



**REPORT OF THE
NCAA COMMITTEE ON ACCESS, OPPORTUNITY, AND IMPACT
MAY 19, 2026, VIDEOCONFERENCE**

ACTION ITEMS.

1. Legislative Items.

- **Flag football as a National Collegiate championship sport.**
 - (1) Recommendation. That the three divisional legislative bodies sponsor legislation to add flag football as an NCAA national collegiate championship; further, to establish a women's flag football committee.
 - (2) Effective Date. Immediate. The flag football committee would begin its work in January 2027 to prepare for the first NCAA national collegiate championship in spring 2028.
 - (3) Rationale. Flag football has been an emerging sport in all three divisions since January 2026. In spring 2026, an NCAA staff review of unofficial data indicated 66 NCAA member institutions sponsored flag football, with 40 member institutions meeting minimum sports-sponsorship requirements. Therefore, the sport reached the legislative threshold of 40 varsity programs to be considered for National Collegiate championship status. The number of schools sponsoring flag football during the 2025-26 academic year will be verified through official NCAA Sports-Sponsorship and Participation data in summer 2026. Additionally, more than 120 member institutions have indicated their intent to sponsor flag football during the 2026-27 academic year, with more than 130 member institutions expected to sponsor flag football in the 2027-28 academic year, demonstrating continued growth. Sponsorship of flag football as an NCAA championship is expected to further accelerate interest and participation.

The NCAA's continued focus and investment in expanding women's sports, investing in championship opportunities, and strengthening the NCAA's media rights agreements make this an opportune time to elevate a new women's sport, particularly one that serves new and varied demographics and continues to grow rapidly. According to the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS), youth and K-12 participation have grown significantly, with girls' high school flag football experiencing a 60% year-over-year growth. NFHS also reported that in states where girls flag football is sanctioned, there were approximately 69,000 reported high school participants in 2024-25. Flag football attracts a varied recruiting pool of student-athletes and has relatively low barriers to entry, particularly at the youth and high school levels. Flag football will be an Olympic sport in 2028, and a professional league is expected to begin operations soon.

- (4) Estimated Budget Impact. Estimated annual championship costs, including sport committee establishment and championship operations, range from \$2.3M to \$3.2M depending on final decisions made regarding championship format. Projected expenses include sport committee administration and travel, team travel, facility rentals and equipment, officiating, event operations, broadcast production, and other championship operational needs. Estimates do not include cost projections for internal staffing, which will be evaluated separately.

[Note: The budget is contingent on approval by the NCAA Board of Governors Finance and Audit Committee, Board of Governors and the appropriate divisional governance committees during their July/August 2026 meetings and must account for the net asset impact of all consolidated future initiatives.]

- (5) Student-Athlete Impact. Provides a new championship opportunity to women athletes in all three divisions and elevates their current varsity programs to NCAA championship status.

2. Nonlegislative items.

- None.

INFORMATIONAL ITEMS.

- 1. Welcome, announcements and mission statement.** The chair convened the meeting at 1:33 p.m. Eastern time and welcomed the members. The committee reviewed its roster, subcommittee assignments and mission statement.
- 2. Approval of April 22, 2026, meeting report.** The committee approved its April 22, 2026, meeting report.
- 3. NCAA Student-Athlete Advocacy/Advisory Committee updates.** The Division II SAAC representative updated the committee on the work of the Division II SAAC.
- 4. Subcommittee updates.**
 - a. Administrative Subcommittee.** The committee received an update on the subcommittee's work, including a letter sent on the committee's behalf to the Board of Governors and NCAA Senior Management Team regarding the recent membership survey and its impact on the national office budget and structure.

