tag	Theme	Response
AD	ADR relationships are strong on both engagement and effectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 71-73% of ADs rate their ADR's engagement and effectiveness positively Fewer than 1 in 10 ADs describe the ADR relationship as unengaged or ineffective
AD	Presidents are viewed as effective despite varying levels of involvement in athletics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 77% of ADs describe their President as effective or highly effective in supporting athletics at their institution Only 60% of ADs rate their President's level of engagement with athletics as high or very high, suggesting Presidents are viewed as effective even when not consistently involved in day-to-day athletics direction
BOTH	Presidential engagement in NCAA governance is materially lower than at the conference level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only 42% of ADs see their President as actively engaged in NCAA governance, with 31% reporting little to no involvement Commissioners report 58% of member presidents as highly engaged at the conference level, and only 6% as low
BOTH	Stakeholders diverge on what would improve presidential engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Asynchronous voting between conventions and a defined president-AD touchpoint independent of the chain of command both received support from ADs and Commissioners Commissioners prioritize redesigning the DIII convention to separate strategic from operational items, ranking it as the top governance change needed ADs instead favor building presidential engagement into conference structures and creating formal president-to-president peer networks, options Commissioners do not emphasize
CC	Best practice sharing is concentrated within conferences, primarily through conference meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 48% of Commissioners report significant or moderate best practice sharing within their conference; only 24% say the same across conferences Cross-conference best practice sharing is largely ad hoc (42%) Most within-conference sharing occurs at conference-level meetings, through both formal sessions and informal member conversations

Question Spotlight: Athletics Directors

What changes to DIII governance would most meaningfully improve presidential engagement with athletics? Select up to 2.

