

Division III Strategic Plan

2026-28 Budget Biennium [Year 1: 2026-27]

Vision Statement: Division III will be a dynamic and engaging group of colleges, universities and conferences of varying sizes and missions committed to an environment that encourages and supports health and safety, diversity, values, fairness, and equity, and places the highest priority on the overall educational experience of its student-athletes in the conduct of intercollegiate athletics.

Mission Statement: Promoting the student-athlete academic and athletic experience, with a commitment and dedication to the membership through effective inclusion, communication, and engagement.



DIVISION III
DISCOVER | DEVELOP | DEDICATE

INTRODUCTION

The Division III Strategic Plan serves many purposes. It begins with the Division III Philosophy Statement to establish the framework from which the division's programs, resource allocations, and regulatory decisions are made. It highlights the Division III Strategic Positioning Platform to clarify the practical impact of the Division III philosophy and summarizes the division's strategic priorities by outlining what must be accomplished in the current budget cycle for the division to be successful.

The plan also serves to highlight the programs and services offered for the division's membership. This list of offerings is arranged in a way that demonstrates the connection of each Division III program to the NCAA Strategic Plan and explains when a program or initiative is funded from Division III dollars or a different Association budget. To bring further transparency to the division's operations, the plan justifies every line of the Division III budget against the philosophy statement or NCAA Constitution. Finally, the plan includes the division's budget policies and a note on its history, which tracks the evolution of the division's entire strategic initiatives program.

CONTENTS

Philosophy Statement...page 3
Strategic Positioning Platform Summary...page 4
Strategic Priorities for the Budget Cycle...page 5
History of the Strategic Plan and Budget Policies (Appendix A) ...page 11

DIVISION III PHILOSOPHY STATEMENT

The purpose of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) is to assist its members in developing the basis for consistent, equitable competition while minimizing infringement on the freedom of individual members to determine their own unique objectives and programs. The philosophy statement articulates principles that represent a commitment to Division III membership and shall serve as a guide for the preparation of legislation by the division and for planning and implementation of programs by institutions and conferences.

- (a) Division III members affirm the purposes and fundamental policy of the NCAA, as set forth in Constitution Article 1 with emphasis on:
 - (1) Division III members shall establish and maintain an environment in which a student-athlete's activities are conducted with the appropriate primary emphasis on the student-athlete's academic experience.
 - (2) Division III intercollegiate athletics shall be conducted in a manner designed to protect, support, and enhance the physical and mental health and safety of student-athletes.
 - (3) Division III members shall be committed to the creation of diverse and inclusive environments with respect for and sensitivity to the dignity of every person.
 - (4) Division III athletics shall be conducted in a manner free of gender bias.
- (b) NCAA Constitution Article 2 establishes the independent authority of Division III to organize itself and determine its own governing structure and membership.
 - (1) Institutional presidents and chancellors have the ultimate responsibility and final authority for the conduct of Division III intercollegiate athletics at the national, conference and institutional levels.
 - (2) Institutional and conference members determine policy at the national level through the Division III governance and legislative processes.
 - (3) Key institution and conference constituents who play an integral role in the governance and operation of Division III at the national, conference and institutional levels include, but are not limited to athletics direct reports, athletics diversity and inclusion designees, athletics health care administrators, coaches, conference commissioners, directors of athletics, faculty athletics representatives, presidents and chancellors, senior compliance administrators, senior woman administrators, and student-athletes.
- (c) Division III members abide by the following principles that help to define and distinguish the division and its policies and legislation.
 - (1) Student-Athlete Collegiate Experience.

