



NCAA COMMON GROUND VIII EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
March 3-5, 2026, MEETING
Indianapolis, Indiana

MISSION AND OBJECTIVES

The Common Ground initiative was established in 2014 to provide LGBTQ individuals and individuals of faith at public and private NCAA member institutions, LGBTQ organizations and faith-based organizations an opportunity to discuss commonalities and differences and learn how to work more cohesively within athletics.

The mission of the Common Ground initiative is to create opportunities for intentional dialogue and relationship building for people of all faiths, gender identities, and sexual orientations. This approach aims to equip and support members of intercollegiate athletic programs to create and model common ground on their campuses.

The objectives for Common Ground VIII were to:

1. Build relationships with colleagues at NCAA institutions looking to create spaces of belonging for all student-athletes.
2. Share the mission, vision and benefits of the Common Ground initiative.
3. Build trust amongst colleagues at faith-based, private secular and public NCAA members institutions and the Common Ground Leadership Team.
4. Listen to and learn about what colleagues are facing on their campuses.
5. Share knowledge, skills and strategies for respectful dialogue on difficult topics.

OVERVIEW OF PROGRAM – DAY 1

1. **Welcome and Grounding.** NCAA staff and the program facilitator welcomed Common Ground VIII participants to the NCAA national office and provided an overview of the program's logistics, objectives, and guidelines. A founding member of the Common Ground initiative and member of the Common Ground Leadership Team (CGLT) reflected on the initiative's history, followed by another CGLT member who encouraged participants to fully engage in the brave and challenging dialogue ahead. Additional CGLT members honored the late Vice President Clyde Doughty Jr. of Bowie State University, a long-time member of the CGLT, who passed away in February.
2. **Context Arrival Pair Share.** Participants were asked to individually reflect on several questions about the personal, organizational and societal contexts that framed their participation in Common Ground VIII. They were then invited to reflect in pairs or small groups.

3. **Introductions.** Participants introduced themselves to one another and shared their reasons for attending Common Ground VIII. Additionally, they shared what made them hopeful about participating in Common Ground VIII. Some participants shared with the larger group.
4. **Common Ground Vision, Mission and Objectives.** The facilitator reviewed the updated Common Ground vision and mission that was revised by the CGLT in June 2025, as well as the objectives for Common Ground VIII.
5. **Macrolab Icebreaker.** Participants answered several questions in rotating pairs about the concept of belonging, about faith, gender identity and sexual orientation in sport, and about discomfort or tensions with any or all of those identities.
6. **Developing Communication Guidelines and Framing the Container.** Participants ideated, discussed, and agreed to several communication guidelines, with an emphasis on confidentiality, consent, clarity, respect, and the value of new and varied perspectives.
7. **Common Ground Activity.** Participants formed a circle and remained silent as the facilitator read a series of identities and beliefs. Those who identified with a statement—and felt comfortable disclosing—stepped forward or raised a hand. After several prompts, participants were invited to offer their own statements for the group to respond to. The activity created a visual representation of shared and unique identities, illustrating areas of common ground and, in some cases, moments where an individual stood alone in their experience.
8. **Pair Share/Large Group Discussion.** Participants engaged in two rounds of paired reflection: first with someone with whom they easily shared common ground, and then with someone with whom common ground was less immediate. The activity concluded with a large-group discussion synthesizing insights from both rounds.
9. **Home Group Time: Consulting Carousel (Part I).** Home groups—teams of three to five representatives from each institution—discussed their campus athletics culture related to faith, gender identity, and sexual orientation. These groups served as institutional teams with shared vision and networks, responsible for developing cohesive action plans to advance Common Ground on their campuses.
10. **Home Group Time: Consulting Carousel (Part II).** Home groups then participated in a consulting carousel, rotating between “hosting” and “visiting” roles. Host teams presented a challenge, while visiting teams posed clarifying questions and offered insights such as patterns observed, comparable experiences, and potential strategies. After each round, teams switched roles and repeated the consulting process.
11. **Adjournment.** The facilitator closed the first programming day with general announcements about Day 2.

