THE RIGHT WAY FORWARD
2026 NATIONAL CONVENTION

NAIA Governance Review

Background

The NAIA is governed by its constitution, bylaws, and policies found in the NAIA Handbook. The primary areas addressed by the Constitution and Bylaws (C and B), thus requiring a vote of membership to revise, are:

1. Requirements of Membership
2. Frequency of Play
3. Composition and duties of councils
4. Eligibility
5. Infractions and enforcement

Given that much of the C and B was created in the 1950s and 60s, staff are not sure why these areas were included in the C and B while others (for example, financial aid limits) became policy decisions of councils and/or staff.

There are four councils authorized in the C and B to make policy:

1. Council of Presidents – primary areas of authority
    a. Fiscal Matters
    b. Supervision of CEO and the national office staff
    c. Decisions to admit or dismiss members
    d. Financial aid policy
    e. All other areas, as long as not in conflict with the C and B
2. National Administrative Council – oversee competition
    a. Qualification criteria
    b. Championship formats
    c. Coaches' associations
3. Council of Faculty Athletic Representatives – academic standards
4. Council for Student-Athletes – health, safety, and development of student-athletes

The C and B take precedence over policies and can only be amended by a vote of membership at the annual meeting. The amendment process states that each institutional vote shall be cast by the chief executive of the institution or a faculty or staff member from that institution as designated by the chief executive. In other words, each president controls the member vote.

Each year, members come together to consider amending the C and B. There is a detailed process that is followed to provide notice of proposed changes so that members can discuss the topics with campus leaders in advance of the convention. At the convention, the COP reviews the amendments and provides a "straw" vote that is included at the business meeting.

Concerns

During this process, presidents have frequently expressed concerns with the system, including these areas specifically:

1. COP should be in charge. Some believe that the COP should make all (or at least more) of the important decisions.
2. Process. Once presidents get to the convention, there is little opportunity for influence. ADs carry the majority of votes, with many presidents providing little direction to their ADs.
3. Specific areas should be the purview of presidents. An example is frequency of play.

Discussion Items with COP

1. Within the system, how do we balance the insights of our subject matter experts— administrators, FARs, and commissioners— with empowering college presidents to take a leading role in shaping the strategic direction of the NAIA?

2. If the system is broken or needs adjustment, what is the preferred path? Here are some options:
    a. Overhaul the system, establishing the COP as a traditional board. It would require presidents to secure the votes required to change the C and B at an upcoming convention. It would likely alienate ADs and others who do much of the operational work of the association.
    b. Change processes within the system. Some options include:
        i. making institutional votes public,
        ii. extending and adding layers so presidents can get better informed and potentially direct topics and votes,
        iii. establish COP as a gate-keeper, vetting topics before they reach the docket and/or a membership vote.

3. What sense of urgency does the COP have for reform of this type? Schedule creep seems to be the primary area of frustration in recent years. Other significant decisions were either incorporated into COP policy (financial aid limits, transgender) or the COP proposed legislation that was passed by membership (accreditation, drug testing).

4. As previously mentioned, any significant changes to governance would necessitate a rallying of NAIA presidents to change the bylaws. Is there an appetite to do so?