- (i) Primarily focus on intercollegiate athletics as a four-year undergrad experience.
 - (ii) Seek to establish and maintain an environment in which a student-athlete's athletics activities are conducted as an integral part of their educational experience.
 - (iii) Assure that student-athletes are supported in their efforts to meaningfully participate in nonathletic pursuits to enhance their overall educational experience.
- (2) Student-Athlete Athletics Experience.
 - (i) Support student-athletes in their efforts to reach the highest levels of athletics performance, with a primary emphasis on conference and regional competition, while providing access to national championships.
 - (ii) Prioritize the experience of the participants, and the internal constituency (e.g., students, alumni, institutional personnel) rather than on the entertainment needs of spectators or the general public.
 - (iii) Develop and maintain an environment that promotes sportsmanship and a positive culture for student-athletes, coaches, and administrative personnel, recognizing the role intercollegiate athletics can play in human development. Ensure spectators contribute to a positive sporting experience in support of all participants.
- (3) Member Responsibility and Oversight.
 - (i) Encourage participation and provide equitable opportunities with support for gender and ethnic/racial diversity. Give equal emphasis to men's and women's sports.
 - (ii) The administration of an institution's athletics program (e.g., hiring, compensation, professional development, certification of coaches) should be integrated into the campus culture and educational mission.
 - (iii) Assure all teams are provided with appropriate facilities, competent coaching, and competitive opportunities.
 - (iv) Assure student-athletes are treated similarly to the student-body in areas that include, but are not limited to, admissions, enrollment, financial aid, academic and career support, academic performance, and degree completion.
 - (v) Assure that financial aid is not awarded to any student on the basis of athletics leadership, ability, participation, or performance.

Division III Positioning Statement

Follow your passions and discover your potential. The college experience is a time of learning and growth. For Division III student-athletes, this happens most importantly in the classroom and through earning an academic degree. The Division III experience provides for participation in a competitive athletics environment. Student-athletes push themselves to achieve excellence and build upon their academic success with new challenges and life skills within an environment that fosters health and wellness. Student-athletes are encouraged to pursue the full spectrum of opportunities available during their time in college. In this way, Division III provides an equitable and inclusive environment for student-athletes to take responsibility for their own paths, follow their passions and discover their potential through a comprehensive educational experience.

Division III Attributes

Proportion: appropriate balance of academics, athletics, and additional collegiate opportunities.

Comprehensive Learning: opportunity for broad-based education and success.

Passion: playing for the love of the game, competition, enjoyment, self-improvement, and our teammates and communities.

Responsibility: development of accountability through personal commitment and choice.

Sportsmanship: fair and respectful conduct toward all participants and supporters.

Citizenship: dedication to developing responsible leaders and global citizens.

Reasons to Believe

Comprehensive educational experience. Division III institutions develop student-athlete potential through a holistic educational approach that includes rigorous academics, competitive athletics, and opportunities to pursue other interests and passions.

Competitive athletic programs. Student-athletes participate in an intense, competitive athletics environment. Student-athletes do not receive any monetary incentive (athletics scholarship) to play sports in college and play for a love of the game.

Integrated campus environment. A quarter of all Division III students participate in athletics. These student-athletes are integrated into the campus culture and educational missions of their institutions:

Commitment to inclusive environments. Division III prides itself on creating inclusive, diverse, and equitable environments for its student-athletes.

Academic focus. Student-athletes most often attend a Division III institution because of the excellent academic programs.

Available financial aid. 80% of all student-athletes in Division III receive some form of grant or non-athletics scholarship. Student-athletes have equal opportunity and access to financial aid as the general student body – but are not awarded aid based on athletics leadership, ability, performance, or participation. Without the obligation of an athletics scholarship, student-athletes can emphasize academics, athletics, and other opportunities of college life appropriate to the necessary commitment and their own passions.

Commitment to athletics participation. Division III institutions are committed to a broad-based program of athletics because of the educational value of participation for the student-athlete. The division averages 19 sports per institution; more than any other division. It also emphasizes integrating competitive men's and women's sports into higher education so that the educational experience of the student-athlete is paramount.

National championship opportunities. Division III has over 210,000 student-athletes competing annually in 41 different national championships. These competitions provide an opportunity for student-athletes to compete at the highest level and fulfill their athletics potential.

