



# Your Time To Shine

A resource guide to staging conference championship events with community engagement in mind

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As an institution or conference, what does community engagement mean to you? Develop your vision, and align it with your conference values.

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Determine the right connections, and begin building those relationships. There's nothing like in-person contact to get things off on the right foot.

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You've started the communication engine, but it's vital to press the accelerator – even if the event is still several months away.

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Need some ideas for the run of show? We have the participant manual, the timing sheets, the blueprints for conducting clinics, and everything else that is tangible to the event itself.

### SECTION 5: Game Time

Now it's finally time to show off the lively, civil and entertaining game environment that Division II is all about.

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Think you're done? What about next year? It's never too early to debrief about what's in the rearview mirror and start peering out your windshield to what's next.



## WHY COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT MATTERS

In July 2012, the Northern Sun Intercollegiate Conference was fortunate to reach an agreement with Sanford Health and the city of Sioux Falls, South Dakota, to host the men's and women's conference basketball tournaments at the newly built Sanford Pentagon.

While this decision was a significant change for the conference (it was the first time the tournaments had been held outside the state of Minnesota since 2000), our sights were set on creating an event that was about much more than basketball by fully engaging with a community in the conference footprint.

As a representative of Division II, the tournament provides an opportunity to promote what we as a conference have to offer and what we as a conference believe and value. We are able to showcase what Division II is all about by taking an already popular event and expanding its audience.

We were fortunate to receive a Division II Membership Fund grant to assist with managing expenses during the initial year of the tournament community engagement initiative in 2014. We believed in what we were doing and knew that from this engagement activity a blueprint could be drawn for other institutions and conferences to use in actively engaging with communities in their footprint. With the blueprint complete, and a successful maiden voyage behind us, we are eager to share our experience with the whole of Division II.

The success of this, and any, community engagement activity is not possible without the tireless efforts of community leaders, conference and national office staff and institutional personnel. An event of this magnitude requires teamwork and dedication to achieving the goal of an exemplary event for student-athletes and coaches and immersion into the community.

During the planning stages, we found new partners that were excited to join forces with our conference because a community engagement activity is a win for everyone involved. Institutional personnel volunteered their time and shared their expertise, strengthening an already solid relationship between institutions and their conference.

Our friends at the NCAA national office helped us stage what turned out to be a terrific event, and now they have assembled this guide as a collection of tools to take you from start to finish as you transform your conference tournaments into community events that have a lasting impact. The ideas included are a combination of new and borrowed from already successful engagement activities. This is a collaborative effort designed to have a collective impact for the Division II family.

As you embark on your own community engagement activity, remember that the communities in your conference footprint likely know a lot about your schools, but maybe not as much about you as a conference. Conference postseason tournaments – the star of your calendar of events – provide the opportunity for you and your institutions to shine.

So, let's get started!

*Erin Lind, Commissioner  
Northern Sun Intercollegiate Conference*



## SECTION 1

# Developing Your Vision

Division II schools and conferences should actively engage with their communities to not only help drive attendance at athletics contests but also foster relationships with community members and develop more of a shared civic experience.

If you've cracked open this resource guide, odds are you're planning ahead for an event you want to improve by having it truly engage your community.

First of all, good for you – we're glad you're here!

Secondly, chances are that your conference members already have conducted many community engagement events locally, and that perhaps even you as a conference have tried this "combining postseason tournaments with community engagement" once or twice before, maybe even with great success. If so, we hope you'll add to this resource guide with good ideas of your own.

But if you're starting from scratch, we suggest the first thing for you to do as a conference is to decide what your membership collectively represents from a community perspective. You probably already have established a "competitive" brand for your league based on the quality of athletics at your institutions, but what characteristics and attributes beyond great competition do you want the thousands of people in your conference footprint to take away every time they attend one of your events?

You also probably already know that community engagement is much more than just setting up a few clinics and visiting a few classrooms. Community engagement means establishing a welcoming presence in the community – a give-and-take approach in which your athletics events serve as the attraction but the events surrounding them provide the message.

As such, what's your message *as a conference*? If you're holding an event within your conference footprint but not on the campus of a member school, would the people attending know what you stand for as a conference?

If you can't answer those questions, they would be good ones to pose at your next league meeting. And even if you can answer them, are you confident that everyone at your member institutions would answer the same way?

