

An Assessment of Tiered Giving Strategies for Small College Athletic Administrators'



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Abstract

NCAA Division II athletic departments have limited resources to allocate toward staffing and funding, therefore the need to develop effective fundraising strategies becomes apparent. This study looks at one commonly used fundraising strategy, tiered giving. In this research, Division I FBS development personnel were surveyed to explore the current perception of tiered giving efforts and best practices that could help Division II athletic departments improve strategies for structuring tiered giving strategies. The results of this study extended the finding of institutional isomorphism in Division I athletic departments to Division II college athletics as there was great variability found when it came to athletic department tiered giving strategies despite the common use of a tiered reward structure for giving. Future research is needed to determine the effectiveness of fundraising efforts and the best practices to optimize the success of these institutions.

Keywords: sponsorship; institutional isomorphism; college athletics

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1. Introduction

Adequate fundraising is paramount for an athletic department's success. However, only 4.37% of NCAA annual revenue is redistributed to Division II membership institutions, and of this distribution, 60% is allocated toward postseason competition and championships, leaving only a small portion to go directly to funding department operations (National Collegiate Athletic Association [NCAA], 2022). Additionally, much of the remaining funds go directly to Division II member conferences to distribute amongst their membership based on five guiding principles - academics and life skills, athletics operations and compliance, diversity and inclusion, game day and championships, and member and positioning initiatives (NCAA, 2022). Although funds may help member institutions enhance programming for student-athletes by bringing in speakers or paying for internships, there are many restrictions to how the funds may be used. For example, the NCAA Division II Conference Grant Program Guidelines and Principles (2018) indicates the funds may not be used for capital improvement or increasing grant-in-aids.

Although revenue opportunities are not as abundant for Division II member institutions, there are still high expenses. According to a 2018 research study, Division II athletic departments that sponsor a football program lose an average of \$6,057,141 annually (NCAA, 2018). In the same report, overall athletic department expenses grew by 135.8% while the average generated revenues grew by only 102.7%. Given the increase in deficit among Division II athletics, institutions need to find ways to offset these ever-growing expenses. However, research from the NCAA Demographics

Report (2021) showed that there are only 237 development employees (i.e., employees dedicated to athletic department fundraising) across the Division II membership compared to 1,280 development employees working at the Division I level. Therefore, institutions operating in the Division II membership might not have the opportunity to devote full-time employees to development. In some cases, Division II institutions will make a coach or other employee full-time by adding a responsibility, such as development. With the limited number of development employees working within Division II athletics, there is a need to establish the best practices that can help administrators combat the increased deficits among Division II athletic programs.

One possible development strategy that could help Division II athletic departments is providing a best practice tiered rewards giving strategy. A tiered rewards giving strategy can be described as an organization offering various privileges or benefits for given levels of donations (Lipsey, 2021). For example, Clayton State University offers donors who contribute \$50 a t-shirt and newsletter while donors who give at the \$500 receive the previously mentioned gifts in addition to two sport passes. A recent study on tiered reward systems implemented at member institutions competing at the Division I level indicates the presence of institutional isomorphism, and researchers suggested further studies use a qualitative approach to survey development officers regarding rationales for current tiered giving structures (Lipsey, 2021).

The need to explore best practices for tiered reward giving strategies is supported by the limited funding the NCAA distributes to those institutions

operating in the Division II membership. With the limited circulation of funds to the Division II membership, individual member institutions could benefit from the perceptions and recommendations from practitioners that work in development. As Division I institutions are able to secure more resources through the funds distributed by the NCAA, resource dependency theory (Klein & Diniz Pereira, 2016; Ulrich & Barney, 1984; Salancik & Pfeffer, 1977) may support the current state of fundraising practices by Division II institutions. Institutions in the Division II structure may not have the funds their Division I peers have to hire full time development personnel. The ability to hire full time employees to research and build tiered reward strategies can give the Division I institutions a competitive advantage leading to the cycle of the Division II institutions not being as competitive in the battle for donations as they are not able to devote full time employees to the development role.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to gain a better perspective of tiered giving best practices for NCAA Division II institution administrators to use to improve their current tiered giving strategies.

To begin this exploration, the researcher developed the following research questions:

1. How are NCAA Division II athletic departments structuring their online giving pages on their websites?
2. How are NCAA Division II athletic departments organizing giving options for donors?
3. How are NCAA Division II athletic departments enticing donors to participate in online giving?

