

NCAA Strategic Initiatives Conference Grant Program Best Practices Guide with Q&A

This guide has been developed to illustrate best practices in the planning and reporting of conference grant expenses. Included are standards established by the NCAA Division III Strategic Planning and Finance Committee around expected business practices. The guide includes reminders of commonly overlooked policies, as well as commonly asked questions. Ideas for specific programs or initiatives by tier may be found in the grant policy and procedure guide. All grant related resources are available and consistently updated at the [Division III Strategic Initiatives Grant Program homepage](#).

General Reporting Policy Reminders

This section of the guide provides conferences with concepts to consider before entering information into the impact form.

The conference grant impact form is the conference's report back to Division III about how it used Division III funds. So, while it may be helpful to note that a conference spent its own funds on a particular initiative, those dollars should not be included in the 'amount spent' questions on the form.

If the conference spent Tier Three funds on either Tier One or Tier Two themes, these funds should still be reported in Tier Three.

If the conference has a remaining unused amount of funds amounting to \$300 or less within a particular tier, those dollars will not 'carry over' for required usage in the following year. In addition, the conference will not be required to provide a plan for future usage of those dollars, nor will the system flag those dollars for an explanation. Any tier with a carryover amount of \$301 or more will continue to require an explanation and plan for future usage. Also, if a conference was granted a \$1,000+ carryover from the previous year, it does not have to report on those funds within the associated tier; rather, the conference will be prompted to answer a question about its use of the prior year's rollover funds in Tier Four (the administrative tier).

Rollover requests for unused dollars beyond \$301 in any tier should include a specific plan for future fund use. If a request does not clearly explain the planned fund use, it will be denied and the conference will be required to send the monies back to the NCAA.

Q&A for the General Reporting Policy Reminders.

Q: What must be submitted at the end of the year?

A: By August 1, each conference must submit its impact form describing how the past year's funds were spent. Also, by October 15, the conference must submit a third party review form concerning conference grant accounting documents. The committee and Division III governance staff will review the impact forms. As noted in the policies and procedures document, if it is determined that a conference allocated or an institution used funds in a manner inconsistent with grant program policy, one of four actions will be taken:

1. Issue a warning that such fund use shall not be permitted in the future;

2. Deduct the misused funds from the conference's next annual grant allocation;
3. Require the conference to reimburse the NCAA in an amount equal to the misused funds. The conference is responsible for this reimbursement; however, it may require the institution to submit funds to the conference; or
4. Audit fund use and take other steps as deemed necessary by the staff or committee.

Q: Who is responsible for submitting the annual impact form?

A: This responsibility rests with the conference office. In addition to a signature from the conference office upon submission, the impact form will also be signed by the person to whom the commissioner directly reports (for most leagues, that person is the conference president). Conferences will be assessed a fine for late submission of grant forms, as detailed in the policies and procedures document.

The conference office will also be checking a box that indicates that the grant usage has been shared and reviewed by a senior woman administrator (SWA), faculty athletics representative (FAR), and conference SAAC member. These four individuals will receive an email copy of the final report for their review; however, are not required to submit their electronic signature.

Q: Will the conference's grant submission be audited?

A: Following a review of the third party review form, the committee and staff reserve the right to request further details and information on the allocation and use of funds at any time.

Q: Is the conference office required to receive and file receipts from grant recipients?

A: For Internal Revenue Service purposes, it is critical to distinguish and have appropriate documentation for disbursements such as "grants for research" and "reimbursements for out of pocket expenses" (not taxable, if receipts justify expenses). Conferences may develop a spreadsheet itemizing travel, lodging, meals, registration, fees and miscellaneous, and also request receipts for items over \$25. Use of a spreadsheet might prove beneficial particularly for grants allocated for individual travel or presenters in Tiers One and Two. It should be noted that the third party review form does require that receipts be included, as detailed on the submission form.

Q: If, for example, a FAR is issued \$500 to travel to the FARA Annual Meeting, does he or she have to provide receipts to justify expenses?

A: Yes, receipts should be provided to the conference office for any expense over \$25. In addition, conferences also should request that an expense form be completed and returned. A sample expense form can be found at the [Division III Strategic Initiatives Grant Program homepage](#).

Q: What if all funds are not used in a given year in each tier?

A: Unused funds must be returned to the NCAA with two exceptions:

Exception No. 1: If the conference has a remaining unused amount of funds amounting to \$300 or less within a particular tier, those dollars will not ‘carry over’ for required usage in the following year. In addition, the conference will not be required to provide a plan for future usage of those dollars, nor will the system flag those dollars for an explanation. Any tier with a carryover of \$301 or more will continue to require an explanation and plan for future usage. A conference may retain any unused funds totaling \$1,000 or less (across all three tiers combined), provided that the conference submits its justification and plans for the future use of the excess funds in the conference’s impact form. This does not require committee approval.

