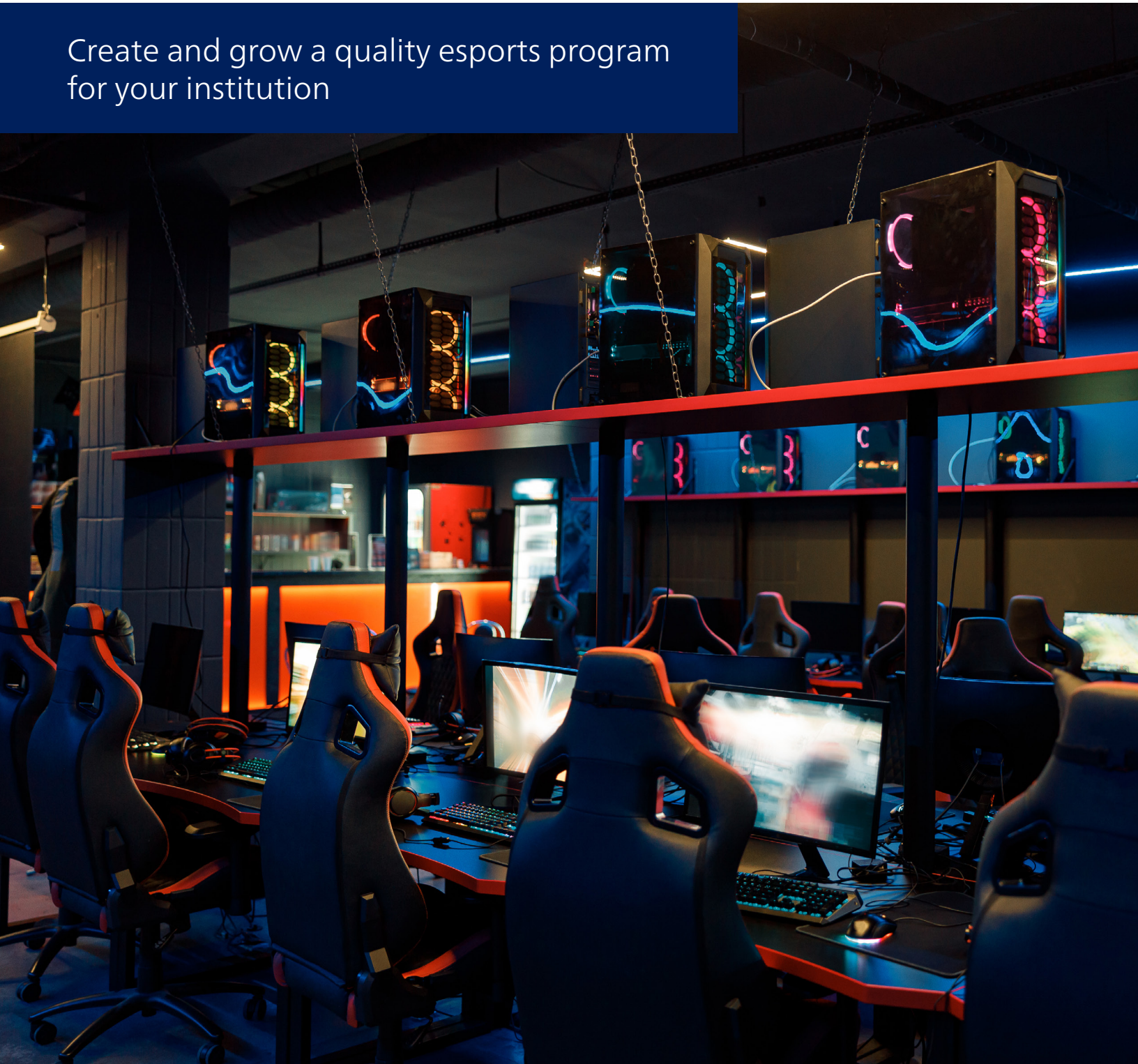# How to Create or Expand Your Collegiate Esports Program

Create and grow a quality esports program for your institution

![AVI-SPL logo]

How to Create or Expand Your Collegiate Esports Program

The esports industry is exploding. With almost 30 million monthly spectators in the U.S., experts predict the market that was valued at just under $1 billion in 2020 to hit $4.75 billion in 2030. Collegiate esports is no exception to the upsurge, with hundreds of school teams, thousands of competitors, and millions of dollars in scholarships offered to players.