NOTE: Strategic initiatives are divided between championships and Enrichment Fund initiatives and programs. Most strategic initiatives support the Division III student-athlete experience. The strategic priorities are not listed in priority order; all are of equal value. **Text in red highlights key initiatives during year one of the 2026-27 biennium.**

DIVISION III STRATEGIC PRIORITIES FOR 2026-28 BUDGET BIENNIUM [YEAR 1: 2026-27]

Maintain Fiscal Integrity. All programs and budget priorities shall be managed in a manner that ensures they are fiscally responsible, sustainable and reflect the division's priorities. Further:

- Maintain and annually evaluate the divisional operating budget for the current budget cycle (2026-27).
- Continue to monitor the division's current mandated reserve.
- 1. **Provide Quality Division III Championships. FY27 budget equals \$41 million.** The Division III experience provides for participation in a competitive athletics environment, and Division III is committed to conducting quality championships with fair selection processes and appropriate access. Strategic priorities support student-athletes in their efforts to reach high levels of athletics performance, which may include opportunities for participation in national championships, by supporting institutions as they provide all teams with adequate facilities, competent coaching, and appropriate competitive opportunities. The Division III Championships Committee is responsible for continual assessment of policies and NCAA legislation related to the championships program including the appropriateness of bracket sizes, regional alignment, and selection criteria processes. Championship funding enhancements will start at the sport committee level with recommendations to the Championships Committee, endorsement by the Strategic Planning and Finance Committee and ultimate approval by the Management and Presidents Councils. **Incorporate approved FY27 budget enhancements (e.g., joint women's basketball championship in FY28, increased per diem and high cost city per diem, flexibility to protect higher ranked teams, bracket expansion with increased sports sponsorship, Division III women's wrestling championship, host livestreaming grants of preliminary rounds of NCAA team championships).** Budget plan for the next budget cycle (2026-28).
- 2. **Provide Division III Conference Office Support. FY27 budget equals \$4.6 million.** These funds support the Strategic Initiatives Conference Grant Program, annual commissioner meeting with NCAA staff and a grant to support officiating resources. All conferences will be represented annually; commissioners will be provided with the opportunity to discuss Division III hot topics, governance, and championships issues.
 - The Strategic Initiatives Conference Grant Program is divided into five tiers.
 - Tier One: Professional Development and Student-Athlete Advisory Committee support. All institutions may annually access conference grant dollars to support campus and conference SAAC meetings, programs, and initiatives as well as professional opportunities for key constituent groups (e.g., senior woman administrators, mid-level administrators, sports information directors, athletic trainers). Funding also is available to offset conference office travel and web hosting. All conferences will optimally use the full allocation of funds each year.

- Tier Two: Student-Athlete Well Being Initiatives. Funds are available for a wide-variety of student-athlete well-being initiatives with an emphasis on programming related to diversity, equity and inclusion, academic experiences, identity and integration and sportsmanship initiatives.
- Tier Three: Technology and Officiating Improvement. Funding is available for conference offices to improve technology and support of officiating improvements.
- Tier Four: Funding is available to support the division's strategic priority of diversity, equity, and inclusion at the conference and/or institutional level.
- Tier Five: Third-Party Review. Aids conference offices to provide documentation of a third-party external review of grant fund usage to the national office annually.
- Promote usage of NCAA officiating platform (RefQuest) to address challenges with officiating, including the quality and pipeline of officials. Maintain funding, via the conference grant program, to enhance officiating, and support the Division III Commissioner Association's partnership with the National Association of Sport Officials (NASO).

3. Effectively Advance Access, Opportunity, Inclusion, Diversity, and Equity. FY27 budget equals \$2.7 million.

- Create partnerships, review the objectives, and establish meaningful goals for the division's programs supporting equity and inclusion. Partner with Division III conferences and institutions to support innovative programs.
 - Continue professional development and networking opportunities for underrepresented groups (e.g., SWA Program, Institute for Administrative Advancement, Student Immersion Program).
 - Continue to fund the Division III opportunity grants – pathway to excellence, strategic alliance matching, and coaching enhancement.
 - Support the office of inclusion in providing resources for the athletics diversity and inclusion designee.
 - Support the Management and Presidents Council DEI subcommittee that absorbed the work of the LGBTQIA+ and Diversity and Inclusion Working Groups.
 - Continue to provide the LGBTQ OneTeam program that provides education to the membership on ways to create a safe and inclusive environment for LGBTQ individuals and allies. Maintain the annual LGBTQ of the Year awards. Continue to promote the LGBTQ non-discrimination policy guide.
 - Promote the Inclusive Leaders Program that provides education on improving the recruitment and retention of students of color.
- Establish strategies to increase and diversify the pool of candidates for Division III committee service and membership job searches.
 - Maintain the division's database of underrepresented individuals that have participated in an NCAA program. Continue to send out a quarterly Connected Insights newsletter.

