THE RIGHT WAY FORWARD
NAIA 2026 NATIONAL CONVENTION

Brand Advocacy

Background

The Right Way to Play® brand advocacy initiative was launched in March 2025 to strengthen the NAIA's national visibility and more clearly communicate the association's distinct value amid significant changes across college athletics. The campaign was designed to help members, student-athletes, and NAIA leaders to more consistently articulate what differentiates the NAIA experience and why it matters to institutions.

To accelerate this work, the national office partnered with CRUX to help create the campaign strategy, define messaging, and lead coordinated activation across all NAIA marketing channels. In its first year, the campaign expanded visibility, increased member participation in storytelling, and began strengthening the NAIA's overall brand position. Members are using campaign assets in recruitment, campus storytelling, and within their social media accounts to better communicate the NAIA's story.

The Right Way to Play is now a federally registered trademark, marking an important step in formally establishing the Association's distinct brand.

Campaign Efforts Underway

Over the past year, the campaign has focused on building foundational storytelling platforms, activating member participation, and integrating the brand message into high-visibility marketing initiatives. Several year-two initiatives are in progress:

- Website Redesign: The NAIA's website, NAIA.org and PlayNAIA.com (homepage only), is being redesigned, and the launch is anticipated in June.
- Podcast Series: A new The Right Way to Play podcast series launched last fall with seven episodes recorded and posted on the NAIA's social media channels to date. Each featured conversations with members, coaches, and student-athletes that emphasized the NAIA model.
- Storytelling Series: A new The Right Way to Play storytelling series launched last fall with 6 stories published on the NAIA's social media channels. Several of the stories also highlighted the NAIA's Champions of Character® program in action.
- Student-Athlete Social Media Ambassador Program: A Student-Athlete Ambassador Program, launched in December, equips a team of 13 student-athletes to serve as authentic voices of the NAIA, promoting The Right Way to Play® on their social media accounts. Ambassadors create and share content that highlights character, competition, and campus experience.
- Hype Video: A new student-athlete-focused "hype" video debuted this fall and was shown during championship streaming, on-site at the championships, within the Eligibility Center's new Welcome Center, and on social media. The video has been created so that members can apply their own branding to air at campus and conference events.

- Expanded Membership Campaign Assets: Ongoing release of campaign graphics, social media templates, and other assets for campus and conference use.
- Fall Membership Social Media Campaign: The *[Your] Way to Play* fall social media campaign equipped members to showcase how they uniquely live The Right Way to Play across their campuses and conferences. Through customizable graphics and video templates, members created and shared social media posts that reflected their own brand and amplified the NAIA story. More than 40 institutions and conferences have used the campaign assets, resulting in 80+ social media posts to date.
- New membership social media campaign: A new membership social media campaign will launch at the convention and invite members to share a short "Right Way Forward Pledge", one concrete action their institution or conference will take to advance what makes the NAIA The Right Way to Play. The pledge videos will be recorded at the activation station at the convention, where members can share on their social media. The full membership will receive instructions on the campaign following the convention.

Campaign Results

The campaign has significantly expanded the NAIA's exposure beyond traditional audiences while strengthening engagement within the membership. The campaign results year-to-date are as follows:

- Social Media
  - Impressions: 11M year-to-date with 107% increase over last year
  - Engagement: 78% increase in engagements over last year
  - Audience Growth: 13% increase in audience across all social media accounts
- Campaign Webpages
  - Membership-Facing Campaign Webpage Visits: 1,300 views
  - Public-Facing Campaign Webpage Visits: 1,575 views
- Podcast – total views across all platforms: 1,750 (total for six episodes)
- Streaming Impressions of New Brand Anthem Video (brand anthem video shown within championships broadcasts): 7.7M views
- Overall Campaign Reach (number of unique people reached by campaign): 264M

How to Participate in the Campaign. All brand assets and campaign materials are available at **www.naia.org/advocate**. Members are encouraged to:

- Incorporate The Right Way to Play logo and messaging into campus and conference marketing and communications materials and efforts.
- Continue to use #TheRightWayToPlay hashtag and @NAIA in campus social media posts.
- Continue to engage with the national office's campaign social media posts.
- Participate in membership social media campaigns
- Participate by submitting campus and conference stories for the new storytelling initiative.

Conclusion

The Right Way to Play is no longer just a campaign; it's become the defining narrative for how the NAIA is understood by its members, prospective institutions, and the broader athletics landscape.