OVERVIEW OF PROGRAM – DAY 2

1. **Welcome and Context Arrival.** The facilitator invited participants to reflect on their impressions, wellbeing, and mindset at the start of Day 2, then share their reflections in mixed pairs.
2. **Home Group Time: Campus Readiness.** Home groups discussed prompts related to campus readiness, relationships, assessment needs, and their preparedness to advance Common Ground on their campuses. These themes were then explored in a large-group discussion.
3. **Caucus Group Time (Part I).** The facilitator introduced caucus groups as spaces for connection and belonging among participants with shared identities. In these groups, participants engaged in peer conversation and support, reflecting on their Common Ground experience. Some later shared insights with the full group.
4. **The Reality of Power in Seeking Common Ground.** Participants examined the role of power in efforts to build common ground. Through open-table conversations and a large-group discussion, they explored the challenges and importance of creating common-ground spaces and how to recognize when such spaces emerge. The facilitator concluded by outlining key concepts of power dynamics: power over, power with, power to, and power within.
5. **Home Group Activity: Power Mapping.** Each home group engaged in an activity about creating a common ground space, energy and practice within their athletics departments. Home groups created a visual map showing individuals on their campuses who have power to influence, the degrees to which they each have power, and the likelihood that they will support facilitating a common ground space. The home groups were then tasked to develop strategies to address the elements of power. Following the activity, participants shared their findings with the large group.
6. **Dialogue Circles Activity.** The facilitator introduced core dialogue principles and behaviors that support productive exchange. Participants then engaged in “dialogue circles” to practice Common Ground dialogue and offer one another constructive feedback. In each round, one participant served as an observer and distributed behavior cards before the group responded to a prompt of their choice. While participants practiced the behaviors on their cards, the observer noted specific examples to share afterward. Groups then rotated roles and repeated the activity with a new prompt. The exercise concluded with a large-group reflection on their dialogue circle experience.
7. **Navigating Triggering Events in the Midst of Common Ground.** The facilitator defined a “trigger” as any internal or external stimulus that evokes an emotional response, such as surprise, disorientation, or heightened intensity. Participants then engaged in an exercise focused on navigating triggering moments while pursuing Common Ground. Working in groups of three, each person shared a mild-to-moderate trigger and later reflected on the

experience in a large-group discussion. The facilitator closed the activity by outlining four common responses to triggering events: fight, face, flight, and freeze.

8. **Adjournment.** The facilitator closed Day 2 of programming day with general announcements about Day 3.

OVERVIEW OF PROGRAM – DAY 3

1. **Checking in and Reconnecting.** The facilitator welcomed participants to the third and final day, revisiting the program’s purpose and guidelines. They checked in on participants’ feelings and progress, emphasizing the importance of self-care when engaging in challenging, in-depth conversations.
2. **Caucus Group Time.** Participants met in their caucus groups to check in with one another and discuss questions about their individual and home group experiences and learnings during Common Ground VIII.
3. **Re-entry to Campus.** A CGLT member shared their experience returning to campus after participating in a previous Common Ground program, encouraging participants and home teams to consider practical action steps—some simple—to maintain accountability and sustain Common Ground efforts on their campuses.
4. **Home Group Time: 30-60-90 Day Planning.** Home teams collaborated to develop 30-60-90-day action plans, drawing on program strategies and their experiences at Common Ground VIII to envision their return to campus. The activity concluded with a large-group session where teams shared examples of their plans.
5. **Final Thoughts, Appreciations and Closing.** Participants gathered in a circle as NCAA staff offered closing remarks, expressing appreciation for the group’s thoughtful engagement and encouraging continued commitment to building common ground. The facilitator then reaffirmed the leadership team’s commitment to ongoing engagement with participants and their institutions.

Common Ground VIII March 3-5, 2026, Meeting	
Facilitator:	
Tanya Williams, Authentic Coaching and Consulting	
Participants:	
American University	
Anderson College	
Bridgewater State University	
Brigham Young University	
DePaul University	
Hamline University	
Hampton University	
LeMoyne-Owen College	
Newberry College	
Randolph College	
Southern Virginia University	
University of Connecticut	
University of Dayton	
University of Illinois, Urbana Champaign	
Villanova University	
Common Ground Leadership Team in Attendance:	
Helen Carroll, Sports Project Consultant	
La Shonda Coleman, California State University, Northridge	
Liz Darger, Brigham Young University	
Kelsey Davis, Christian Athlete Circles	
Pat Griffin, University of Massachusetts, Amherst.	
Drew Martin, University of Texas at Austin	
Keadrick Peters, Bowie State University	
Tim Selgo, Mammoth Sports Consulting	
Amy Wilson, NCAA	
NCAA Staff in Attendance:	
Debbie Brown, Olivia Brown, Leah Kareti, Kat Lin, Ashlesha Lokhande, Felicia Martin, Jean Merrill, Gretchen Miron and Tyler Noragon.	