

NCAA Emerging Sports for Women Program Application Guide for Prospective Sports

Updated: June 2025

The NCAA adopted the Emerging Sports for Women program in 1994 based on recommendations from the NCAA Gender Equity Task Force. An NCAA survey conducted in the early 1990s showed that 20 years after Title IX was passed into law, female students had about 30 percent of the athletics participation opportunities offered by NCAA institutions. In 2022-23, female students had approximately 70,000 fewer athletics participation opportunities than men on [NCAA campuses](#). However, the five current emerging sports are one way to help close this gap and offered over 4470 participation opportunities to women athletes in all three divisions in 2023-24. The purpose of the program continues to be to grow meaningful intercollegiate sport participation opportunities for female student-athletes in sports that have the potential to reach the required number of varsity teams to be considered for NCAA championship status.

The Emerging Sports for Women program is managed by the Committee on Women's Athletics (CWA). The committee oversees the application process for potential emerging sports and recommends to each division through the NCAA governance structure to add or remove sports from the NCAA's Emerging Sports for Women program. Each division votes for which sports are Emerging Sports for Women in their division. The CWA also receives annual updates from current emerging sports and provides feedback and guidance as needed on their growth.

NCAA legislation creates a pathway for a National Collegiate Championship to be established in an emerging sport for women if at least 40 NCAA institutions are verified to sponsor the sport at the varsity level. If a sport reaches 40 programs, the Committee on Women's Athletics may recommend to the divisions that an emerging sport become a National Collegiate Championship. Each division would then vote on whether to add the sport as a championship sport through their governance structures.

Since the Emerging Sports for Women program was established in 1994, six sports have achieved NCAA championship status: rowing (1996); women's ice hockey (2000); women's water polo (2000); bowling (2003); and women's beach volleyball (2015) and women's wrestling (2025).

A sport is no longer considered an emerging sport once the sport has transitioned and is established as a championship sport. An emerging sport is limited to a 10-year period to become a championship sport unless it can demonstrate that steady growth has occurred during that time. NCAA institutions may use emerging sports to satisfy minimum sports-sponsorship requirements for all divisions and minimum financial aid awards for Divisions I and II when they are sponsored at the varsity level. If an institution lists an emerging sport on its NCAA sports sponsorship and demographics form, that sport must follow all applicable NCAA rules.

Application Requirements

Applicants pursuing membership in the NCAA Emerging Sports for Women program must submit a complete and accurate application to the Committee on Women's Athletics. **Completion of the application process does not guarantee acceptance into the Emerging Sports for Women program by the Committee on Women's Athletics or each division's governance structure.**

If an application is incomplete, inaccurate, or late, the application will not be considered. If an applicant sport is not accepted into the Emerging Sports for Women program, the applicant sport is eligible to re-apply two years after its most recent application (e.g., if a sport applies in Aug. 2025 and is denied, it would be eligible to re-apply in Aug. 2027).

Applications are typically submitted by one representative from the sport's national governing body or bodies. If a sport has multiple national governing bodies or organizations working together, the committee encourages the bodies to collaborate and submit one application for cohesiveness and consistency in the application. In addition, the national governing body representative should work with necessary partners and member schools to ensure that the application is complete and meets the requirements.

Prior to submitting an application, the national governing body representative must complete the Emerging Sport for Women [interest form](#) and set up a time to talk with NCAA staff to ensure that the sport has the necessary information to submit a worthwhile application and to clarify any questions.

The application period **opens May 1 and closes Aug. 1** each calendar year. Applications must be submitted using the [online application](#) process and must satisfy the following requirements:

- a. Demonstrate the applicant sport meets the definition of a sport as detailed in this guide (see "Definitions" section).
- b. Demonstrate that at least 20 NCAA active member institutions sponsor the applicant sport at the varsity **OR** club level and offer women student-athletes comprehensive and robust participation opportunities at the time of application. An NCAA institution is considered to sponsor a sport for purposes of this application if the institution's varsity or club team can demonstrate it has engaged or will engage **in at least five intercollegiate contests against the varsity or club programs of four-year, degree-granting collegiate institutions during the academic year in which the application is reviewed**. In individual sports, the institution's team shall include a minimum number of participants in each contest, as required per the sport's standardized rules. The NCAA institutions included in the application can demonstrate proper sponsorship of the applicant sport in two ways:

1. An NCAA institution must provide official contest and participant results. (Note: Results other than official contest and participant results received directly from the institution OR conflicting results will not be considered);

OR

2. An NCAA institution must provide either a set schedule of competition or official contest and participant results for the academic year in which the application is reviewed not later than **Jan. 2**. The schedule must be signed by the director of athletics (or the director's designee) AND the senior woman administrator.
- c. Provide at least 10 letters of commitment from 10 NCAA active member institutions that either sponsor the applicant sport at the varsity level at the time of application **OR** intend to sponsor the applicant sport at the varsity level during the academic year in which the application is reviewed. (Note: The letters of commitment may also be used to fulfill the requirement in Section B to demonstrate 20 NCAA active member institutions sponsor the applicant sport if they contain the required information.) Each letter must be signed by the respective institution's chancellor or president AND director of athletics AND senior woman administrator and include the following supporting materials:

1. Actual or proposed budget with specific line items.
2. Roster size.
3. Number of full-time and part-time coaches.
4. Description of practice and competition facilities.
5. Local and regional competition opportunities.
6. Implementation timeline to varsity status.
7. Relationship with sport governing body/organization.
8. Commitment to following NCAA health and safety guidance when at the varsity level.
9. Statement of commitment to gender equity in supporting the applicant sport on their campus.

Note: information submitted by NCAA member schools in Section C will be used for committee review only. It will not be shared with other entities or externally. If a member school has concerns about sharing this information, they may contact the NCAA office of inclusion contacts directly for assistance.

- d. Include suggested NCAA regulations (e.g., playing rules, playing and practice seasons; financial aid limits; coaching limits; and sport sponsorship minimums). Include additional data about the applicant sport in the following areas:

1. Data on most common injuries, injury rates, information about health and safety protocols, any protective equipment required in the sport and any other relevant health promotion efforts.
 2. Data of race and ethnicity of participants at the collegiate and youth level. If a sport is working on increasing the diversity of participants, they are encouraged to include information about these diversity efforts for the committee's consideration.
 3. Participant data at the high school, collegiate, and post-collegiate levels.
 4. Participant data for nonscholastic, high school, collegiate teams/programs (e.g., varsity, club, recreation and/or intramural participants).
- f. Include additional documentation (encouraged but not required) to supplement the application and demonstrate the sport's viability to grow meaningful intercollegiate sport participation opportunities for women student-athletes. Examples of additional documentation include, but are not limited to, the following:
1. Data on regional geography of sport.
 2. Confirmation of an established national collegiate club/varsity championship or future championship plans, including identification of host association and/or organization.
 3. Letters of support from NCAA conferences that sponsor or are interested in sponsoring the sport (strongly encouraged to include if an NCAA conference sponsors the sport).
 4. Letter from the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee if supporting the sport (e.g., classify the sport as an Olympic or Paralympic sport; national governing body for the sport; grants for sport participation).
 5. Letters from state high school associations that recognize the sport.
 6. Letters of support from coaches associations.
 7. Letters of support from professional sports organizations.
 8. Letters of support from other associations or organizations.

Note: Individual support letters and additional documents may be uploaded as a Word Document, PDF, etc. into the application.

Application Process and Timeline

The application process and timeline is as follows:

March 1: Updated application and/or evaluation criteria are available online for potential applicants.

June 1: Application opens for electronic submission.

Aug. 1: Deadline for submission of application and supplemental materials using the online application form. Submission due by 11:59 p.m. Eastern time.

September/October: Committee on Women's Athletics is informed of application(s) and establishes a review subcommittee(s) during the fall committee meeting.

September/October – December: Subcommittee meets and discusses the application in detail to complete its summary of findings.

December: Staff liaisons to the Committee on Women's Athletics provide a summary of preliminary findings to the applicant. The summary of findings may include an invitation for the applicant to attend the committee's winter meeting virtually.

February: Committee makes final decision on application. If invited, an applicant may attend the committee meeting virtually to discuss the application and the applicant sport's viability as an emerging sport for women.