4. What is the perception of current website fundraising practices from practitioners working in athletic development?

The next section outlines a review of literature related to the study of sport consumer behavior within NCAA DII athletic department fundraising as well as a review of resource dependency theory and institutional isomorphism within the context of college athletic giving.

2. Literature Review

Sport Consumer Behavior – Giving in Division II Athletics

Sport consumer behavior scholars examining fan identification and have found that sport fans with strong psychological connections (see Funk & James, 2001; 2006; Webster, 2021) to sport objects (e.g., teams, leagues, sports, brands, etc.) predict more wins (Wann & Dolan, 1994), attend more games (Murrell & Dietz, 1992), are more knowledgeable about sport objects (Wann & Branscombe, 1995), and demonstrate persistence in their commitment to sport objects (Dietz-Uhler & Murrell, 1999; Wann & Schrader, 1996). Put another way, sport fans that possess strong psychological attachments to sport objects are more likely to engage in behaviors that reflect those connections. Scholars have identified several motivations (see Funk et al., 2004) that contribute to these connections, and this commitment can be conceptualized as a reflection of a sport fan's desire to sustain a relationship with the sport object, eventually resulting in behavioral outcomes (Kim et al., 2013). According to Yoshida (2017), the investment in this relationship transfers to decision-making by sports fans. Given the scope of the present re-

search, it is helpful to explore best practices within DII giving because of the connection sport fans develop with sport objects (e.g., athletic teams and departments) and potential behavioral outcomes of such connections (e.g., donating to athletic departments).

Research examining donor behavior has identified several motives that drive donor giving, including self-esteem, recognition, emotional and economic benefits, emotional and familial utility, commitment, prestige and respect in the community, peer pressure, and in the context of collegiate athletics, winning (Cohen et al., 2011; Coughlin & Erikson, 1985; Merchant & Ford, 2008; Sargeant et al., 2006). Mahony et al. (2003), one of the seminal works examining donor motivations within the context of college sport, identified several factors that influence donation behavior: tradition, current success, future success, community pride, nostalgia, philanthropic, social, escape, priority seating for football and basketball, business enhancement, and psychological commitment (i.e., identification). The authors' findings echoed Wann and Branscombe's (1993) proposition that donors and fans who are highly identified are more likely to monetarily invest in their teams.

Development employees working in athletics on NCAA Division II campuses have indicated they face the challenge of limited staffing, other job responsibilities, and fundraising budgets (Hanson & Welty-Peachy, 2022). Research indicating best practices for a tiered giving strategy could help ensure the limited resources are used to create the best possible fundraising strategy. For example, research from Kim et al. (2019) indicates tangible benefits did not highly motivate donors to

give at the Division II level. This finding contradicted previous research on the Division I level indicating the importance of tangible benefits for donors. Although many institutions are offering gifts to donors, vicarious achievement has been identified as a strong motive for donors (Kim et al., 2019; Ko, et al., 2017).

For an institution looking to motivate donors to give using tangible benefits, tickets are often included, however, on the Division II landscape, many events are not ticketed. For example, when considering non-revenue sports there are even fewer tangible benefits that can help with fundraising efforts (Roberts & Weight, 2013). Non-revenue sports, such as track and field, golf, and tennis, do not typically charge admission. As such, there is no opportunity to offer donors season tickets. Despite the lack of tangible gift options in smaller sport programs, it is important to note previous literature found that donors want feedback and communication (Shapiro, 2010). Development employees might find it advantageous to include benefits such as newsletters or monthly updates from the athletic director or head coach.

Earlier studies of the Division I landscape have found that an institution's football team's success correlates with increased giving (Martinez, et al., 2010). This finding may indicate the benefit of having separate giving options on athletic department websites specifically for each sport program. Additionally, there is perhaps the need to include more graphics and advertising of the football team on booster brochures. A college men's basketball team's success was also found in previous research to garner fans, and future donors (Popp et al., 2016). Additionally, a connection was

found between athletic success and financial contributions from private donors (Walker, 2015). Although a marketing team does not have the ability to change a team's success, there is potential that sponsorship and donation pages can help an institution increase revenue, supporting the need to develop an effective tiered giving strategy. The need to focus on fundraising strategies is also highlighted by previous research, indicating there was no significant difference in giving patterns based on the age an individual became a fan of a team (Popp et al., 2016). This finding supports the need to understand what fundraising initiatives work, and fundraising strategies should not target specific demographics (e.g. older alumni.).