We're not suggesting that you write a mission statement, but it's a good idea to have your membership understand the conference's vision for community engagement. It's also critical for that the vision to be followed consistently every time your members (or the conference collectively) conduct a community engagement event.



### NEED SOME HELP?

Here's what we recommend:

#### Develop your "why"

- At your next set of conference meetings, ask people why they think it's necessary to engage with your communities. Do you have a moral obligation or civic duty to give back? Is it because it's a fun and creative thing to do? Is it merely because it's the *right* thing to do? Figuring out the *why* of community engagement is a good place to start.

#### Review the practical applications

- Part of the why should be because community engagement makes good business sense. After all, many of the community members you engage with might well be your future students and student-athletes. And if you're staging a community engagement event as a conference, what a great opportunity to let prospective students know the values your league represents.
- Part of the why also is the old "butts in seats" mantra. As an institution or conference sponsoring intercollegiate athletics, you have an obligation to attract as many people as possible to witness the extraordinary talents of your student-athletes. Bigger crowds make for better student-athlete experiences. Engaging your communities helps grow your fan base!

#### Make sure everyone is on board

- A vision is only as good as the glasses everyone wears. Make sure all your members understand what the conference stands for when it comes to community engagement, and that they are able to articulate it.
- Involve your alumni and corporate partners!

#### Teamwork, baby!

- Consider establishing a representative "community engagement committee" or leadership team composed of athletics personnel and student-athletes at your member schools (SAAC reps would be a good idea). Just think of all the great ideas that group will bring to the table, since they'll likely have been involved in several community engagement events already. Plus, this group can help keep your conference message consistent from event to event.

#### Develop a motto

- Nothing builds teamwork like a good motto. Charge the community engagement committee with proposing several mottos that capture the essence of your conference's community engagement vision and put them to a vote. It could be a fun way to get everyone on board!

## SECTION 2

# The Building Blocks of Building Relationships



So you've developed your vision for community engagement and you've got some mojo going. If you're fortunate enough to have already targeted an event – and you know where it is and who's hosting it – now you can really start making some progress.

Perhaps you've been at this location before and already have an army of supporters and volunteers who know what community engagement buttons to push. But if you, your conference or your site is a rookie at this sort of thing, then we've got some tips for you.

First (and maybe even second and third), *don't be afraid to ask for help!* If you're not an expert at community engagement, don't feel bad – you're not alone. Fortunately, though, you have experts at your disposal, and the best news is *they want to help you!*

Since this section is all about the building blocks of building relationships, the first place to start is with the NCAA national office. Don't assume that the folks there are too busy to answer the phone. The Division II staff is eager to help, and staff members have the knowledge to get your initiative off on the right foot. Tell them what you want to do and the resources you have to work with, and the staff will

guide you. They may even help you get more resources.

That is what happened with the Northern Sun Intercollegiate Conference. Officials there applied for and received a grant from the Division II Membership Fund to supplement community engagement activities during the 2014 NSIC men's and women's postseason basketball tournaments in Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

The \$7,000 grant helped fund:

- Transportation for student-athletes to visit schools and the Boys and Girls Clubs
- Game tickets for elementary school students
- Clinic basketballs and T-shirts
- T-shirts and other giveaways for in-game promotions
- 50 gym bags to distribute during Boys and Girls Club visits
- Tickets, gifts and concessions for Make-A-Wish families honored during the games
- Advertising purchased via local newspaper, TV and radio outlets

The NCAA national office staff also can guide you on how to build the relationships you'll need to conduct a successful event. Again, using the Northern Sun as an



## SECTION 2



example, the conference engaged representatives from the following entities:

- The two host institutions in Sioux Falls (Augustana College and the University of Sioux Falls)
- The arena's corporate sponsors (Sanford Health)
- The Local Organizing Committee
- The Sioux Falls superintendent of schools
- Officials from the South Dakota branch of Make-A-Wish
- Administrators from the Sioux Falls Boys and Girls Clubs
- Members of the Air Force Reserve in Sioux Falls

The NSIC staff held in-person meetings with all those folks about six months before the tournaments. Those meetings led to additional contacts with other organizations and new community engagement relationships.

We urge you to develop a similar “outreach wish list” and get the meeting ball rolling early. The more communication you have with the people you’ll be relying on, the better your event will be.

### BUILDING YOUR FOUNDATION

So, congratulations – you’ve got a plan *and* you’ve got some planners assembled. Now, what should you plan on accomplishing at this meeting we want you to have so far in advance of the event?