No later than March 15: Applicant receives final decision, including whether the committee will recommend legislation to the divisions to add the applicant sport as an emerging sport for women through the appropriate governance and legislative processes.

April: The committee's recommendation to sponsor and adopt noncontroversial legislation to add the sport as an emerging sport for women is reviewed by the applicable governance committees in all three divisions. The committee recommends that the divisions utilize noncontroversial legislation to add emerging sports to the list effective Aug. 1 of the applicable year. If noncontroversial legislation is not used in a division, the traditional legislative process will ensue for adding the sport.

June/July: Review and possible action on noncontroversial legislation in final legislative form by divisional governance bodies.

By Aug. 1: If approved by the divisional governance bodies, the sport is added to the emerging sports for women list.

Application Review

The Committee on Women's Athletics will establish a subcommittee to evaluate the applicant sport. The subcommittee will review the quality of the application and consider several factors when reviewing the sport. The subcommittee will consider whether the sport has the potential to reach 40 varsity programs in the 10-year period including but not limited to the following:

- a. Growth potential at the youth, high school, college and post-collegiate levels.
- b. Economic viability of campuses to add and support the sport at the varsity level. including overall cost to run a program, facility availability and usage, overall sport costs, etc.
- c. NCAA governance, legislative and budget priorities in all three divisions.

- d. Potential to become a national collegiate championship at the varsity level within the 10-year period.
- e. Level of support from member institutions and conferences to sponsor the sport.
- f. The sport's health and safety principles.
- g. The sport's ability to abide by and promote gender equity principles.
- h. The sport's ability to contribute to and support diversity and inclusion efforts on campuses.
- i. Other applicant sports and sports currently in the Emerging Sports for Women program.
- j. Level of support from the sport's national governing body, national association or organization and their leadership of the sport.
- k. The Committee on Women's Athletics and NCAA staff will provide feedback on all submitted application materials and may request additional information from the applicant sport and member institutions and conferences that sponsor the sport if needed.

Application Reconsideration

Applicants may request reconsideration of a committee decision only if new information is presented that was not available at the time of the committee's decision. A reconsideration request shall be submitted by emailing or mailing a letter to the Committee on Women's Athletics via NCAA staff liaisons within 30-calendar days from the time a written decision is sent to applicants. An explanation must be included with the letter to clarify the reason(s) the new information was not originally available. Any additional or repetitive information that was originally available to applicant or the committee may not be submitted for reconsideration.

The chair of the Committee on Women's Athletics shall determine if the new information standard is met for all reconsideration requests. If the reconsideration standard is met, the Committee on Women's Athletics will reconsider the new information and render a decision based on all the information, including the new information submitted. If the chair of the committee determines that reconsideration standard is not met, then the reconsideration request shall be denied. Applications that are denied must wait two years after their most recent application to reapply.

Emerging Sports Governance and Legislative Process – Application Phase

If the Committee on Women's Athletics supports an applicant sport to be added to the Emerging Sports for Women program, the committee will make a recommendation to the appropriate

committees in Divisions I, II and III. Pursuant to governance and legislative processes, each division will determine whether an applicant sport will be added to the division's Emerging Sports for Women list and legislation. Each division has the legislative autonomy to determine if it will introduce legislation to add the sport. The divisions are not required to support the CWA's recommendation.

CWA encourages the divisions to consider using noncontroversial legislation or an immediate effective date when adding sports to the list to support their growth and allow schools to better support these sports as quickly as possible. Each division has the discretion to use noncontroversial legislation, immediate effective dates or the established legislative processes in each division when considering emerging sport legislation.

Once a division adopts legislation to add a sport to the emerging sport list, the legislation is effective for that sport per the effective date of the proposal. The sport then becomes a current emerging sport in the respective divisions and must follow all NCAA rules.

Appendix B is an overview of the emerging sports legislative process provided at the end of this document.

NCAA National Office Contacts

Contact NCAA national office staff with questions about the Emerging Sports for Women program.

General Inquiries and the Application Process

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Appendix

Appendix A: Definitions of Terms

The Committee on Women's Athletics defines several commonly used terms for the purpose of managing the Emerging Sports for Women program. The following terms **are not** NCAA legislated definitions unless they include specific NCAA bylaw citations. Usage of these definitions are for application purposes only.