Previous research shows that there is a positive relationship between athletic department giving and academic giving (Koo & Dittmore, 2014). According to Stinson and Howard (2010) giving to athletics actually decreases if a donor decides to give to both athletics and academics. No crowding-out effect has been reported between college athletic and academic giving (Stinson & Howard, 2008). As previous research shows how the institution, beyond just athletics, can benefit from donations to athletics, research into Division II athletic department tiered giving strategies can help the entire institution increase sponsorship effectiveness. Pop et al., (2016) suggests athletic departments use more family-oriented marketing and promotion strategies.

Given the large body of research dedicated to understanding sport consumer motivation (specifically within the context of athletic donations) as well as the overall emphasis by scholars to research athletic giving, it is imperative that college

athletic administrators, particularly within Division II, employ the best practices to capitalize on donation behavior.

Resource Dependency Theory

Resource dependency theory can support the current landscape of sponsorship solicitation at the Division II college level. At the basis of the theory, organizations (e.g., NCAA member institutions) will continue to compete for resources that are in scarce supply (Klein & Diniz Pereira, 2016; Ulrich & Barney, 1984; Salancik & Pfeffer, 1977). Although all institutions can structure a tiered giving sponsorship package, having a full time employee on staff to develop and ensure effective usage of the sponsorship strategy depends on the resources available to hire and educate employees in the athletic department. According to Kirkpatrick (2018), the majority of athletic directors employed at the Power 5 Conference level have either athletic fundraising or some type of development experience. Although these Power 5 institutions might have the ability to hire fundraising specialists, member institutions operating in the Division II landscape likely lack the funding to do so. Exploring the potential of athletic tiered giving sponsorship strategies at the Division II level could prove beneficial for institutions with limited staffing resources to optimize their revenue.

With the limited scope of research in the area of Division II tiered giving sponsorship efforts coupled with the lack of resources Division II institutions have, it seems important to explore strategies that could help these institutions find more success. NCAA Division II institutions can help supplement limited athletic department staff by using their athletic department website to increase and

maintain donor satisfaction, as they might not have the resources of large NCAA Division I institutions.

Institutional Isomorphism

Institutional Isomorphism has been studied extensively. There are three categories of isomorphism – coercive, normative, and mimetic isomorphism – and previous research urges researchers to include all categories in their analysis (Mizruchi & Fein, 1999). In summary, coercive isomorphism develops when an organization is under pressure to conform to expectations. Looking at the case of Division II tiered giving strategies, athletic directors may feel pressure to put together tiered giving sponsorship structures to show they are making the attempt to fundraise in their limited resource environment. Mimetic isomorphism develops in cases of uncertainty to try and legitimize the organization. As new institutions enter the NCAA membership, the organizations may develop similar strategies and best practices to ensure they are seen as a valid and accepted NCAA member institution, and ensuring the prestige that comes with the membership. Finally, normative isomorphism results from professionals receiving the same training. A similar education coupled with similar experiences attending NCAA conferences (e.g. regional rules and NCAA convention) and networking could lead to developing similar structures for tiered giving.

In the case of tiered giving, conformity might not be the best option, “organization, concerned with survival and thus their legitimacy, take on forms not necessarily because particular forms are technically appropriate but rather because they conform to socially accepted notions of what is appropriate” (Mizruchi & Fein, 1999, p. 679). A one

size fits all structure may not be appropriate for all NCAA Division II athletic department tiered giving structures but it may be accepted as athletic directors do not want to allocate limited time and funding to starting from scratch with new sponsorship strategies. Research has found that organizations will attempt to imitate the actions of successful organizations (Haveman, 1993). In the case of NCAA member institutions, those institutions that follow the norms of established member institutions may be seen as more legitimate in the membership.

Previous research has found a presence of institutional isomorphism in intercollegiate athletics. Examples of isomorphism found in intercollegiate athletic research includes athletic director’s perception of revenue and non-revenue sport (Cooper & Weight, 2011), mission statements (Ward, 2015), delegation of activities (Cunningham & Ashley, 2001), academic practices for student-athletes (Kelley, et al., 2018), and tiered giving for athletic fundraising (Lipse, et al., 2021).