Exception No. 2: A conference may retain unused funds in excess of \$1,000 (across all three tiers combined), provided that the conference submits a detailed plan to the committee regarding how the excess funds (beyond \$301 in any single tier) will be used and the committee approves the plan. Conferences may pre-emptively request the committee authorization to pool funds across years of the grant program, as long as the funds are to be allocated within the four-year grant cycle (e.g., 2018-22).

Q: What happens if conferences do not request all resources appropriated in a given year (e.g., conference A is allocated \$44,000 and requests only \$30,000)?

A: The excess funds would go into the Division III reserve. The committee will not reallocate grant funds to other conferences within any given year.

Q: May a conference or the Association of Independents request to carry over more than \$1,000 to support multi-year programming?

A: Conferences may pre-emptively request the committee authorization to pool funds across years of the grant program, as long as the funds are to be allocated within the four-year grant cycle (e.g., 2018-22). Conferences may not request additional resources to be distributed within any single year, but rather could save toward a future large expenditure.

The Planning Process – Q&A.

Q: What role should chancellors and presidents play in the grant process?

A: In addition to the required signature from the individual to whom the conference commissioner reports (which is typically the league president), conference presidents should maintain general oversight and accountability of the grant process and its associated budget allocations.

Q: How should conferences establish policies to govern the distribution of funds and the selection of grant recipients?

A: A broad-based, conference-wide dialogue should occur and each Tier One constituent group should participate in the planning process. Conferences should not simply rely on the conference executive to "hand pick" recipients. As an example, the conference could designate a representative of each of the required signature groups to provide counsel on grant requests and selection processes. Involving other campus constituents (e.g., student- athlete affairs, coaches, and student personnel) also may be appropriate.

Q: Are provisional/reclassifying members eligible to receive resources from grant programs?

A: This is a matter of conference discretion. Only active Division III members are included in financial allocations that determine distribution amounts; however, conferences that have provisional/reclassifying members may choose to share grant resources with the provisional/reclassifying members.

Q: What if an institution is a member of two conferences?

A: Conferences that have members involved with two conferences will receive a "one-half member" allocation of resources (Tiers One and Two). Institutions in more than one conference should discuss their role in the resource allocation process with each conference. Note that with the adoption of NCAA Division III Proposal No. 2012-2, there shall not be any new conferences entering into such an arrangement, but relationships existing on or before August 1, 2012, will be honored.

Q: My institution is an independent but not a member of the Association of Division III Independents. How do I access grant resources?

A: The Association of Division III Independents has agreed to manage and support the resource allocations for all independent institutions. Contact the NCAA grant administrator for more information.

Q: May a conference or the Association of Division III Independents request "additional resources" beyond its allocation for any reason?

A: Conferences may pre-emptively request committee authorization to pool funds across years of the grant program, as long as the funds are to be allocated within the four-year grant cycle (e.g., 2014-18). Conferences may not request additional resources to be distributed within any single year, but may save toward a future large expenditure.

Q: May a conference take any portion of the grant, or a particular tier, and send each member an equal amount or rotate annually in some fashion?

A: Yes, but while that may be administratively convenient on the front end, the conference is still responsible to meet all annual, biennial and quadrennial funding requirements.

Tier One.

Policy Reminders:

Conferences that repeatedly do not support each of the required groups in Tier One will face a reduction in funding. As detailed in the policies and procedures document, fines shall be assessed after two consecutive years of nonsupport of the FAR, ethnic minority or SWA categories.

Tier One is intended to support attendance at the specific list of professional development events included in the grant policy and procedures document. Conferences shall spend at least \$1,000 annually in support of member sports information directors (SIDs) as a result of additional funding that was added into the Tier One category in 2014 to support this specific initiative.

Q&A for Tier One.

Q: If a meeting is held in the hometown of our attendee and we don't need to pay travel expenses, may our conference use that allotment elsewhere in Tier One?

A: If you have a member attending a meeting as planned, you are clearly following the strategic plan. Feel free to use the money in a justifiable way to support other constituents in Tier One; however, also note this individual's attendance within the annual impact form submission.

Q: What expenses does the NCAA cover for the commissioner meeting and SID meeting and what expenses must come from the conference?

A: The Division III budget will continue to cover on-site expenses such as meeting room charges, audio visual costs, and food and beverage fees. The commissioner and SID may use grant funds to pay for travel, lodging and incidentals not included with the meeting.

Q: How could a conference develop a process for distribution of the funds to support FARs?