First, it’s a good idea to make sure everyone’s missions align. That is, rather than assume for example that the

Boys and Girls Clubs are just joining you as a favor, find out what they want out of the experience. Odds are, the desired outcomes will be similar, but it’s a good strategy to get everyone’s cards on the table right away.

Second, establish contacts/liaisons who will carry the relationships throughout the event (and hopefully even beyond). It’s a good idea to match conference reps with various community groups. This is another good reason to have established a conference-wide vision for community engagement (see Section 1), so that your liaisons can activate it during times like these.

Third, start drafting a “run of show.” Even this far in advance, you’ll have a general idea of how you want the event to go. Most people at the table will have gone through something like this before, so the brainstorming from previous experiences will naturally produce a preliminary schedule of events. It’s a good idea to appoint a manager for the run of show – most likely the sports information director from the school that is hosting the tournament. That person will be familiar with game management anyway, so he or she is an ideal choice for this role.

Fourth, don’t leave the meeting without everyone clearly understanding what’s at stake. Make sure your contacts are established, that your visions align – and that this won’t be the last time you see each other! In our next section, we’ll explain that while this initial meeting is important, it’s the ones that are to come that will decide whether your event will be a success.

*Here’s the kind of feedback you’re shooting for when you establish community relationships for your event.*

*This was a wonderful experience for our kids. Each of our 15 classrooms had an hour with one of the University of Sioux Falls student-athletes, and each of those student-athletes read a book to the students, answered questions, signed autographs, and spent time in small groups.*

*I’m not sure we can ever put into words or will ever truly know the positive impact that this engagement might have on any one of our students. The opportunity for them to interact with a role model from within our community was priceless. The Sioux Falls student-athletes were examples of what hard work, persistence and following one’s dreams is all about!*

– Jayne Zielenski, principal at Laura B. Anderson Elementary in Sioux Falls, after the University of Sioux Falls women’s basketball team visited the school during the NSIC tournament

## SECTION 3

# Maintaining the Communication Loop

Sometimes when you tell people to plan ahead (as we urged in Section 2), they'll argue that if you start planning too far out, you'll forget what you decided when the time actually comes to play ball.

If you're one of those people, we *still* think you should plan ahead, but we also think you should maintain those relationships you worked so hard to establish with *ongoing* communication after the first connection occurs. That keeps everyone in the loop longer and gives everyone time to readjust when you get tossed a logistical curve ball along the way (which invariably happens).

Would the people attending the tournaments have noticed? Maybe not, but it certainly would have been an opportunity lost. Anyone who has any experience in event management knows it's a rare bird indeed when an event goes off without a hitch. We all know that stuff happens, but you need to communicate regularly to ensure that the "stuff" never hits the fan!

Once you conduct your site visit or have that initial meeting between conference reps and community stakeholders (hopefully you can have that meeting *during* the site visit), you should plan on the contacts/liaisons

you established corresponding with their respective stakeholders regularly in the months leading up to the event.

If your event is in March, for example, then you ought to start corresponding regularly in January. And they don't have to be in-person meetings, either. Just a phone call or email exchange every couple of weeks should be enough to maintain the relationship and keep everyone in the loop – and allow you to troubleshoot when necessary.

### WHAT SHOULD YOU ADDRESS IN THESE EXCHANGES?

Well, whatever correspondence you set up between the conference/institutional reps and the designated organizational contacts

should be designed to review the run of show and make sure things are still OK as planned. Each time you touch base, make sure *you* know – and that *they* know – what you're going to do when the time comes to execute. (Check out our sample agenda for these sessions.)

Remember, it's hard to overcommunicate. The last thing you want to hear after something goes wrong is, "Well, that wouldn't have happened if I had known about it." Or worse: "Well, that wouldn't have happened if *you* had told me about it." Yikes.

Don't worry that you're "nagging" your contacts with this regular correspondence, either. They have enough to do as it is, and they'll appreciate you taking the communication reins!



### HERE'S AN EXAMPLE

After the Northern Sun held its initial planning meeting with conference reps, facility people and community stakeholders in October 2013, and before the event was staged in March 2014, there was an unexpected change in leadership at the Sioux Falls Boys and Girls Clubs. As it happened, the outgoing executive director didn't communicate very well with his replacement about how the Boys and Girls Clubs were going to provide posters for teams participating in the upcoming NSIC tournaments. So we had to make up for lost time late in the game to make sure that actually happened. But if we hadn't set up regular correspondence at the outset, chances are there wouldn't have been any posters at all.