Specifically to tiered giving, institutional isomorphism has been supported in previous research regarding the tiered reward systems offered to donors at the NCAA Division I FBS level (Lipse, et al., 2021). It is possible that this phenomenon may occur at the Division II level indicating the need for best practices to serve as a guide in creating tiered giving sponsorship initiatives as opposed to copying the tiered giving structure used by peers. Institutional theory may support the common look and feel of the current state of Division II athletic department tiered giving strategies. Dacin (1997) hypothesized conformity to institutional norms, “creates structural similarities, or isomorphism,

across organizations” (p. 47). As many organizations attempt to seek legitimacy in their environment, they may also develop similar strategies, avoiding establishing practices that could be seen as deviating from normal behavior (Deephouse, 1996). Athletic departments post tiered giving sponsorship materials on their websites, so the initiatives are able to be publicly viewed, and employees working on developing tiered giving sponsorship strategies might look to peer athletic department websites for assistance.

The research presented in this paper sought to determine best practices for Division II tiered giving sponsorship strategies to ensure administrators are not only copying practices of peers but utilizing strategies that could prove successful for their member institution.

Considering donor behavior, institutional isomorphism, and resource dependency theory, the authors of the present study agree with Mahony et al. (2003) regarding the demand for additional research on institutional strategies regarding giving within college athletics.

3. Methodology

Qualitative Inquiry

A qualitative approach to inquiry can produce rich descriptions of phenomena when research contains several concepts, theories, and/or unknown variables as well as provide insights into process rather than outcomes (Ajagbe et al., 2015; Sofaer, 1999). Further, qualitative methods are appropriate when little is known about a topic and the researcher aims to understand more from the participant or practitioner’s perspective prior to designing more causal or predictive studies (Cotting-

ham et al., 2013). Therefore, this research incorporates a two-part qualitative design to allow for clarification and identification of themes regarding Division II best giving practices.

Different types of methods (e.g., regression, interviews, ethnography, etc.) result in different types of outcomes (Lever, 1981). In order to accurately answer the proposed research questions, the present study involved both a content analysis as well as an open-ended survey. The two part quantitative-qualitative mixed method approach provided depth to this study as website content analysis informed the survey instrument used in part two of the research. Two part studies are implemented when questions remain unanswered (Morse, 2010) about a given topic (e.g., best strategies for giving). What follows is an overview of these methods, how they were implemented within the context of the research, and a review of the sampling, data collection, and data analysis.

Content Analysis

Content analysis allows for both a systematic process of analyzing documents and text data as well as a means for conveying meaning (Cavanagh, 1997; Krippendorff, 1989; Neuendorf, 2017). Further, content analysis allows for researchers “to provide knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon under study” (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992, p. 314). Therefore, a content analysis was used in this study to explore the websites of Division II athletic programs regarding giving practices.

The researcher began each exploration by reading the director of athletics’ biography on the staff directory page. The researcher pulled information relating to the Director of Athletics’ educational

background and previous work experience. The researcher then searched the websites to find information related to an athletics' booster club and the name of the booster club. The researcher then noted the steps necessary to find a place to donate to the athletic department and any tabs included in the process. Finally, tiered giving options were found and reported along with any gifts tied to giving at certain tiers.

Surveys

With the varying number of giving tiers found during content analysis of the athletic department websites, the researcher then created a survey instrument to gain the perceptions, experiences, and recommendations of Division I development employees. Specifically, the researcher used the findings from the website content analysis to inform questions for a survey that was sent out to all senior level athletic department development personnel at member institutions in NCAA Division I FBS conferences. Email addresses for the development employees were obtained from member institution athletic department websites, and each senior level development employee was sent an email invitation containing information about the study and a hyperlink to the online survey. The study contained 21 questions containing open-ended items. Content analysis of the qualitative responses was used to identify themes and patterns within the data. To support interpretive validity, empirical material from the interview responses are reported entirely verbatim (Johnson & Christensen, 2016). Common themes are discussed in the next section.