Sport. A sport shall:

- a. Be defined as an institutional activity, sponsored at the varsity or club level, involving physical exertion for the purpose of competition against teams or individuals within an intercollegiate competition structure; and
- b. Operate under standardized rules with rating/scoring systems ratified by at least one official regulatory agency and/or governing body.

Emerging sport for women. An emerging sport for women is a sport that:

- a. Meets the definition of a sport;
- b. Is accepted and recognized by the NCAA (as approved by its divisional governance bodies) as an emerging sport for women;
- c. Provides additional athletics opportunities to female student-athletes; and
- d. Demonstrates the NCAA's commitment to gender equity among student-athletes.

Varsity intercollegiate sport. A varsity intercollegiate sport is a sport that has been accorded that status by the institution's president or chancellor or committee responsible for intercollegiate athletics policy and satisfies the following conditions:

- a. It is a sport that is administered by the department of intercollegiate athletics.
- b. It is a sport for which the eligibility of the student-athletes is reviewed and certified by a staff member designated by the institution's president or chancellor or committee responsible for intercollegiate athletics policy.
- c. It is a sport in which qualified participants receive the institution's official varsity awards.

Club sport. A club sport is a sport that has been accorded that status by an institution and satisfies the following conditions:

- a. It is a sport that has not been accorded varsity status.
- b. It is a sport in which student-athletes compete in intercollegiate athletics.

Sport sponsorship. An institution is considered to sponsor a sport if the institution's varsity or club team engages in at least five intercollegiate contests against the varsity or club programs of four-year, degree-granting collegiate institutions each year. In individual sports, the institution's

team shall include a minimum number of participants in each contest, as required per the sport's standardized rules.

Contest (DI and DII). A contest is any game, match, exhibition, scrimmage or joint practice session with another institution's team, regardless of its formality, in which competition in a sport occurs between an intercollegiate athletics team or individual representing a member institution and any other team or individual not representing the intercollegiate athletics program of the same member institution. (Division I Bylaw 17.02.2 and Division II Bylaw 17.02.2)

Contest (DIII). A contest is any game, match, exhibition, scrimmage or joint practice with another institution's or an outside team, regardless of its formality, in which competition in a sport occurs between an intercollegiate athletics team or individual representing a member institution and any other outside team or individual not representing the intercollegiate athletics program of the same member institution. (Division III Bylaw 17.02.2)

Date of Competition (DI and DII). A date of competition is a single date on which any game(s), match(es), meet(s), exhibition(s), scrimmage(s) or joint practice session(s) with another institution's team take place, regardless of its formality, between an intercollegiate athletics team or individual representing a member institution and any other team or individual not representing the intercollegiate athletics program of the same member institution. (Division I Bylaw 17.02.5 and Division II Bylaw 17.02.5)

Date of Competition (DIII). A date of competition is a single date on which any contest(s), with another institution or an outside team or individual, takes place. (Division III Bylaw 17.02.5)

Intercollegiate competition (DI). Intercollegiate competition is considered to have occurred when a student-athlete in either a two-year or a four-year collegiate institution does any of the following:

- a. Represents the institution against outside competition, regardless of how the competition is classified (e.g., contest, scrimmage, exhibition or joint practice session with another institution's team) or whether the student is enrolled in a minimum full-time program of studies;
 - b. Competes in the uniform of the institution, or, during the academic year, uses any apparel (excluding apparel no longer used by the institution) received from the institution that includes institutional identification; or
 - c. Competes and receives expenses (e.g., transportation, meals, housing, entry fees) from the institution for the competition.
- (Division I Bylaw 12.02.3).

