

Enhancing the Athletics Direct Report's Role with Athletics

8 Tips to improve effectiveness



Since ADRs are such an important component in the athletics organizational chain at Division III institutions – and because the prevalence of these reporting lines is unique to Division III – it is imperative that ADRs are equipped with the tools and resources they need to be effective at the campus, conference and national levels.

These recommendations come from the Athletics Direct Report Working Group, which was established to help ADRs be more effective in their oversight roles and to be more engaged with their athletics directors in the Division III governance process.

The Division III philosophy states an expectation “that institutional presidents and chancellors have the ultimate responsibility and final authority for the conduct of the

intercollegiate athletics program at the institutional, conference and national governance levels.” The working group embraces this concept and believes that enhancing the ADR role will support presidential leadership.

The recommendations are based on three surveys conducted in 2014-15 – two garnering feedback from ADRs themselves and another from athletics directors at Division III institutions. The surveys, with average response rates of 50 percent, indicated that athletics directors and ADRs alike would appreciate development opportunities to enhance their relationships, and to be provided ideas that work in that regard.

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1 ADRs should report directly to the president.

A recent survey showed that 87 percent of athletics direct reports (ADRs) responding report directly to the president. This is an effective reporting line, as it improves communication, allows for greater presidential leadership and facilitates integrating athletics on campus. No change is being recommended for institutions whose athletics director reports directly to the chancellor/president; rather, the goal is to provide strategies and resources for institutions that use an ADR reporting structure.

2 Ongoing communication.

More than three-quarters of ADRs and athletics directors surveyed said they meet with each other weekly or biweekly, which is a good approach. Meeting agendas should include athletics budgets, personnel issues, enrollment management, student-athlete conduct, compliance, facilities, sportsmanship, diversity and inclusion, Title IX compliance, student-athlete well-being, and strategic planning as standing items (in addition to the more contemporary issues that need to be addressed at a given time, such as conference office updates).

3 Presidential communication.

A triad of communication should be developed among the ADR, the athletics director and the president (some schools also include the faculty athletics representative). Surveys show that a little more than a quarter of Division III colleges and universities already schedule such meetings. Since presidents are ultimately accountable for athletics, and because presidents rarely have the time necessary to fully engage in conference and national athletics governance issues, it is critical for ADRs and athletics directors to inform presidents in person about these matters at regularly scheduled times throughout the year. Such communications will provide an opportunity for these decision-makers to collaborate and strategize in regard to the role athletics plays related to enrollment, retention, graduation, branding and campus-life perspectives.

4 Engage at the campus level.

Most athletics directors attend as many athletics events on campus as they can, and many also engage regularly with their campus Student-Athlete Advisory Committees (SAACs) by attending meetings and supporting SAAC-led initiatives on campus. ADRs should adopt a similar approach as their schedules permit. Such engagement not only leads to a better understanding of athletics operations, but also increases visibility for the ADR and positions him or her as an advocate for student-athlete interests.

5 Engage faculty athletics representatives.

Active involvement of the faculty athletics representative (FAR) as a key institutional liaison to the athletics department and the student-athlete is important. FARs may be involved with student-athlete eligibility requirements, compliance and rules education, and collaboration efforts with faculty, admissions, financial aid and the registrar, as well

as interactions with student-athlete leaders (such as SAAC). Regular engagement with the ADR allows the FAR to share, discuss and collaborate on many topics, including eligibility, and academic and faculty-related issues. Similar to item No. 3, a triad of communication should be established among the ADR, the athletics director and the FAR.

6 Engage at the conference level.

Involvement in athletics conference business typically has been the purview of the athletics director, but ADRs would benefit from being more engaged at the conference level. Currently, just slightly more than half of ADRs surveyed (55 percent) participate in conference office business, but almost 90 percent said they discuss conference business with their presidents. As such, staying informed is critical. Regular conference communication (such as emails and newsletters) and conference best practices boost engagement with conference business. At the very least, conference-member ADRs should meet annually with each other to discuss pertinent issues, develop stronger networks, and ultimately improve the overall athletics and academic experiences for student-athletes.

7 Engage at the national level.

In addition to participating in the Division III governance structure (ADRs have two seats on the Division III Management Council) or via the newly created ADR Institute (see item No. 8), ADRs should stay informed with national and athletics issues through newsletters and monthly updates provided by the NCAA national office. ADRs should be sure they are on the mailing list to receive these periodic updates and check NCAA.org regularly for news pertaining to Division III. ADRs wanting to attend the NCAA Convention should discuss funding opportunities with their conference commissioner/executive director, as funding is available for ADR professional development.

8 Shared practices and networking.

Survey responses indicate that three-quarters of ADRs do not have any formal, or even informal, relationships with their counterparts, but 86 percent said they would attend a professional development conference to discuss issues and create networks. Topics that ADRs would be most interested in discussing include budgeting, personnel management, conference matters and enrollment management. To help in this regard, the Division III Strategic Planning and Finance Committee agreed to fund an annual professional development program called the "Athletics Direct Report Institute," which would convene select ADRs to discuss these and other topics. Current ADRs, along with NCAA staff and outside consultants, will serve as faculty for the ADR Institute. Based on feedback, the ADR Institute will be held in conjunction with the annual NCAA Convention. The nomination process to determine participants will be announced in the summer of 2015. While the NCAA will fully fund ADR Institute participants, every Division III conference office also has funding available for ADR professional development.