Sampling

Convenience sampling (see Jager et al., 2017)

has a prevalent history within sport management research (Jordan et al., 2011) and has been implemented to study a wide range of phenomena, including sport consumer attendance (Armstrong, 2008), team identification (Greenwood et al., 2006), branding in sport mega-events (Lee, 2014), sport merchandising (Kwon & Armstrong, 2006), and sport tourism (Jaberi et al., 2018; Pranić et al., 2012). According to Bornstein et al. (2013), convenience sampling provides researchers with an inexpensive and efficient way to gather information for a study. Given this, it is no surprise that convenience sampling is the most utilized sampling method within our field's top journal, the *Journal of Sport Management* (JSM; Jordan et al., 2011). Therefore, based on the historical precedent of convenience sampling in sport management research as well as the arguments presented by Bornstein et al. (2013), this type of sampling was used in the present study.

Following the tenets of convenience sampling, six athletic conferences (including both public and private NCAA Division II institutions) were chosen for this research. The authors analyzed the athletic department websites in each of the six conferences selected. In total, 83 athletic department websites were included in the present study.

Data Analysis

The empirical material collected from the gift options was coded as common themes were found between donor benefits at each gift giving level. The process for coding the empirical material followed a data-driven coding process, as this process allowed the researcher to begin the coding process without codes and find nuances in the gifts reported (Brinkmann, 2013).

4. Results

First, the results regarding website content analysis will be discussed. An analysis of the Director of Athletics’ biographies shows business administration and physical education academic undergraduate backgrounds are the most common. When it comes to graduate work, Sport Administration was overwhelmingly the most common discipline for Athletic Directors (46.4%). Sixteen of the Athletic Directors included in this study have terminal degrees. Of the Athletic Directors that have acquired terminal degrees, 35.7% acquired the degree in an athletic administration field.

When analyzing the career background of the athletic directors in this study, 23.5% of athletic

directors held a head coaching position prior to becoming athletic director. The most common previous position held prior to reaching the position of athletic director was an Associate Athletic Director (27.9%). The majority of athletic directors in this study (61.0%) worked at an NCAA Division II institution prior to accepting their current position.

To answer RQ1: How are NCAA Division II athletic departments structuring their online giving pages on their websites, the researcher searched the homepage of each athletic department website for giving tabs. Figure 1 depicts an example of a giving tab analyzed in this study.

Figure 1



Table 1

<i>Athletic Department Fundraising Tab Names</i>		
Tab for Fundraising	Count	Percent
Support	6	7.2%
Donate	12	14.5%
Support “Institution Name”	2	2.4%
Giving	10	12%
Give	2	2.4%
“Name of Booster Club”	15	18.1%
Support Athletics	2	2.4%
No Tab	15	18.1%

Frequently, institutions either had their giving opportunities listed under a tab named after their booster club (23.4%) or did not have a tab for giving (23.4%). When athletic departments did not have a direct tab for giving, it was common to find a giving link under a tab named “fan central” or “fan zone” (45.5%). A tab named “donate” was also common amongst athletic departments (18.8%). Table 1 below outlines how Division II institutions named the giving tabs on their web-

sites.

To answer RQ2: How are NCAA Division II athletic departments organizing giving options for donors, the researcher searched the athletic department websites for information outlining benefits for giving. The information found indicates there is a wide array of giving options across different NCAA Division II institutions. An example of an outline for giving benefits analyzed in this study is listed in figure 2.

Figure 2

Total Annual Giving To Any Fund July 1 - June 30		LETTER WINNER	CAPTAIN	ALL-CONFERENCE	ALL-AMERICAN	NATIONAL CHAMPION
	\$99 \$149	\$150 \$499	\$500 \$999	\$1,000 \$4,999	\$5,000 \$9,999	\$10K+
Membership Welcome Packet						
Recognition In Program & On Athletic Website						
Club Magnet						
Invitation To Event In Spring**						
Invite From Athletic Director For Select Events	2	2	4	4	4	4
Personalized Thank You From Student-Athlete						
Club T-Shirt						
Access To Exclusive Mid-Season Press Conference						
Invitation To Clarion 1867 Giving Society Events**						
Invitation To President's Pavilion & VIP Area For Select Athletic Events**				4	4	4
Club Stadium Chair (benefit value of \$50)						
Invitation To End-Of-Season Luncheon With Athletic Director & Special Guests**						

For example, some institutions only have three tiers for giving, whereas others have up to ten. Additionally, the minimum amount required to reach the first tier varies, ranging from \$20 to \$1,000. Additionally, the top tier giving level differs in a range from \$100 to \$26,000.