Higher education officials are realizing that starting or growing an esports program benefits students and schools in many ways:

Recruitment

Esports programs attract students and even appeal to parents who view it as a safe activity. Quality programs also help retain students who feel part of the esports community on campus. Consider offering scholarships to attract top esports and broadcast talent. Schools can also offer business partnerships and related degrees to attract and prepare students for careers in esports.

Student engagement

Some spectators and participants wouldn't otherwise be engaged in campus life. In fact, 80% of high school esports players haven't been involved in other extracurricular activities. College students have the opportunity to participate in a number of ways, including as competitors, broadcasters, coaches, support team members, or spectators.

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Sense of community

Esports is more inclusive than many other activities–for both competitors and others in the community. And the fans are as passionate, involved, and engaged as they are in other school sports.

Social well-being

Esports offers the opportunity for gamers and other students to participate in social events which are important to the college experience. It's also a safe option compared to many other activities, and gaming facilities that are open late can be a secure place for students to hang out.

Publicity

Like in traditional sports, the top esport players can attract fans, bringing both recognition and revenue to their schools.

Despite the advantages an esports program can provide, many technologists and administrators aren't sure what their next steps should be. This guide will help you take those first steps to create or grow a quality esports program.

Lay the Groundwork

Before you start ordering computers, there's a lot to consider when building an esports program. Experts predict esports will continue to grow in popularity, so you'll want to make sure you consider the future of your technology, your spaces, your students, and your faculty and staff. In fact, the creation of an esports program will likely generate new departments and positions–like esports director–that you'll have to consider moving forward.

Stakeholders

Start by assembling a team of campus stakeholders that may include students, administrators, IT staff, facilities managers, marketers, athletics and wellness faculty, academic programming directors, or anyone interested from other departments. And students should include more than just the gamers–there will also be broadcasters, coaches, and more. Off-campus stakeholders may include members of the community like sponsors, game developers, and associations and conferences.

Budget

Budget is a big question for colleges building their esports programs. There's a wide range of costs depending on a school's size, plans for the program, and even the kinds of games they'll play.

80% of high school esports players haven't been involved in other extracurricular activities.

At a recent [AVNetwork Roundtable](#), esports technology experts discussed creating and expanding collegiate esports programs. Brandon Brunhammer, Director LD and Simulation at AVI-SPL, explained that a simple system could cost $150,000, while a more complex system could be $5 million. "Every solution is going to be tailored to the university," Brunhammer explained, adding that there are some basic standards to adhere to.

However, you don't have to spend millions from the outset — what's important is to begin with a strong foundation with room to grow.

Michael DiBella, Director of Product Marketing, Commercial at Crestron, said net revenue from the program can actually help fund the facility. "What's so unique about esports," DiBella said, "is that it pays for itself."

Plan Your Spaces

Whether starting a new esports program or expanding on one, proper space planning is essential. Some questions to consider include:

What kinds of spaces do we need?

Esport facilities often include a lounge with game computer stations; an arena for competitions and spectator seating; a broadcast area or booth for commentary and streaming.

Will they be multi-use spaces?

Some schools create versatile esport spaces that students can use for other purposes when not in use for gaming. For example, students can use the powerful gaming computers for programming or video production; they can use the broadcast suite for podcasting; and they can use the lounge area as a relaxed study space or rent it for gameplay. Facilities can serve both competitive and recreational esports players.

> "What's so unique about esports, is that it pays for itself."
>
> - Michael DiBella
> Director of Product Marketing, Commercial Crestron

How do we get started?

Non-profit organizations like the National Association of Collegiate Esports (NACE) can help you get started. NACE can connect you with technology professionals and provide build guidelines for collegiate esports spaces.

There are different tiers of options, from a simple competition space to larger ones with stadium seating for spectators. Even if you're just starting out with a dozen gaming stations, leave room for options to expand. It's vital to talk to a consultant or integrator at the outset because they can offer a future-proofing perspective.

Ashley "AJ" Jones, Director, Membership Sales and Services at NACE, recommends starting with 3-, 5-, and 10-year plans. That way, everyone involved can understand the program goals and plans.

