GETTING THE MOST FROM YOUR
ATHLETICS RECRUITING PROCESS

A guide to maximizing efficiency and effectiveness for your coaches and staff
Recruiting is critical for any Division III athletics program. And recruiting student-athletes is critical for any Division III institution.

As such, the following resource will help you manage and make more efficient one of the most essential parts of your job.

For institutions, athletics recruiting plays an integral role in enrollment strategy and management, since about 20 to 30 percent of students at most Division III schools play sports. For athletics departments, recruiting affects roster size, team success, and in many cases, student retention.

**Just how important is recruiting in Division III?**

Prospective student-athletes and their families increasingly depend on the athletics recruitment process to make their college choice.

A 2013 survey tells us that athletics recruiting as a key component of enrollment strategies has grown 10 percent:

- Division III sports with high proportions of participants who were recruited:
  - **MEN’S BASKETBALL**: 76%
  - **WOMEN’S BASKETBALL**: 78%
  - **MEN’S LACROSSE**: 83%
  - **WOMEN’S ICE HOCKEY**: 85%
  - **FOOTBALL**: 86%
  - **MEN’S ICE HOCKEY**: 88%

- **57,000** Approximate number of first-year student-athletes (about one-fifth of the entire Division III student population) on one or more sports teams in 2012-13.
- **7,700** Number of Division III teams in 2012-13.
- **2 out of 3** Number of Division III athletes recruited by college coaches in 2012-13; the rest walked on or were recruited after enrolling.
What’s the effect of the Division III recruiting model on coaches, athletics staff and student-athletes?

- Some coaches are away from campus so often recruiting that they spend less time with their current student-athletes on campus.
- Some prospects say they’re overwhelmed. Surveys tell us that a quarter of Division III recruits believe coaches contact them too often. Three-quarters of prospective student-athletes are recruited by anywhere from one to nine schools, and 15 percent are recruited by 10 or more.
- Athletics administrators who rely on part-time coaches and coaches with dual responsibilities (such as administrative or teaching roles) say their staffs are being stretched too thin.
- The pressure to fill beds and compile competitive rosters makes coaches and staff reluctant to scale back, thus exacerbating what already is a work/life imbalance.

Indeed, because institutions are relying more and more on student-athletes to help meet admission goals, recruiting creates a challenging environment on many levels. All of this strongly suggests that everyone involved should actively manage a recruiting process that is integral to the institution and the prospective students. It is imperative not only to student-athlete well-being, but also your own.

How this resource will help.

This resource will help your planning process by providing a framework for asking the important questions and developing practices that minimize the strain on your coaches, staff and the prospects they recruit.

It will help prepare your coaches for success on the recruiting trail. It will help you collaborate with the broader campus community to support your coaches. It will help you shape the best recruiting program for your unique situation.

In short, this resource is designed as a springboard for focused discussion, planning and programming that can increase success and make your recruiting efforts more efficient and effective.

Here’s how it works:

In Part 1, you’ll find a description of the current Division III recruiting landscape – the “who, what, where, when and how” based on extensive research.

Then in Part 2, you’ll get some tips on how to best prepare your coaches and equip them with the tools they need to be successful.

Part 3 includes questions that should prompt your coaches and staff to discuss methods that make your recruiting practices more efficient and effective.

This is not a “one size fits all” approach. Rather, this resource is intended to help YOU design a better process for an important but often challenging component of your job.

This resource comes from the Division III Recruiting Working Group, a membership panel charged in 2012 with evaluating the current Division III recruiting environment and suggesting alternative models to ease pressure on Division III staffs as they seek to offer the right fit for prospective students and their families.

Assure that athletics recruitment complies with established institutional policies and procedures applicable to the admissions process.

Division III Philosophy
Research shows that athletics recruiting is widespread and pervasive across Division III. It’s also an important tool that families use to choose the best college or university for their son or daughter.

What does Division III recruiting look like?

- Email and telephone are the top recruiting tools for more than 90 percent of coaches.
- About 80 percent of coaches say they review video either sent by the prospective student-athlete or through a recruiting service.
- Notably, only about one-third of Division III coaches use social media to communicate with prospects.
- Division III coaches are out on the recruiting trail, as well. Seventy percent or more attend high school events and nonscholastic events or showcases to identify and establish relationships with prospective athletes in order to set up an on-campus visit.
- Eighty percent of coaches have the prospect visit campus, spend time with student-athletes and attend a class in order to learn about the campus and evaluate whether the school is a good fit.
Who’s involved in the recruiting process?

- To be sure, it’s more than just the prospect and the college coach. College athletics directors, college admissions counselors, high school coaches, high school guidance counselors, high school teachers, club sport coaches and the prospect’s family and friends all play a part.

- Who plays the biggest role in the college choice decision? Sixty-two percent of Division III athletes say parents and relatives are the most influential. High school teachers, guidance counselors, and high school and club coaches were cited by fewer than 25 percent as being “extremely important.”

