KEY ITEMS.

1. Increase in squad size. The committee recommends a squad size increase from 20 to 22; travel party will remain at 28. (See Action Item 2-c.)

2. Preliminary-round facilities and gamesmanship. Starting in 2019, institutions that do not or choose not to meet the facility, crowd management and game management requirements set forth in the Division I Softball Pre-Championships Manual, will not be eligible to host the following year, even if they are a seeded team. (See Informational Item 2-a.)

3. Four-umpire format. The committee recommends that the four-umpire system be used in the NCAA postseason as soon as funds are available. Some conferences are planning to use four umpires in their conference tournaments in 2019. (See Action Item 2-b.)

ACTION ITEMS.

1. Legislative items.
   
   - None.

2. Nonlegislative items.

   a. Automatic qualification.

      (1) Recommendation. That the following 32 conferences receive automatic bids for the 2019 Division I Softball Championship: America East Conference; American Athletic Conference; Atlantic Coast Conference; Atlantic 10 Conference; Atlantic Sun Conference; Big East Conference; Big Sky Conference; Big South Conference; Big Ten Conference; Big 12 Conference; Big West Conference; Colonial Athletic Association; Conference USA; Horizon League; The Ivy League; Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference; Mid-American Conference; Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference; Missouri Valley Conference; Mountain West Conference; Northeast Conference; Ohio Valley Conference; Pac-12 Conference; Patriot League; Southeastern Conference; Southern Conference; Southland Conference; Southwestern Athletic Conference; The Summit League; Sun Belt Conference; West Coast Conference; and Western Athletic Conference.

      (2) Effective date. October 1, 2018.

      (3) Rationale. Each conference meets the requirements to receive an automatic berth to the championship.

      (4) Estimated budget impact. None.
b. Four-umpire system.

(1) **Recommendation.** That a four-umpire system be implemented in the NCAA postseason (regionals, super regionals and the Women’s College World Series).

(2) **Effective date.** October 1, 2018.

(3) **Rationale.** The 2018 season was the first time the four-umpire system could be implemented in NCAA softball. Since 2016, officiating has been an area of emphasis for the softball committee. In addition to increasing training opportunities, the merits of the four-umpire system and video review have been two areas the committee believes will have the greatest impact on officiating improvement. Many times missed calls are attributed to umpires being out of position because in the three-umpire rotation, an umpire is responsible for more than one base. The committee recommends the four-umpire system be implemented in 2019 NCAA postseason or as soon as funding is available. The coaches association supports the concept, and some conferences are planning to use the four-umpire system during their postseason conference tournaments.

(4) **Estimated budget impact.** Approximately $25,000.

(5) Student-athlete impact. Officiating has a direct impact on the student-athletes and their perception of the fairness of the competition. Evaluations from student-athletes have consistently ranked officiating as one of the top three priorities in NCAA championships needing improvement. Student-athletes want a fair and equitable playing field and providing a system that allows umpires to be in a better position to “get the call right” will assist in meeting that goal.

c. Increase in squad size; no change in travel party.

(1) **Recommendation.** That the squad size be increased from 20 to 22. The travel party will remain at 28.

(2) **Effective Date.** October 1, 2018.

(3) **Rationale.** Softball has grown rapidly, and the game has become more physically demanding, especially for pitchers, making it necessary for teams to increase their roster size. In the past, it was unusual for a team to have more than two pitchers; now most programs have three or more pitchers, increasing the average squad size to over 20. As softball programs increase their rosters, the committee believes the championship squad size should also increase so that student-athletes who have been part of the squad all season may participate in the championship. The
committee requests that the Competition Oversight Committee approve a squad size increase without a travel party increase in order to not create a budget impact.

(4) Estimated budget impact. None for the NCAA budget; however, it may add costs for institutions for support staff traveling with teams since there would only be six travelers remaining in the travel party.

(5) Student-athlete impact. A squad size increase has direct impact on student-athletes. The additional student-athletes enhance the student-athlete experience, benefits the health and well-being of student-athletes and creates more opportunities for participation. This increase provides an opportunity for an additional 128 student-athletes to participate in the NCAA postseason.

INFORMATIONAL ITEMS.

1. Review of 2018 selections.

a. Team selections. The committee discussed ways to improve selection preparation for both the regional advisory committees and the national committee.

(1) Regional Advisory Committee. The committee explored various options for improving information received from RACs and sharing that information between the RACs and the national committee. The current process is extremely time consuming for coaches while they are “in-season” and places additional stress and demands on them when they are preparing their teams for competition. The committee is adjusting the current process to capitalize on the knowledge and experience of coaches yet be more efficient for the coaches and more effective in the evaluation of teams. The process is as follows:

- Each region will schedule two conference calls during the spring season.
- The RAC, led by the national committee representative, will be responsible for discussion and evaluation of teams that are under consideration for an at-large bid.
- The RAC will forward all teams (regardless the number) they believe are candidates for an at-large bid to the national committee for their deliberations. (There will be no regional rankings.)
- The national committee members are responsible for providing information shared on these calls along with statistical information not already available to the committee to prepare the national committee for evaluation and discussion of teams.
- The committee believes this format will increase the number of teams discussed, will increase the quality and quantity of information provided by the
RAC members, and increase attendance and preparation by coaches involved on all RACs.