Equip Your Program

Start by talking to stakeholders and consultants. Currently, there isn't a set of standards schools apply to their spaces like in other sports and activities. That's why it's important to engage with experts to learn what other schools are doing and to outline the kind of experience you're trying to create.

Your equipment and infrastructure should not be an afterthought. The quality of your tech has to match the level of your players. Nanoseconds matter in esports, so you can't risk low bandwidth and poor refresh rates.

Experts recommend using a separate network for your esports facility because these spaces use a lot of bandwidth. And invest in a backup network from a different company in case your primary network goes down during a tournament or important event.

This kind of gaming is a spectator sport, so consider investing in video walls and audio technology that will immerse fans even when they head to the restroom or concession stands.

Common equipment and capabilities for esports facilities include:

- AV or media over IP video distribution system
- Streaming and signal flow management
- Gaming PCs
- Control systems
- Audio equipment
- Monitors/displays for players, broadcasters, spectators, and team members
- Peripherals like headsets, controllers, mice, keyboards
- Broadcast equipment
- Video walls
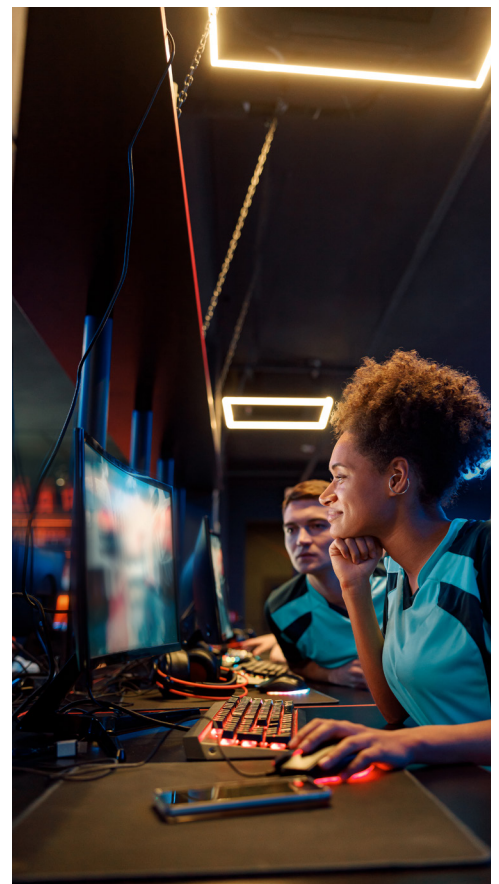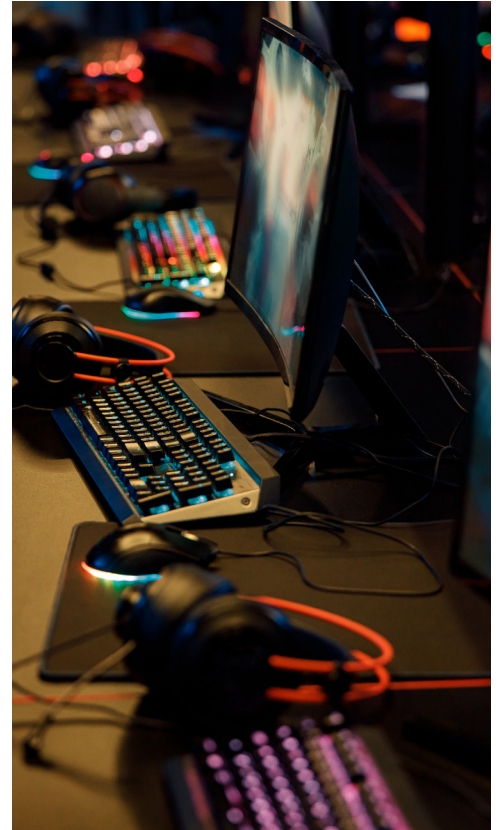
You don't have to limit the gear and equipment to that list though. Some schools include game consoles and some are experimenting with virtual reality technology. Continue to listen to students and keep in mind that esports is an evolving field.

Begin the Build-Out

Setting up your space will bring it to life, so it's a good time to get some initial feedback from players. In this phase, you'll install and set up the equipment. Your integrator will also test and program the equipment to ensure all your software, hardware, and systems are working and interoperable.