A: The group of FARs within a conference could gather to consider a priority ranking for allocation of resources and develop a process consistent with the previous Division III FARA Grant Program:

1. Top priority: Any newly appointed FAR in the conference.
2. Second priority: FAR that has not attended FARA within the last four years.

A conference also may decide that they have other priorities that best meet its needs. Whatever the case, the constituent groups most affected should have ample opportunity to develop an approach that works best for them. Regular conference participation in the FAR Fellows Institute may help drive engagement of your conference FARs. Please remember that conferences will be assessed a fine for two consecutive years of nonsupport of an FAR.

Q: If a conference has five FARs who want to go to FARA, what are the options?

A: First, make sure that if you have that much demand for FAR attendance at FARA that you spend at least the entire Tier One allotment (and perhaps fund more from Tier Three) to facilitate their attendance. The best option is to give each of the five a share of the money with the idea that their institutions will fund the remaining cost. This maximizes FARA attendance and promotes institutional commitment to the program. You can rotate two or three FARs to attend this year and two or three next year if this doesn't work in your league. The method of rotating the FARs is for each conference to determine.

Q: Is there any connection between Tier One FAR funding and the FAR Fellows Institute?

A: The funding for these two programs is separate. It is the hope that the FAR Fellows Institute will help create more engaged FARs across your conference, thereby enhancing interest in attending NCAA events in the future. Attendance at the Institute does not satisfy a conference's requirement to support an FAR's attendance at the FARA Annual Meeting or NCAA Convention, but the attending FAR may become an advocate for NCAA programming and involvement.

Q: What if a conference has tried to get an SWA to attend an approved event, but had no

luck? Must the conference give that portion of the money back?

A: It is important that you exhaust every avenue of encouragement that you can. Have you discussed the issue with your presidential group and asked for support? Beyond that, have you thought about other ways to enhance the SWA stature within your conference?

What other meetings would they like to attend? The grant program now recognizes the NCAA Convention, Inclusion Forum, Women's Leadership Symposium, and Title IX seminars, generally, and the Women Leaders in College Sports Convention and leadership institutes (Administrative Advancement, Leadership Enhancement and Executive) as pre-approved Tier One events.

Have you checked with other conferences to learn of other ideas? SWA enhancement is an important part of the strategic plan, and it is hoped that every effort to rectify this situation will be made. You cannot spend funds in another area, and grant fund balances are subject to standard policy.

Q: What is the policy about female directors of athletics (AD) and the SWA grant?

A: SWA professional development funds may not be used to fund a female AD's attendance at the NCAA Convention. While some individuals are both an AD and an SWA, the point of this Tier One program is to provide professional development opportunities to female administrators who may not have the chance for such development without grant funding. NCAA Convention attendance should be viewed as a general responsibility for Division III ADs, and should not take away from funding that would otherwise be used to provide an SWA with professional development.

Q: How is the ethnic minority prong of Tier One supposed to work?

A: The funding for the ethnic minority component of Tier One should function in the same manner as the SWA and FAR components, where conferences must support at least one person over the specified time period (in this case, at least every other year). The following list of events could be supported through the new Tier One category of racial and ethnic minority professional development:

1. Professional development programming sponsored by the Minority Opportunities Athletic Association (MOAA), National Association of Division III Athletic Administrators (NADIII AA), Women Leaders in College Sports, and National Association of Collegiate Directors of Athletics (NACDA).
2. The Black Coaches and Administrators (BCA) Convention.
3. The NCAA Regional Rules Seminars.
4. The NCAA Convention.

Q: What if a conference does not have a racial or ethnic minority administrator to send to an event?

A: If all options for racial or ethnic minority candidates have been exhausted, conferences have three additional options:

1. Provide funding for any institutional administrator (not just athletics department administrators) to attend an event specifically designed to increase campus or conference diversity or to assist campuses or conferences in developing strategies to generate diverse candidate pools (e.g., events offered by MOAA, BCA).
2. Send a racial or ethnic minority coach to a professional development event other than a coaching convention.
3. Send a racial or ethnic minority student-athlete to the NCAA Convention. In this case, the student-athlete must have an interest in pursuing a career in athletics and the conference must commit to making the NCAA Convention a meaningful experience for the participating student-athlete.

Tier Two:

Policy Reminders:

In the area of academic support services (e.g., tutoring, career coaching, interview skills, etc.), conferences and institutions may only provide services or items if a similar service or item is available to the general student-body.

Tier Two student-athlete well-being is meant to focus on developing students and student-athletes in ways other than physical fitness or athletics skill. Therefore, spending in this area should not include fitness items or other athletics equipment.

Q&A for Tier Two.

Q: What are the spending requirements for each of the four areas?

A: The program calls for the student-athlete well-being, sportsmanship and equity and inclusion areas to be addressed over a four-year period. There is not a required minimum amount that must be spent on any one area, as long as the conference addresses each area during the 2014-18 period.