Intercollegiate competition (DII). Intercollegiate competition occurs when a student-athlete in either a two-year or a four-year collegiate institution:

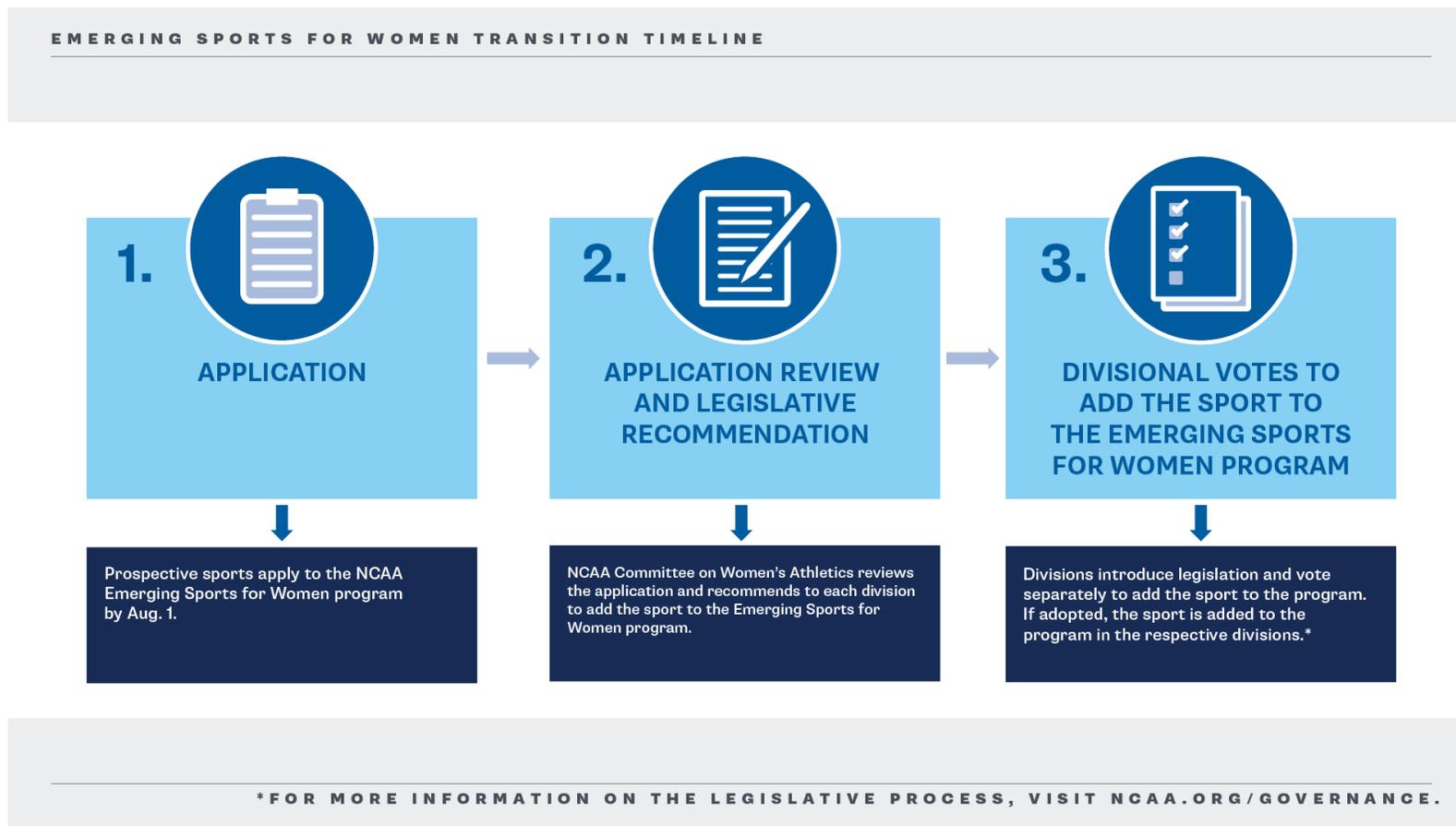
- a. Represents the institution in any contest against outside competition, regardless of how the competition is classified (e.g., scrimmage, exhibition or joint practice session with another institution's team) or whether the student is enrolled in a minimum full-time program of studies;
- b. Competes in the uniform of the institution or, during the academic year, uses any apparel (excluding apparel no longer used by the institution) received from the institution that includes institutional identification;
- c. Competes and receives expenses (e.g., transportation, meals, housing or entry fees) from the institution for the competition;
- d. Competes in outside competition as a member of a club team at a two-year or four-year collegiate institution, provided the institution sponsors the sport on the varsity level.
(Division III Bylaw 17.02.8)