When does recruiting occur?

- Legislation adopted at the 2015 NCAA Convention allows contact after a recruit’s sophomore year of high school and permits recruits to make an official campus visit beginning January 1 of their junior year.

- Once the process starts, the recruiting trail tends to be year-round. In the offseason, 97 percent of coaches are actively recruiting. Recruiting at nonscholastic events reaches its height in June and July when most showcases and recruiting camps are held. The peak for high school events occurs in December, January and February. The bulk of the off-campus contact comes at nonscholastic events during the summer.

- On-campus visits are an important part of the recruiting process, too. Coaches host prospects on their campuses throughout the calendar year. The number of campus visits peaks in October.
PART 2
PREPARING YOUR COACHES

We know that coaches serve on the front line when it comes to recruiting. But what can athletics departments do to better prepare them and track their success?

Research shows that student-athletes frequently cite the college coach as the most important person in their college selection process. As such, educating and training those influential coaches is critical to effective and efficient recruiting. It can also be a factor in retaining coaches, since it can help them find the necessary career balance.

To effectively prepare your coaches for the recruiting trail, ask yourself the following:

**Are your coaches educated on the “type” of student that fits your institution? Do your coaches have materials to guide them in this regard?**

To be successful recruiters, coaches need to know what type of student to target and what exactly to tell them about the campus once they’re identified.

And it’s not an “athletics-only” sale in Division III. On the contrary, research shows that college choice is affected by two primary components – academics and athletics. More than 85 percent of student-athletes say that athletics recruiting played an important role, but academics played an equally important role in their college choice.

As such, equip your coaches with talking points about ALL that the campus has to offer. Remember, Division III is about proportion in the college experience – encouraging students to discover their interests and passions, develop their potential and dedicate themselves to achieving their goals.

**TIPS TO BETTER EDUCATE AND TRAIN YOUR COACHES:**

- Have them meet periodically with the campus admissions staff to share key enrollment strategy information.
- Encourage them to participate in campus tours led by the admissions staff.
- Make sure they have a coaches handbook that addresses strengths of your campus, conference and Division III overall (and if your institution doesn’t have a coaches handbook, consider developing one).
- Provide them with a campus “quick facts” sheet or pamphlet. For new coaches, conduct orientation sessions led by the admissions staff and/or the faculty athletics representative.

**Do you offer resources for new coaches on “how” to recruit?**

Successfully “on-boarding” new coaches not only helps them become effective recruiters quickly but also establishes the foundation necessary to sustain that success.

**TIPS TO BETTER ACCLIMATE YOUR NEW HIRES:**

- Have an outside consultant or entity conduct sport-specific recruiting webinars.
- Establish a mentor program in which the new coach is matched with a senior coach.
- Propose that your conference offer a training program for new coaches to minimize costs and maximize efficiencies.

**Does standardized training exist for coaches? Who’s responsible for developing it?**

Many institutions have developed their own training programs (and we encourage sharing with peers in this regard), but programs also may be available from external sources. For example, some coaches associations offer programming at their annual conventions.
If you’re looking for training programs and are considering developing your own, it will be important to include all the key players:

- Athletics director
- Compliance coordinator
- Admissions staff
- Enrollment manager
- Senior woman administrator
- Faculty athletics representative
- Conference commissioner
- Financial aid staff
- Academic advisors/academic counseling centers
- Student services/student affairs
- Student-Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC) representative

The campus admissions department is the logical starting point due to its expertise in student recruiting. Also consider when the training would occur. It should be regular and periodic, but you may prefer heavier engagement at key campus enrollment times.

Because athletics recruitment on a Division III campus is frequently tied to overall student recruitment, it requires a “team effort.” Be sure you have healthy lines of communication among various campus departments and key groups.

**What resources should coaches have at their disposal?**

As many as you’ve got! Athletics administrators should consider resources that exist beyond the walls of the athletics department to help their coaches be successful. These resources could include:

- Talking points
- Brochures
- Video content
- Letter templates
- Websites
- Learning management systems
- Software applications

These are all potential tools in any coach’s recruiting toolbox.

Also remember that the NCAA national office provides resources, as well. They include:

- Division III Facts and Figures
- The NCAA Recruiting Fact Sheet
- The Division III Coaches Rules Test
- The Division III Identity Initiative Tool Kit
- The NCAA Division III Website
- The NCAA Eligibility Center
- The Division III Coaches Mobile Website

And finally, make sure you’re tracking key institutional benchmarks to help coaches develop appropriate recruiting strategies. These include:

- Retention rates
- Graduation rates
- Grade-point averages
- Admissions/enrollment benchmarks
- Financial aid benchmarks
- Participation opportunities in key co-curricular and extra-curricular programs such as SAAC, internships/externships, study abroad and community service
Efforts to increase effectiveness and efficiency in recruiting pay off in multiple ways. They help the coach sustain excellence and approach an appropriate career balance. At the same time, they may help the athletics department save time and money.