- b. Emerging Sports Subcommittee.**

 - (1) Biannual updates. The subcommittee chair provided an update on recent meetings, including its review of bi-annual updates from each emerging sport. The subcommittee reported that the Spring 2026 updates were some of the most comprehensive to date, clearly outlining sports' growth and opportunities for improvement. Staff will share feedback with sport leaders to support preparation for the 2026-27 academic year.
 - (2) Flag football recommendation. The committee recommended that the three divisional legislative bodies sponsor legislation to establish flag football as an NCAA national collegiate championship and establish a women's flag football committee. [See Legislative Item.]
- 5. Update on emerging sport blanket waiver requests.** Staff provided an update on blanket waiver requests regarding the playing and practice seasons legislation for triathlon and Division III rugby. Staff also shared an update on the blanket waiver regarding the Athletics Diversity and Inclusion Designee requirements.
- 6. Discussion of USOPC/NCAA Para College Inclusion Project.** Staff and representatives from the United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee (USOPC) provided an update on the USOPC/NCAA Para College Inclusion Project, including: the collegiate adaptive sport landscape; Para-eligible impairments for NCAA and adaptive sport student-athletes; the impact of college programs on the Paris 2024 Paralympic Games; collegiate participation opportunities for adaptive and Para athletes; the project's history and key activations to date; and available informational resources.
- 7. NCAA divisional representative updates.** Divisional representatives serving on the committee provided updates on their respective division's ongoing efforts. The committee briefly discussed equity considerations related to recent changes to playing and practice seasons legislation and evolving eligibility models.
- 8. Governance scorecard reminder.** The chair reminded the committee to complete the 2025-26 Association-wide governance scorecard by the deadline.
- 9. Future meeting schedule.** The committee reviewed its future meeting schedule.
- 10. Other business.** The committee acknowledged the last meeting of Noreen Morris, Commissioner of the Northeast Conference, and thanked her for decades of service to advancing access and opportunity for NCAA student-athletes.
- 11. Adjournment.** The meeting was adjourned at 3:30 p.m. Eastern time.

Committee Chair: Jacqie McWilliams Parker, Central Intercollegiate Athletic Association.

Staff Liaisons: Amy Wilson, Office of Inclusion.

Corey Berg, Division III Governance and Member Services.

Niya Blair Hackworth, Office of Inclusion.

Jean Merrill, Office of Inclusion.

Gretchen Miron, Office of Inclusion.

NCAA Committee on Access, Opportunity and Impact May 19, 2026, Videoconference
Attendees:
JP Abercrombie, University of Notre Dame.
Femi Alao, Roberts Wesleyan University.
Alisse Ali-Joseph, Northern Arizona University.
Greg Bamberger, Fairmont State University.
Kristie Bowers, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute.
Yahir Chairez Salazar, Colorado School of Mines.
Pankil Chander, Wilkes University.
Mark Giles, University of Illinois Chicago.
Janet Gooch, University of Illinois Springfield.
Mercedes Himmons, Southern Connecticut State University.
Martin Lemelle, Grambling State University.
Ryan Martin, The City College of New York.
Jacqie McWilliams, Central Intercollegiate Athletic Association.
Noreen Morris, Northeast Conference.
Jeffrey Poulard, Big East Conference.
Stephanie Stevens, Gallaudet University.
Marion Terenzio, State University of New York at Cobleskill.
Dawn Turner, Lander University.
Betsey Walkowiak, University of Wisconsin-Green Bay.
Kristin Williams, Mid-American Conference.
Guests:
Emily Brauer, United States Olympic & Paralympic Committee.
Calli Doggett, United States Olympic & Paralympic Committee.
Adam Wood, United States Olympic & Paralympic Committee.
Absentees:
Nichole Book, Mansfield University of Pennsylvania.
Stacey Gibson, Idaho State University.
Juan Hernandez, Curry College.
Alfred Lamptey, University of Mount Saint Vincent.
Peyton Owens, University of Minnesota, Twin Cities.
NCAA Staff Liaisons in Attendance:
Corey Berg, Niya Blair Hackworth, Jean Merrill, Gretchen Miron and Amy Wilson.

Other NCAA Staff Members in Attendance:

Debbie Brown, Dawn Buth, Gail Dent, Leah Kareti, Kat Lin, Ashlesha Lokhande, Felicia Martin, Leilyn Miles, Tyler Noragon, Stephanie Quigg, Jen Roe and Jared Tidemann.