- Monitor NCAA emerging sports (e.g., triathlon, flag football).
 - Monitor, with the office of inclusion and the membership, new emerging sports for women and specifically, vote on a proposal at the 2027 Convention to establish a national collegiate championship for women's flag football and potentially triathlon at the 2028 Convention. Research sports that are rising in popularity and sponsorship at the high school level, potentially inclusive of adaptive sports, for discussion by the Division III membership.
- Ensure a gender equitable experience for all student-athletes.

4. **Ensure Student-Athlete Support. FY27 budget equals \$1.6 million.**

- Maintain the promotion and use of the Injury Surveillance Program, SSI's data collection system, by the Division III membership.
- Continue to sponsor a regular and representative academic reporting program to compare the academic success of student-athletes and the general student body. Continue to emphasize the academic success of Division III student-athletes as compared to other students. Maintain the annual student-athlete graduation rate submission. Management Council subcommittee formed to focus on solutions and best practices to address graduation rates of teams and demographic groups that are lower than their counterparts who do not participate in intercollegiate athletics.
- Maintain and enhance the partnership with the College Sports Communicators by providing professional development funding and opportunities (e.g., Emerging Elite Program, Division III Day at the CSC Convention and CSC Student Program), overseeing a recognition system awarded three times per year, and providing funds to support the Division III-specific Academic All-America program.
- Amplify the student-athlete voice. Collaborate with Division III SAAC to provide opportunities for effective student-athlete engagement and leadership.
- Fund student-athletes to attend the annual NCAA Student-Athlete Leadership Forum. The Forum is an opportunity for college athletes, coaches, and administrators to collectively learn about themselves and grow as the next generation of leaders. Fund DISC assessments that are a valuable resource that institutions and conference offices use to help student-athletes, coaches and administrators learn more about their behavioral styles and how their individual styles come together in a team environment.
- Support Gameday the DIII Way, the Division III sportsmanship and game environment initiative. Promote existing tools and resources (e.g., facilitator training and on-line educational modules such as the de-escalation training module).
- Monitor and promote institutional commitment to the Board of Governor's policy on sexual assault violence prevention education and annual requirements.

- Continue to create specific programming for student-athletes attending the annual Convention to help better engage and educate on the Division III philosophy.
- Promote the division's mental health program, Mental Health First Aid training, which is available to all Division III institutions, at no charge, through August 2027. Support the Sport Science Institute's resources related to mental health. Discuss next steps to maintain and expand mental health support.
- Promote sports wagering resources and research the opportunity to create a diversionary approach for those seeking help to address problem gambling.

5. **Maintain the Value of Division III Athletics. FY27 budget equals \$3.1 million.** The division continues to serve as a conscious alternative to the sport-specialization youth culture, and as an accessible and fulfilling educational and athletics destination. It also emphasizes a fuller, more integrated academic experience in all divisional endeavors.

- Use the outcomes of the Division III analysis to identify, develop, and propose actionable solutions to mitigate tensions and reinforce, strengthen, and advance the division's values.
- Conduct a comprehensive and holistic review of Name, Image, and Likeness via the NIL Working Group, eligibility, and membership standards to ensure consistency with values and the evolving nature of higher education.
- Communication, emphasize, promote, and steward the Division III brand, identity, and unique philosophy as articulated in the division's Strategic Positioning Platform to prospective student-athletes and their families, guidance counselors and high school and club coaches. Support conferences and institutions to better tell the Division III story to a variety of internal and external target audiences with the following identity activation initiatives: Division III week, national and customizable videos. **Create new public service announcements.** Maintain a recognition award for athletics communication directors to recognize outstanding work that tells the Division III story.
- Emphasize the values of Division III to effectively manage its membership growth. Maintain a cross-divisional governance staff and Membership Committee liaison group to monitor divisional membership issues.
- Monitor the federated process for Division III playing rules. Ensure communication between playing and sport rule committees and inform the membership of key rule changes to encourage feedback. Monitor new playing rules committee structures.
- Continue to support athletic trainers and factors impacting their hiring and retention. **Provide institutional funding to offset athletic training costs (e.g., health and safety grant).** Assist with resources, professional development, and communication/engagement strategies (e.g., develop an Athletics Trainer Connect Program).
- Support athletics communication personnel. **Provide funding to enhance access to NCAA photography during single sport national championships. Provide institutional funding to offset athletics communication costs.**