Intercollegiate Competition (DIII). Intercollegiate competition is considered to have occurred when a student-athlete in either a two-year or a four-year collegiate institution does any of the following:

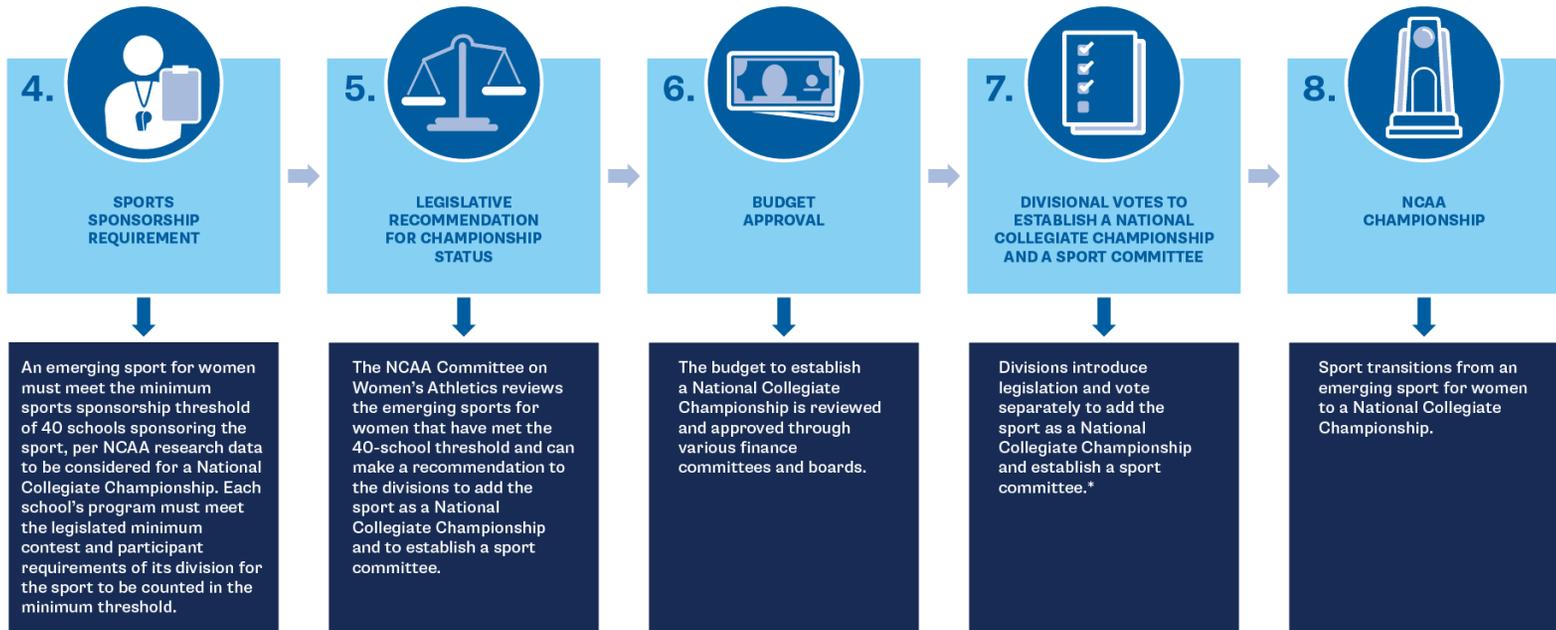
- a. Competes while representing the institution in any contest against outside competition, regardless of how the competition is classified (e.g., scrimmage, exhibition or joint practice session with another institution's team) or whether the student is enrolled in a minimum full-time program of studies; or
- b. Competes and receives expenses (e.g., transportation, meals, housing, entry fees or uniforms, apparel or equipment purchased and still in use by the institution) from the institution for the competition (see Bylaw 16.11.1.9 for regulations governing the use of equipment during the summer).
(Division III Bylaw 17.02.9)

Appendix B: Legislative Process

Below is an overview of the Emerging Sports for Women transition timeline:



EMERGING SPORTS FOR WOMEN TRANSITION TIMELINE - CONTINUED



* FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS, VISIT [NCAA.ORG/GOVERNANCE](https://www.ncaa.org/governance).