Of the institutions that have tiers listed on their website for their giving ($n = 39$), most institutions have five or six tiers (46.2%). Similar to the wide array of giving levels and tiers amongst NCAA Division II athletic departments, the type of gift given to donors at different levels is just as varied. To answer RQ3: How are NCAA Division II athletic departments enticing donors to participate in online giving, the researcher analyzed giving guides for donors posted on athletic department websites. After a review of the athletic department websites included in this study, gifts to donors were broken down into recognition, communication, tickets, access, events, physical gifts, hospitality, store credit/discounts, and parking. Key findings from each of these categories are discussed below.

Recognition. The most common recognition received for donations regardless of tier appeared to be print and website recognition following a donation. However, other common recognition included on-field/court recognition, recognition on electronic backboard, and annual report recognition. Higher tiered recognition included serving as honorary coach of the game and presidential recognition.

Communication. Newsletters and email updates were common methods of communication given to donors at all tiers. No other common method of communication to donors was listed

across institutions. However, other notable forms of communication from the athletic department included a personalized thank you letter from student-athletes and athletic directors.

Tickets. The number and type of tickets gifted to donors at varying tiers differed drastically between institutions. For example, even at the first tier of giving, three institutions gave one all-sport pass to donors, whereas one institution gave four all-sport passes. Tickets varied from single game tickets to season passes to all sport passes. Additionally, some tickets were for general seating, while others were reserved seating. Moreover, some institutions only offered the right to purchase priority seats with no complimentary ticket benefits.

Access. After a review of the available giving guides on athletic department websites, it appears the higher the giving level, the more special access a donor was given. At the first tier of giving, no institutions offer special access. However, when donors give at higher tiers, special access includes meetings with coaches, the athletic director, and student-athletes. These meetings took the form of private dinners, travel to away contests, and rounds of golf. One institution included special access to the athletic director.

Events. Invitations to special events were very popular benefits of giving to athletic departments. The special events included invitations to end of season banquets and hall of fame dinners. However, the number of tickets to these events differed between institutions at the same giving level. For example, at the 5th tier of giving, one institution offered three hall of fame dinner tickets, another offered two hall of fame dinner tickets, and two in-

stitutions offered one ticket to the hall of fame dinner. Similarly, at the 5th tier of giving, one institution offered four end of season banquet tickets, another offered one ticket to the end of season banquet, and another offered two tickets to the banquet.

Physical Gifts. Physical gifts given seemed to be the most common of the giving categories between institutions. The most common gift at all giving levels appeared to be the car decal. Other common gifts included t-shirts, lapel pins, and polos. At the highest tier levels (tiers nine and ten) gifts included a pop-up tent, custom cooler and autographed items. It should be noted that it was common to notice unspecified gifts listed in the benefits of donating at a certain level.

Hospitality. Although hospitality was a common benefit of giving, the number of passes to hospitality seemed to differ between institutions. For example, at the 7th giving tier, 10 institutions offered access to hospitality for donors. However, one institution gave four passes to hospitality, and another gave six passes to hospitality.

Store Credit/Discounts. Gift cards and merchandise discounts appeared to be common benefits for donors at varying tiers. However, as with the categories discussed above, the percent dis-

count and gift card amount varied within each tier. The lowest gift card amount listed was a \$25 gift card at tier one, with the highest gift card listed at \$250 beginning at tier six. The lowest discount for merchandise offered to donors was 5%. This discount applied to donors at the specific institution that gave at giving tiers 1-5. The highest discount given to donors was 25% from one institution at the 7th tier of giving.

Parking. There did not appear to be any parking perks for donors giving at any of the first tier giving levels. However, when parking privileges were included as perks for higher giving tiers, they were just as varied as tickets. Similar to tickets, parking ranged from single game parking passes to season parking passes. Additionally, parking passes were either reserved parking or general parking. Moreover, some benefits only included football parking or basketball parking, whereas others included both.

Based on the findings from content analysis reported above, a survey was sent to athletic development employees working at NCAA Division I FBS institutions regarding RQ4. A total of ten participants completed the electronic survey. A description of each participation is listed in Table 2.