## SECTION 4

# Pre-Event Prep

As an athletics administrator, chances are you have been a student-athlete either in high school or in college. That means you probably faced a big rivalry game or competition where there was plenty on the line, and the weeks and days leading up to the match got a little more intense along the way.

Well, the stage you're at with this community engagement event you're working on is kind of like that, only if you've done the communicating we've urged you to do to this point, you're probably not under as much pressure as when you were an athlete. After all, consider yourself as the head coach of this community engagement team. Your job is to motivate your team and put them in the best position to succeed. If you've done that, then all the team has to do is execute properly and "voila!" You've got a victory!

In the weeks leading up to the event, here are some basic steps you'll want to take.

**1. Designate a manager for the run of show.** As we mentioned in Section 2, it's a good idea to appoint someone to manage the run of show – most likely the host institution's SID. And by "manager," we don't mean "czar," either. It's important for everyone to have frequent access to the run of show and to have the ability to change it when warranted, so you don't want someone who's overly controlling as your manager. At the same time, you do want someone who is good at collaborating and organizing. There are a lot of moving parts to this thing, and you need a good person managing the script.

**2. Make sure everyone on your internal team has a run of show.** As with any good event-management strategy, you want to ensure that everyone in the gym knows what will happen during pregame, at every timeout, at every minute during halftime, and during postgame ceremonies. (Or if it's a sport other than basketball, then plan what will happen during similar breaks.)

**3. Decide how you will communicate.** You've probably been emailing each other until now, but when the event tips off, that mode of communication won't be immediate enough. Determine whether you'll be using cell phones or radios during the event, and plan to arm the right people with those tools.

**4. Review responsibilities.** Even if people have heard

what they're supposed to do 100 times, 101 can't hurt. Make sure each one of your internal staff members has everything he or she needs. And don't assume that people know what *your* expectations are. Tell them, and make sure they understand your expectations.

**5. Have a Plan B.** While it may not sound like good karma to anticipate things going wrong, you don't want to be the one holding the bag when they do. If you've done this

game-management thing before, you probably know that technology – while often your best friend – is also a primary culprit. But you've got a Plan B, right? So when the video you've cued up on the Jumbotron doesn't play during the first timeout, don't sweat it. You've got backup music or some other alternative in place to keep the positive game environment going.

**6. Assign community performers appropriately.** While it's not always possible or practical, it's a good idea to evaluate schools groups or individuals you've got lined up to perform. If you have a volunteer or community pep band, what's their repertoire? Can they be "peppy"? Do their abilities allow them to provide the entertainment you need for that segment of the event? Are you confident in your choices for the national anthem? While it's tricky to "evaluate" or "audition" people who are doing this out of the goodness of their hearts, at the same time you don't want to put them in a position where they might embarrass themselves – or you.

**7. Develop a promotions plan.** Determine local media outlets and assign people to contact them in

order to promote your event. Your conference member SID will already have media lists available, and some will have media who will travel to follow specific teams. If your event is at a neutral site, you may have to make an additional effort to promote your event locally. Use your Local Organizing Committee to your advantage.

That's not an exhaustive list by any means, but it's a good foundation and should at least help you to begin covering your bases. It's a good way to minimize the stress of event management, too. Part of what makes for good community engagement after all is a smooth run of show. Make 'em think you can do this stuff in your sleep. (Then after the event is over, maybe you can actually get some sleep!)



## SECTION 5

# Game Time

OK, you've built up to the crescendo, and you've worked hard to ensure that a splendid time is guaranteed for all. Now it's time to roll out the lively, civil and entertaining game environment for which Division II is known!

What's that – did you say you're not familiar with the mantra, "lively, civil and entertaining"? Well, then, here's a brief history lesson for you.

Division II was created in 1973 when the NCAA established its current three-division structure, but it wasn't until about 10 years ago that Division II really began defining what it was all about. Before then, Division II often was perceived as the "middle child" between Divisions I and III. But in the mid-2000s in an effort to better define its membership parameters and promote the division as a unified whole, Division II launched an identity campaign that produced the six attributes we're so familiar with today: Balance, Learning, Service, Passion, Sportsmanship and Resourcefulness.