- Continue the strategic partnership with Special Olympics. Maintain the activity reporting program to better tell the partnership's story from a division-wide perspective.
- Continue to create specific programming for delegates attending the annual Convention (e.g., educational sessions, Issues Forum, and technology to support all sessions) to help better engage and educate the membership. Properly engage and educate the membership on legislative proposals.

6. Provide Professional Development for Division III Constituents. FY27 budget equals \$558K.

- In partnership with the NCAA Executive Staff and divisional Association-wide governance staffs, enhance Division III specific presidential programming to educate and engage all Division III chancellors and presidents. Continue to selectively forward issues of presidential importance to the division's presidents and chancellors. **Create a Division III specific engagement program for campus senior leaders (e.g., presidents/chancellors and athletics direct reports).**
- Maintain in-person, full-day orientation programs for new athletics directors and commissioners to assist these individuals in understanding and promoting the division.
- Strengthen the advocacy of Division III faculty for the values of the athletics experience by offering annual professional development training and networking opportunities to FARs. Maintain the Faculty Advisory Group to provide quarterly updates to the Division III Management Council.
- Partnership with National Association of Division III Athletics Administrators. The governance structure will provide financial support to NADIII AA for its professional development offerings.
- The division will fund professional development opportunities for female athletics administrators in a manner most accommodating to applicant individuals (e.g., Women Leaders in Sport Institutes, SWA Program).
- Continue to maintain and enhance Division III University – an on-line learning management system. **Create and add new division-specific educational modules.**
- Support a day-long professional development program for the division's athletics communication and sports information directors in conjunction with the annual College Sports Communicators (CSC) Convention – DIII Day. Maintain the Emerging Elite Program to provide professional development to athletics communication staff.
- Provide funding for the DIIICA and NADIII AA executive leadership groups to come to Indianapolis in Aug./Sept. to discuss current hot topics in Division III and plan communication strategies for the upcoming year. Emphasize communication, shared accountability, and collaboration in leading the division.

- Continue to provide live stream options for the annual Regional Rules Seminar to enhance compliance education. Further, explore alternatives to the regional rules format to provide compliance education to the membership in an effective and cost efficient manner.

7. Enhance Formal Accountability of the Governance Structure and National Office Support. FY27 budget equals \$179K.

- Continue to distribute the annual performance scorecard to committee members for regular accountability of key Division III programs and committee staff liaisons.
- Monitor, and address as needed, the enrollment and related financial challenges within higher education, and the related challenges affecting the Division III membership. Monitor the impact on conference office stability and the impact of conference realignments.
- Continue to make membership communication a priority. Provide clear, concise, and consistent communication. Strengthen relationships with the leadership of the DIICA and NADIIAA. Provide effective transparency and opportunities for input in the work of governing bodies.

8. Support Association-wide initiatives.

- Support the Association in its efforts to engage Congress to introduce federal legislation to address threats (e.g., Name, Image and Likeness, student-athlete compensation, select litigation).
- Support relevant issues identified through the Association's priorities (e.g., fan database, purchasing collective, post-eligibility insurance).
- Monitor the implementation of the House settlement agreement, legal threats and cases against the Association and analyze and strategically plan for impacts to the division.
- Continue to partner with the Sport Science Institute regarding priority health and safety issues, including mental and physical health. Provide Division III representatives for on-going summits. Provide timely and consistent communication to the membership regarding new SSI interassociation guidelines and best practices.