Table 2

List of Participants

Participant	Years of Experience	Reported Highest Degree Earned
1	20	Working on a PhD
2	5	Bachelor of Arts in Communication Studies
3	5	Beachelor of Arts in Sport Administration
4	3	MBA

5	9	MBA and Master of Sport Administration
6	3	Master of Arts in Sport and Fitness Administration
7	5	Juris Doctorate
8	34	Graduate Degree in Sports Administration
9	8	Master’s Degree in Athletics Administration
10	5+	Masters of Science in Sport Management

In the discussion of the “call to action” button on the athletic department website, five participants indicated the importance of making the giving tab on the athletic department website prominent. When discussing the most effective “call to action” button, participants reported finding success with using pictures and videos of student-athletes to grab attention. However, it is important to note that participants highlighted the importance of ensuring the “call to action” button is easily accessible. Participant 3 noted, “I think the most effective “call to attention” tools are ones that clearly get the point across - a donor should never wonder why that button exists or where that banner will take them if they choose to click on it.” Four participants noted the importance of keeping the “call to action” button easy to find for donors. Participant two noted, “banners add a layer to marketing efforts, but a prominent place within the menu is another layer that must be used in coordination. Legitimacy of the fundraising department is necessary and adding it to the menu helps that legitimacy. A banner alone puts it at equal footing with a sponsor.”

With the varying number of giving tiers found during content analysis of the athletic department websites, the researcher asked participants for their thoughts on the optimal number of giving ti-

ers. The responses from participants were as varied as the findings during the content analysis of the athletic department websites. Four participants indicated they believed the optimal number of giving tiers depends on the size of the institution. Participant three responded, “I think that the amount of tiers depend on each organization, however, it is important to make sure that there are benefits in the tiers to encourage members to upgrade and understand the difference between each tier. With that being said, it's also important not to over complicate any benefits.” Overall, participants indicated athletic fundraising departments should not over complicate the number of tiers as this could overwhelm donors.

When asked what gifts the participants believed were most effective to use when attracting donors, nine participants stated parking privileges were effective. Seven participants stated special team/athletic department access was effective and six participants believed hospitality privileges were effective. Five participants indicated tickets were effective incentives for attracting donors. When discussing the least effective incentives for attracting donors, store credit was mentioned as least effective by five participants. Participant 6 noted, “for some reason this [store credit/discounts] just has not appealed to donors like I thought it would. I

feel as though donors would much rather receive access to exclusive gear rather than receiving a discount on gear that is available to the general public”. Three participants indicated physical gifts were least effective. Participant two discussed, “a donor would rather an experience than a mug. They would rather see what their hard-earned money did and how it made a difference to a student, a coach, a trainer, or globally- the overall impact athletics had on the local economy.”

Each participant was asked for their perspective of each of the following incentives for donating identified during the website content analysis: recognition, inside communication, tickets, access, special event invitations, physical gifts, hospitality, store credit/discounts, and parking privileges. Table 3 below highlights common themes found in the discussion of the effectiveness of each incentive.

Table 3

Suggestions for Incentives

Recognition	Access	Tickets	Inside Communication	Special Events	Physical Gifts	Parking	Store Credits/ Discounts	Hospitality
1. Recognize donors at all giving levels.	1. Consider the burden for coaches/athletic staff.	1. Know what is important to your donors.	1. Use multiple mediums to communicate.	1. Make the event an experience.	1. Consider unique gifts.	1. Give parking options.	1. Make it easy to use the discount online.	1. Be able to execute at a high level.
2. Coordinate with university fundraising.	2. Reserve this benefit for higher tiered donors.	2. Consider revenue you are "giving away".	2. Get buy-in from coaches and other athletic department staff.	2. Do not have repetitive events each year.	2. Ensure variety each year.	2. Create a process to ensure game-day operations staff do not turn away donors.	2. Consider one-off discount events for donors.	2. Consider a hospitality benefit for donors at lower tiers.
3. Include an experience.	3. Ensure a unique experience.	3. Make it clear tickets are not a tax-deductible benefit.	3. Make sure content is valuable.	3. Pair special event with another event (e.g. a tailgate with a football game).	3. Include the organization's brand or name on the gift.	3. Create signage and parking maps to help donors find their lot.		3. Ensure buy-in from donors prior to spending funds on hospitality.
4. Allow an opt-out option for recognition.	4. Consider NCAA rules.	4. Consider offering access to tickets or a specific seating section instead of giving away tickets.	4. Do not over communicate.	4. Limit the number of special events.		4. Consider reserved spaces.		4. Host hospitality in an exclusive space.
		5. Consider a priority program.				5. Consider a priority system.		5. Include special guests in hospitality areas.