Here are some areas to think about:

1 Collecting data to monitor progress and assess your success is an integral part of an efficient and effective recruiting program. Be sure to coordinate these efforts, as “monitoring progress” and “assessing success” may be regarded as separate tasks on your campus. Your coaches may be using software to manage their recruiting list, while admissions may be using other software to monitor enrollment goals. Make sure you’ve got your right and left hands pulling the same levers!

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

• What role does technology play in managing the recruiting process for your coaches?
• Do you have a software platform to help?
• Are you using your current software platform to its fullest extent?
• Is it time to consider an upgrade, or changing your current software platform altogether?
As we mentioned in Part 1, more than 90 percent of coaches use email and telephone most often as recruiting tools, and more than 80 percent incorporate video into their recruiting routine. On the other hand, only about one-third of coaches use social media to attract prospects. Social media may help coaches keep up with the changing times, but the challenge is to find user-friendly options that aren’t outdated.

**QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER**
- Should your coaches consider social media as a viable recruiting tool?
- Does the campus admissions office use social media?
- What can athletics learn from the admissions office?

With more than 70 percent of coaches attending high school and nonscholastic events throughout the calendar year, make sure your coaches maximize their effectiveness in establishing relationships with prospective student-athletes. Relationships are the name of the game in recruiting, and there are multiple ways for your coaches to solidify them:

- Attendance at recruiting showcases and high school events
- In-home visits
- Email, phone, letters, texts, etc.
- Attendance at or hosting camps and clinics

**QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER**
- Have you considered other possibilities?
- Can admissions help in this regard?

Data show that academics are just as important, if not more so, as athletics when prospects are weighing their college choice. In recruiting, finding an academic match as well as an athletics match is the goal. Your admissions staff and faculty can help coordinate these efforts.

**QUESTION TO CONSIDER**
- Recognizing that athletics recruitment is an integral part of overall institutional enrollment strategies, are your coaches leveraging your faculty, your faculty athletics representative, and your current student-athletes to promote the academic aspects of the campus?

Many Division III athletics programs cannot survive without part-time coaches – head and assistant. It can be difficult to incorporate part-time coaches into your department’s recruiting strategies, though. Before any coach hits the recruiting trail, he or she must be appropriately prepared and informed. Part-time coaches present a unique challenge in this regard.

**QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER**
- Are part-time assistant and head coaches appropriately engaged in your recruiting process?
- Are there new or different ways to involve them?

Coaches categorize recruits in many ways (for example, high/low level, blue chip). Prospective student-athletes may be recruited by multiple Division III institutions, as well as by Division I and Division II colleges and universities. Research indicates that nearly a tenth of student-athletes participate in more than one sport. These factors will likely lead a successful recruiter to approach prospective student-athletes in unique ways.

**QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER**
- Have you considered the process by which your coaches determine how many contacts and types of contacts would be needed in recruiting a “blue chip” prospect, a potential varsity player, or an admissions office referral-type prospect?
- Have communication lines among coaches been established for potential multisport athletes?
- Have you implemented any plan in this regard?
Athletics recruiting is an increasingly important tool that prospects and their families use to select their college destination. As with all decisions, more information increases the likelihood of good choices. But it’s not just about educating families. Don’t forget about club and high school coaches, event coordinators, and high school guidance counselors.

**QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER**

- How much time do your coaches spend educating these various groups on Division III and its recruiting process?
- What do coaches need to do this effectively? Ideas may include:
  - Using the NCAA’s one-page resource highlighting the institutional differences among the NCAA’s three divisions.
  - A one-page resource outlining the recruiting/enrollment process at your college or university.
  - The Division III facts and figures one-page resource.
  - The coaches mobile website.
CONCLUSIONS AND TAKEAWAYS

As we know, recruiting is not an idle pastime. Rather, it is the lifeblood of any Division III institution. As such, just about all campus employees are expected to pitch in when it comes to recruiting students. And since students who want to participate in sports make up at least one-fifth of the undergraduate population at most Division III colleges and universities, coaches and athletics department staff are expected to be on the recruiting trail year-round.

Thus, it behooves any staff to have its ducks in a row when it comes to athletics recruiting. That means:

**Educating** your coaches and staff about identifying the right prospects and telling them all the campus has to offer.

**Collaborating** with other campus groups to streamline your efforts, develop the proper approaches and enhance the work/life balance for your coaches and staff.

**Evaluating** your processes frequently to ensure they are the most efficient and effective they can be.

To do this effectively, refer to this resource often. And if you need help in framing all of it, don’t be afraid to ask! Contact your neighboring Division III members, work with your conference office or call the NCAA Division III staff to learn what works best.

While recruiting can be a competitive endeavor, all Division III members have a collective interest in making it more efficient for everyone. You owe it to your coaches, your staff – and yourself – to make the process the best it can be.