Among the most important decisions the Division II Presidents Council made in 2015 when adopting the Division II Strategic Plan was to sufficiently fund it. As all presidents and chancellors are aware, strategic initiatives require financial support to be effective.

Accordingly, the Presidents Council committed $5.7 million through the course of the strategic plan to fund a 10-program “Foundation for the Future” initiative that would become an integral component of the Division II Strategic Plan moving forward.

The 10 programs were selected from among more than two dozen concepts and ideas submitted to a representative task force that included members of the Presidents Council and the Division II Planning and Finance Committee.

And while not everyone involved could have predicted it at the time, many of these programs have been so successful that they are now intertwined permanently within the Division II fabric. Five in fact have been approved to continue being funded as part of the Division II base budget even after the Foundation for the Future allocation ends in the 2020-21 fiscal year:

- Division II University
- Division II Coaches Connection Program
- Division II Student-Athlete Advisory Committee Super Region Convention
- Enhanced Sessions for the Division II Mentor Program
- National Association for Athletics Compliance Grant

Following is a synopsis of the 10 programs and their indelible impact they’ve made on Division II, thanks to the vision and commitment the Division II Presidents Council exhibited upon adopting the strategic plan.
ATHLETICS, and it more actively engages coaches in their role as advocates for the value of Division II athletics. The Coaches Connection Program enhances coaches' engagement and fortifies their voice in the governance of Division II athletics. The program accomplishes exactly what the program's title implies: Coaches Connection is successful because it connects coaches with a forum for sharing their perspective and share information with a wider base, which encourages a more collective voice. Coaches' points of view are better articulated, and information is shared among stakeholders. The program promotes effective and valued communication among stakeholders, resulting in decisions that enhance the Division II student-athlete experience.

DIVISION II UNIVERSITY (Online Coaches Education Program)

What has come to be regarded as the fundamental delivery method for education, training and information sharing – not only for Division II but the NCAA in general – began modestly as an Online Coaches Education Program designed to deliver legislative and health and safety content to a constituency that was too frequently left out of the communication loop.

The immediate goal was for “DII U” to replace the antiquated annual coaches certification exam, a proposal that was resoundingly approved at the 2019 NCAA Convention. DII U was much preferred because of its interactive and easy-to-access courses that creatively and more practically educated constituents on everything from recruiting and eligibility rules and governance to improving student-athlete health and wellness.

Since then, DII U has literally changed the way members understand and follow Division II operating procedures and principles. And the program continues to be expanded, with future modules targeting other Division II constituents, including courses on gameday operations and customer service, as well as courses directed at faculty athletics representatives.

COACHES CONNECTION EXPANSION

As was the case with Division II University, the Coaches Connection program was but a fledgling in 2015, having been established in 2012-13 as a pilot program for football and women's volleyball. The pilot's initial success warranted an expansion in 2014-15 to include men’s and women's tennis and men's and women's soccer.

Now, after having been part of the Foundation for the Future effort, Coaches Connection encompasses nearly all Division II sports and is among the most transformative programs in Division II history.

Coaches Connection is successful because it accomplishes exactly what the program’s title implies: It connects coaches with a forum for sharing information and, more importantly, sharing their voice in the governance of Division II athletics. The program enhances coaches' engagement and fortifies their role as advocates for the value of Division II athletics, and it more actively engages coaches associations in the process.
SAAC SUPER REGION CONVENTION

The Foundation for the Future initiative focused on enhancing student-athletes’ roles in the governance structure as well. While the Division II Student-Athlete Advisory Committee participates annually at the NCAA Convention, the Super Region Conventions provide a convention experience for conference and institutional SAACs. That means even more student-athletes can participate in the governance structure and better understand issues affecting all Division II student-athletes.

Division II hosted its inaugural Super Region Convention November 17-19, 2017, in Washington, D.C. The second SAAC Super Region Convention was April 12-14, 2019, in Orlando. The third convention scheduled for April 2020 in Los Angeles was canceled due to the impact of COVID-19, but plans are underway to schedule a convention in the west region in the near future. The fourth convention scheduled for November 2020 in Chicago has been postponed due to COVID-19 and will also be rescheduled.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR ATHLETICS DIRECTORS

This effort enhances an existing mentoring program that the Division II Athletics Directors Association helps administer, targeting aspiring ADs, particularly women and ethnic minorities. It also targets programming for veteran ADs to help them manage their athletics operations more effectively.

The program for first-year Division II athletics directors has helped new ADs to hit the ground running. Originally, programming was limited to one-half day at the annual NCAA Convention, but the program has been upgraded to feature one and one-half days at the NCAA national office in October (in conjunction with the existing D2 ADA and CCA officers meetings there at that time) to allow D2 ADA officers to be presenters at the orientation sessions and to allow the new ADs to interact with D2 ADA officers and NCAA staff (and to familiarize themselves with the NCAA national office). A follow-up session is offered at the annual NACDA convention in June.

In the coming years the ADA will launch a pilot program in which each of the four D2 ADA officers in a given year “adopt” a new AD and sponsor an on-campus visit to provide in-person mentorship and experience.

NAAC EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMING

The Foundation for the Future initiative has allowed the National Association for Athletics Compliance to provide Division II schools and conferences an interactive program to help administrators maintain ethical compliance programs.

Integral to the program is the Learning Management Platform, which features a library of reference materials for use by on-campus professionals in a location that allows them to be updated regularly with little or no expense. To date, more than 700 individuals from more than 230 institutions have registered. Without this funding, NAAC would not be able to provide this program to Division II institutions.

To streamline educational opportunities, NAAC and the NCAA national office staff are in the process of determining whether these modules can be housed in Division II University moving forward to continue to serve as a resource for the division’s compliance administrators.
**ACADEMIC METRICS REVIEW**

This grant allowed Division II to review metrics for academic success, improve the accuracy of data collection and strengthen the foundation upon which academic policy decisions are made.

**DEGREE-COMPLETION AWARDS**

A total of $440,000 was distributed to provide additional funding to student-athletes who have exhausted their athletics eligibility to help them complete their undergraduate degrees.

**HELPER HELPER**

Helper Helper is an online community engagement platform that institutions used to connect student-athletes to meaningful volunteer experiences and log their community engagement efforts.

**TRANSPORTATION FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

This FFF grant added to a Division II staple of community engagement by providing bus transportation to Division II championships for community members who participate in community engagement events.

**CONFERENCE DISTRIBUTION**

The FFF also allocated a one-time distribution of $50,000 to each Division II conference to be used in any of the following areas: academic support, broadcast support, officiating improvement and branding efforts. The majority of Division II conferences have expended the entire amount awarded toward programs that have benefitted their membership and increased their footprint both regionally and nationally.