Also, an Identity and Integration Symposium Activity is a permissible, but optional, use of tier two funding.

Q: What are examples of Identity and Integration activities?

A: The following activities are considered acceptable Identity/Integration activities:

1. Support of faculty mentor programs designed to promote a better understanding of the student-athlete experience.
2. Campus-based identity/integration discussions: Provide various campus constituencies (e.g., faculty, academic staff, administration) with the opportunity to learn about the role of athletics, the Division III philosophy, how athletics is integrated within the university as a whole, and how athletics contribute to the overall mission of the institution or conference.
3. Host a faculty forum on intercollegiate athletics.
4. Recognize National Student-Athlete Day or Division III Week incorporating various campus departments.
5. Collaborate with admissions office to conduct an annual recruiting seminar.
6. Partner with development office and devise a specific fundraising project that would aid both athletics and development.
7. SAAC-led identity and integration presentations to institutional constituents such as boards of trustees, faculty, and alumni, and facilitate other campus discussions.
8. Student-athlete integration discussions: engage student-athletes in discussions about the Division III philosophy, how athletics is integrated within the university as a whole and how athletics contributes to the overall mission of the institution.
9. Programs focused on establishing and assisting students in achieving essential learning outcomes through the identification and integration of learning outcomes taught both on and off the field.

Q: How will the conference know if a project or event satisfies the requirement to address a specific area?

A: If the conference selects an event/activity that is not on the pre-approved list, the institution should check the “other” box on the impact form and explain the event/activity and the specific area addressed. If the committee does not feel that a topic has been adequately addressed, it will provide that feedback to the conference.

Q: What if the conference spends \$100 on sportsmanship over a four-year period. Is that enough to meet the requirement that the conference address the topic of sportsmanship?

A: That will depend on what the conference does with the \$100. The conference would appear to have satisfied the requirement if those funds are used to purchase snacks for a sportsmanship session where a speaker has donated his or her time. It is likely that the committee would want the conference to conduct additional sportsmanship programming if, for example, the \$100 buys a series of DVDs that are never shown to student-athletes or other constituents.

Q: May Tier Two funds be used to partner with a campus-wide student affairs program?

A: Yes, such partnering is encouraged.

Q: May conferences and the Association of Division III Independents use Tier Two funds to support student-athlete affairs initiatives?

A: Tier two is exactly the place for these kinds of initiatives. Student-athlete affairs administrators also may be involved in the grant allocation decision-making processes if permitted by the applicable conference/Association of Independents.

Q: Our conference has established a Weekend Coaching Symposium for Women to encourage more young women to enter coaching and create leadership and role modeling opportunities. Does it fit within Tier Two or Tier Three if we wish to continue this initiative?

A: This is an example of an initiative that clearly meets the goals of the Strategic Initiatives Grant Program, specifically Tier Two – Diversity and Gender Equity Initiatives. Conferences could use a combination of Tier Two and Tier Three funding to host this event and could even take advantage of pooling funds over multiple years.

Q: I have no idea how to conduct an Identity and Integration Symposium. Are there resources available to assist in my planning?

A: The NCAA has made available a planning guide for the symposiums. This document can be found on the [Division III Conference Grant webpage](#):

Tier Three:

Policy Reminders:

While Tier Three funds may be used on any initiative justified by the Division III strategic plan, funds received through the grant program should not be used for daily operational expenses, which include fitness related equipment, commissioner travel to conference championships and conference office personnel [e.g., sports information director (SID) salaries]. The only exception to this policy is technology in Tier Three.

Q&A for Tier Three.

Q: Is Tier Three limited to the items listed with that tier (technology, officiating improvement, training in sports medicine and nutrition, promotions and marketing/Division III Identity, championships enhancements and professional development)?

A: No. A conference may use Tier Three funds on any initiative it can justify with the Division III strategic plan.

Q: Is there anything prohibited in Tier Three?

A: Because the grant program is based on a premise of enhancing existing programs, it is not permissible to spend grant funds on standard operating expenses (such as salaries/benefits of full-time employees and facility maintenance). This is true for all tiers of the grant program but seems to be most relevant in Tier Three due to the flexible nature of this tier. Technology is not considered a standard operating expense and is covered by the grant program due to the strategic focus on making the NCAA more efficient and effective.

Tier Four/Administrative Stipend:

Policy Reminders:

1. Grant fund balances exceeding \$1,000 across all three tiers must be returned to the NCAA, unless the conference submits a detailed plan regarding how the excess funds will be used and the committee approves the plan. Balances under \$1,000 may be retained by the conference.
2. Each conference's Tier Four allocation has been increased by \$400 to help offset the cost for the third party review.