Part of that campaign was a realization that Division II institutions – because their footprints tend to be so regional – rely heavily on their communities for their fan base and support structure. Plus, since athletics often is the "front porch" for institutions, Division II wanted its members to have a welcoming platform to engage those communities.

OK, so what does that have to do with game environment? Well, if you're depending on your community for support, and if you want your community relationships to be truly interactive – and if you've set up your front porch to welcome your community into your campus – then you better provide lively, civil and entertaining athletics events once community members are inside.

So what does "lively, civil and entertaining" mean? It's simple: If you're bringing a whole lot of people to your games, how do you ensure that they'll want to come back? Will they come back if the seating at your venue is uncomfortable? Will they come back if they have to wait in line for 20 minutes at the concession stand? Will they come back if the music you play makes kids say to their parents, "Mommy and Daddy, what does *that* mean?"

The games themselves aren't your challenge. Division II athletics is big-time, competitive and chock-full of highly skilled student-athletes who put on a good show every time they take the field or court. But it's what surrounds that show that you need to pay attention to.

### Seating and Concessions

- Is the seating in your venue comfortable/easily accessible?
- If you have designated seating areas, are they positioned appropriately? (For example, where do you place the pep bands? Are the cheerleaders blocking sight lines?)
- Are your concession stands accessible?
- Do you have enough human resources devoted to avoid long lines?
- Review the quality of the food. Are there healthy choices?
- Is what you're offering reasonably priced?



### Atmosphere

- Take advantage of your video boards! Institutions and conferences are making a social media splash by providing a computer in the lobby for people to post tweets and Instagram photos that transfer right to the video board in the arena. Go to [tagboard.com](http://tagboard.com) to find out more about this new twist to fan engagement.
- Is your atmosphere "civil"? In other words, do your fans cheer for their teams without berating their opponents?
- Do you have staff or student body representatives positioned to maintain a civil environment or to address an issue if one develops?
- Do some of your teams have coaches who are known to use "colorful language" during games? If so, are you comfortable having young fans be exposed to that sort of thing?

### Entertainment

- How do you "engage" fans during games? Do you have the appropriate music and promotions for timeouts and halftime?
- How do you get the youth in your community actively involved with your event? Make sure the ball boys and girls, and other positions in which kids can contribute, are members of your community.
- Do you have enough entertainment planned to keep everyone busy? Remember, the more down time you have during games, the more likely it is for someone to act out in a negative manner. Try to make sure that there's never a dull moment!



## SECTION 6

# Postgame



Congratulations! Your event was a smashing success! You just spent several of the most rewarding days of your life strutting your conference's stuff. The contests were competitive and exciting, your attendance was great, and each of your member schools made an impact on thousands of people, which means you as a conference left a positive, indelible mark on an entire community.

So you're done, right? Nope. We wouldn't want to let you off *that* easy now, would we?

You've all probably come away from events that you've either been a part of or managed yourselves and said, "Well, I wish we had done such and such differently," or "Man, we have to remember not to do such and such that way again next year." And then time passes and you forget what you swore you'd remember. You've all gone through that, haven't you?

That's why as soon as your event ends you should start *formally* planning for the next one, even though your brain is saying, "Let's take a few weeks off." And that means convening your core group, talking things through and writing down what you want to change – perhaps even brainstorming about how to make those changes. That way, when time passes, instead of scrambling to remember what you'd thought of months ago, you can pat yourselves on the back for having a new plan at your fingertips.

There's an old saying in the fundraising business that

features the letters "SW": *Some Will Give You Money*; *Some Won't*; and *So What?* Why that's relevant to your own debriefing is because you shouldn't get hung up on the "Some Won't" part. Instead, focus on the "WN," as in "*What's Next?*"

Let's assume that you've taken notes throughout the event on how things went. If so, then during your debriefing, ask the team what worked, what didn't work, and what *really* didn't work?

If something didn't work and you can tweak it, OK, but don't get hung up on stuff that didn't work if you can replace it or do it better next time. In other words, acknowledge what happened, address the easy stuff, and discard the failures.

The important takeaway here is that you must be willing to change. There's another old saying that goes something like: "If you always do what you always did, you will always get what you always got."

Community engagement is an ongoing pursuit. The good news is that because you had the passion and vision in place, because you communicated so well throughout the process and because you had a team that was willing to go the extra mile to make it all work, your community engagement event most likely was the best thing you've ever done as a conference.

It was indeed your time to shine, and you left a "bright" impression!