Appendix A

History of the Division III Strategic Plan and Budget Policies

History

The original Division III strategic plan was unveiled in 1998 as the division embarked on its new federated structure. The Division III Management Council Strategic Planning Subcommittee developed the framework for the plan with broad participation of the Presidents Council, Division III and Association-wide committee structure, and the Division III membership. The 2004 version of the Division III Strategic Plan was developed by a joint subcommittee of the Management and Presidents Councils consistent with the Association-wide Strategic Plan adopted by the NCAA Executive Committee in April 2004. The 2004 plan contained many of the existing initiatives and priorities to ensure that the programs and results remain consistent with Division III objectives. However, significant changes occurred as the 2005 and 2006 plans linked the relationship to the Division III philosophy with each Association-wide goal and outlined a series of outcome measures for each goal. Another significant change occurred in 2006-07 as the Division III Strategic Initiatives Grant Program resources were funneled directly to Division III Conferences and the Association of Independents. With this change, many strategic initiatives previously administered at the NCAA national office moved to the local control of conferences and institutions. The localized program encourages collaboration and involvement of all Division III constituent group representatives in the planning, decision-making and accountability of programming and funding to achieve the goals established in the Division's Strategic Plan. Presidential oversight and accountability with the process and budget allocations, consistent with the legislated leadership role of presidents within conference governance, is paramount.

In 2008-09, the strategic plan underwent a format change to create a forward-looking document that highlights the goals and expectations of a budget biennium. Much of the reporting done in previous plans was moved into a Division III Annual Report, and standard committee operations are now reflected in each committee's policy and procedure guide (available on each committee's home page on ncaa.org). The plan clearly articulates the division's funding priorities, and explains when an initiative is funded by Division III, and when it is funded by a broader Association-wide budget. The plan also includes an appendix to show the philosophical or constitutional justification for all programs funded with Division III dollars.

In 2009-10, the plan was updated to highlight the division's near-term strategic priorities. Most 2009-10 priorities resulted from a series of presidentially authored white papers on membership growth published in September 2008. For 2010-12, the plan was updated based on the Division's release of a Strategic Positioning Platform and clearly defined the near- and medium-term goals the division needed to accomplish to be successful in embodying the platform.

For 2012-15, the plan was updated to reflect the Association's move to a three-year budget cycle.

After the 2012-15 budget cycle, the plan returned to a two-year budget cycle and emphasizes budget accountability and management.

With the start of the budget cycle in 2021, the councils approved a one-time, three-year budget cycle (2021-24) to align with the current CBS/Turner broadcast agreement that ends in 2023-24. In FY25, the division will return to its two-year budget cycle as well as adjust its mandated reserve policy from 50% of the annual revenue to a flat 15 million annually in addition to a five million event cancellation insurance policy.

In 2022, the Strategic Planning and Finance Committee recommended a new format for the strategic plan that better reflects the division's commitment to the student-athlete experience.

Division III Budget Policies

The Division will maintain the following budget policies. SPFC must recommend, with final approval from the Management and Presidents Councils, to change the policies.

- The division will have a two-year budget cycle unless a specific request by SPFC to alter.
- The budget will reflect the annual spend on championships and the Enrichment Fund with a priority on enhancing the student-athlete experience (approximately 80% of the budget annually will fund the division's 28 national championships).
- Only consider new budget enhancements in the last year of the current budget cycle unless SPFC determines there is extenuating circumstances.
- Annual mandated reserve is 50% of the annual revenue through FY24. In FY25, the mandated reserve moved to a flat \$15 million.
- Annually evaluate the need to purchase \$5 million in event cancellation insurance.

Division III Budget Initiatives (in priority order)

- a. Contractual obligations.
- b. Championships.
 - (1) Bracketing.
 - (2) Per diem allotment.
 - (3) Experience funding.
 - (a) Game operations (e.g., travel, officials, web streams, marketing, etc.).
 - (b) Student-athlete experience (e.g., trophies, mementos, banquets, etc.).
- c. Conference strategic initiatives grant.
- d. Diversity grants.
- e. Enrichment Fund programs.