(2) Regular-season schedule changes. The committee was disappointed with the changes that occurred at the end of the 2018 season; however, the issues of intent, reasons for schedule changes and the fact that integrity cannot be regulated has resulted in no immediate action for selections at this time. The committee will continue to discuss this issue with stakeholders to determine a possible solution.

b. Rating Percentage Index (RPI). The committee reviewed several statistical options, including the location of the game (home, away or neutral sites) in the current RPI. In comparing the current RPI to the options, there was minimal to no difference seen in the current RPI. The committee members did not change the 2019 RPI at this time, because they believe the changes in the bonus/penalty system were less than the emphasis given the location of the contest during deliberations. The committee recognizes the importance of the location criteria to the coaching community and will continue to review this criterion.

Note: The committee approved the inclusion of California Baptist University as part of the 2019 RPI. They meet the scheduling requirements for a first-year reclassifying program.

2. 2018 championship/2019 preparation. The committee reviewed the championship, including regionals, super regionals and the Women’s College World Series, and addressed the following:

a. Preliminary rounds. The committee reviewed feedback on the regionals and super regionals from participating teams, tournament directors and site representatives and noted areas for improvement.

(1) Facility requirements. Some of the seeded teams still do not have the appropriate locker room/team room or restroom facilities available for visiting student-athletes (the requirement was to have been in place by 2015). This has become a health and safety issue for student-athletes and in some cases gamesmanship on the part of the host institution. Starting in 2019, institutions that do not or choose not to meet the facility, crowd management and game management requirements set forth in the Division I Softball Pre-Championships Manual will not be eligible to host the following year, even if they are a seeded team.

(2) Gamesmanship. Gamesmanship during the NCAA postseason is an issue that affects the student-athlete experience. The committee and NFCA will continue to address this with coaches. Hotels, locker room/restroom facilities and general treatment of visiting teams (atmosphere) are the major issues to be addressed.
(3) **Hotels.** Four (three if the host team is not staying in a hotel) separate regional hotels must be secured at the time of the bid process to consider the bid complete. They should be of equitable quality, amenities and distance from the competition venue. (Hotel room doors shall not open to an outside environment for safety reasons.)

**b. Women’s College World Series.** The committee reviewed the Women’s College World Series and addressed the following:

(1) **Facilities.** The committee discussed the improvements slated for 2019. The underground media areas will be complete, and the two-story press box will be able to be used in 2019 but will be completed in 2020 with the upper level bleachers. Staff will meet with the facility personnel, ESPN and the local organizing committee as construction progresses.

(2) **Team ticket allotments.** The committee discussed increasing the team ticket allotments. While the current ticket allotment in Sections 8 and 11 may not be expanded, an additional 50 seats were available elsewhere in the stadium in 2018. Larger team seating areas are planned when the additional seats become available in 2020.

(3) **Credentials.** The committee determined that the number of credentials issued to teams (38) is sufficient and will remain the same in 2019. Several items will need to be revisited if the squad size increases.

4. **National Fastpitch Coaches Association.** The committee met with representatives from the NFCA regarding the following:

a. Preliminary-round facilities, hotels, game management and gamesmanship.

b. Selection, seeding and bracketing (travel and site assignments).

c. Officiating. Reviewed the 2018 umpire program and requested the NCAA move to the four-umpire format for the 2019 postseason.

d. RPI, including the location of contests.

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**Committee Chair:** Natalie Shock, University of Central Arkansas.

**Staff Liaison:** Sharon Cessna, Championships and Alliances

**Attendees:**

Jenny Allard, Harvard University.
Sarah Baumgartner, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, Newark.
Chris Helms, Virginia Polytechnic and State University.
Lynnette Johnson, University of Mississippi.
Ashlie Kite, Long Beach State University.
Matt Larsen, North Dakota State University.
Shalini Shanker, Colorado State University.
Natalie Shock, University of Central Arkansas.
Megan Smith, University of Kansas.
Brandi Stuart, University of Central Florida.

**Absentees:**
None.

**Guests in Attendance:**
Joanna Lane, NFCA
Carol Bruggeman, NFCA
Karen Weekly, University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

**NCAA Staff Support in Attendance:**
Sharon Cessna, Championships and Alliances.
Laura Peterson-Mlynski, Championships and Alliances.

**Other NCAA Staff Members in Attendance:**
Sahar Abdur-Rashid, Championships and Alliances.
Natalie Steger, Championships and Alliances.