The findings from this exploration into athletic department website fundraising leads to the conclusion that the current state of fundraising is all over the map. Although giving structures seem similar, no conclusions can be made to determine what might be current best practice across NCAA Division II institutions. A further analysis and discussion across Division II member institutions could help institutions find the best ways to structure their website fundraising platforms. The next section offers a discussion of the results presented in this section.

5. Discussion

The findings from this exploration into athletic department tiered giving leads to the conclusion that the current state of tiered giving strategies is all over the map. Although giving structures seem similar, no conclusions can be made to determine what might be current best practice across NCAA Division II institutions, supporting institutional isomorphism. A further analysis and discussion across Division II member institutions could help institutions find the best ways to structure tiered giving plan for sponsors. For example, it may be beneficial to look outside of the intercollegiate landscape to determine best practices for tiered giving. Many organizations use tiered giving strategies. Exploring how and why other nonprofit organizations structure their giving tiers could help provide clarity to the varied strategies regarding giving tiers noted in the intercollegiate athletic landscape.

With the limited common ground using the tiered system with general athletic department

website fundraising, it may be beneficial for Division II athletic department administrators to use crowd funding strategies that focus on a single fundraising objective (Sattler, et al., 2019). It did appear athletic departments used their men's football and men's basketball programs to entice donors, as many of the benefits included tickets, hospitality, and parking for football and men's basketball games. Although institution athletic team success was not considered when exploring the athletic department websites included in this study, this information expands upon research from Martinez et al. (2010) and Popp et al. (2016) indicating football and men's basketball programs can have an impact on athletic department fundraising. Specifically, many incentives offered in tiered giving strategies included parking and tickets for football and men's basketball. These findings may support the need for athletic administrators to focus on fundraising for just football or just men's basketball programming during a single season instead of simply having general giving information listed on their website.

Kirkpatrick (2018) found, the majority of athletic directors at the Power 5 level have some sort of athletic fundraising or development experience. Future research can explore hiring practices in Division II college athletics to gain an understanding of current job requirements to serve as an athletic director or associate athletic director at a Division II institution.

It could be beneficial for professors to consider revising the current curriculum for sport management students to ensure students learn effective sponsorship strategies in the classroom. This edu-

cation could help students achieve successful careers in intercollegiate athletics upon graduation. With the smaller budgets at Division II institutions, athletic directors need to find creative ways to raise money for their athletic programs. Athletic departments are already paying for websites to host statistics, team rosters, and administrative information. Further inquiry into the area of Division II college athletic sponsorship could help institutions use the tools they already have, including their website platform, to increase annual fundraising dollars. For example, athletic programs commonly use coaches and student-athletes in their fundraising strategies. Having coaches help build relationships with donors may make a donor feel more connected and a part of the program. As previous research indicated, vicarious achievement was hypothesized to be a driving motive for giving (Kim et al., 2019). Making donors feel the team's achievement and success could help improve donations.

6. Limitations and Future Research

This research explored best practices for NCAA Division II institutions to improve their success with tiered giving. This study was an exploratory study looking to improve the current state of Division II member institution tiered giving sponsorship strategies. Further evaluation into how athletic departments with successful football and/or men's basketball programs structure their giving tiers compared to athletic departments that do not have successful football and/or men's basketball programs could further provide insight into the effectiveness of using tickets, hospitality, and parking as benefits for donating. The study only

included perspectives from Division I FBS development professionals, further research could include the perspectives from Division I FCS development professionals but also development professionals from general university development offices. Including the current landscape of university strategies for tiered giving could help provide a more holistic picture of institutional tiered giving strategies. Finally, the present study used a convenience sample, limiting the generalization of the research findings.

Improving tiered giving sponsorship practices in Division II is crucial as these institutions lack resources compared to their Division I peers. Research in this area can help these institutions operating with limited resources utilize the resources they do have in an effective way.

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