Since your space will have an audience of remote viewers watching the broadcast, this is also a good opportunity to put your school's branding and personality into the space.

Get Your Game On

Now is the time to finalize spaces for competition. It is also the time to plan your Day 2 operations, including what kind of management services and event support you want to ensure competition day goes smoothly and without game stoppage. Your integrator can tell you about what support services they or their partners offer.

Solutions That Support Esports

Esports arenas require more than just gameplay monitors, CPUs, and lighting. They need to be able to quickly distribute audio and video signals, often using AV-over-IP solutions. These technology tools will:

- Enable broadcast teams to toggle between feeds on their own displays while casting other content to the main feed.
- Allow coaches to use real-time outcomes during practice sessions to educate players.

Crestron technology can provide solutions from the smallest to the largest esports venues imaginable.

Crestron's DM NVX® networked content distribution solution and XiO Cloud® technology management platform can deliver the critical pieces needed to create an exceptional esports experience for the players, broadcast team, and the audience.
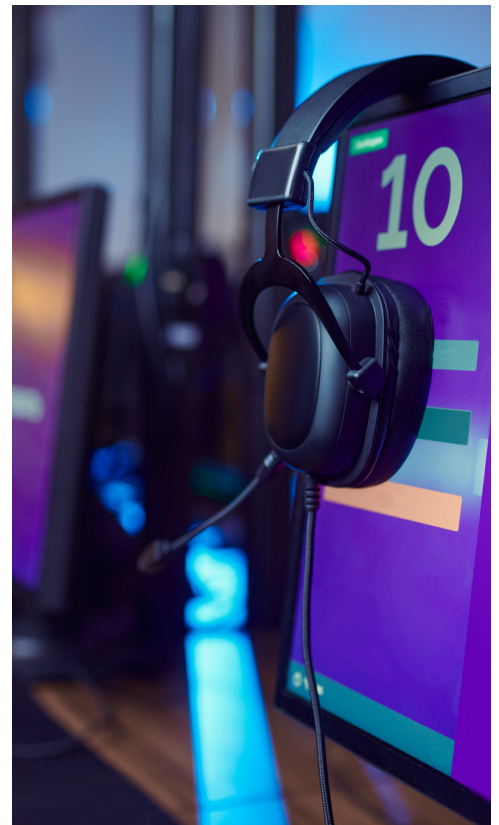
Level Up

Once you decide to expand your esports program, it's time to have another conversation with your technology consultant or integrator. They'll advise you based on experience with other spaces, as well as the games your teams play. The specific games will have a big impact on the kind of expansions you'll want to make.

It's important to keep in mind that technology is always changing and esports will continue to evolve. It pays off to be flexible and scale as your program grows. This process can mean maintaining a rolling build, meaning you can expand your program in phases or just add capabilities as you go. Take advantage of associations like NACE that provide free resources and information about how to expand collegiate programs.

Beyond Game Day

As mentioned, there are many more people involved in an esports facility than just the players. Players aren't the only ones who need to train, since you will need experts to train your staff on equipment and its maintenance. It's also important to train and educate users of the space on how to treat the equipment, especially if it is being used as a multipurpose space.

Keep in mind that technology is always changing and esports will continue to evolve. It pays to be flexible and scale as your program grows.

Esports Culture

For those who haven't experienced esports competitions, it can be hard to imagine the technology, the passion, and the mastery involved. Though many haven't seen a competition, the esports subculture has become mainstream–especially with the addition of facilities and varsity teams at major colleges and universities.

- Esport players garner fan followings like athletes in other fields.
- They choose nicknames for their competition personas.
- Sponsors pay or provide gear to top players.
- Many prefer to play with their own gear like headsets and controllers.

If you're considering building an esports facility but have not yet been to a competition, experts recommend going. Like with other live experiences, you can see firsthand the enthusiasm and skill involved to not only participate but to create a successful event.

Esports Are More Than Just Fun and Games

Esports are fun and games–but they're also becoming an integral part of college life and institutional relevance. Additionally, they promote camaraderie, support STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math), and provide exposure and revenue for schools.

Learn More

If you want to know more about how to create or expand your collegiate esports program, get in touch with AVI-SPL today.

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