



*BE FUTURE
READY*

Academy Design Team

Prep Guide

NAF.org



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What We Do

For 45 years, NAF has transformed the high school experience by providing access to real-world opportunities that help students build skills, explore careers, and prepare for future success. As a national education non-profit, we bring schools, businesses, and community leaders together to equip students for their next steps after graduation. Learn more about the [Power of the NAF Network](#) in this short video.

Our Approach

NAF students engage in hands-on learning beyond what traditional public education is equipped to do alone. We expand on career and technical education (CTE) programs by offering experiential learning that complements career-focused curricula through our [career pathways](#) and other programs of study.

By exposing students to career options, helping them develop [Future Ready Skills](#), and fostering critical workplace connections, NAF aims to transform the high school experience, shape a strong workforce, and support students on their paths to future success.

Mission and Vision

Mission

NAF solves some of the biggest challenges facing education and the economy by bringing education, business, and community leaders together to transform the high school experience.

Since 1980, NAF has grown from one NAF Academy of Finance in NYC to 600+ [NAF academies](#) focusing on growing industries today.

Vision

We envision a world in which all young people have equal opportunity for successful futures.

We're also constantly improving and innovating to impact students beyond NAF academies.

NAF DESIGN

The NAF approach focuses on establishing NAF academies, implemented using four essential elements of practice. This flexible structure combines career-focused content in the classroom with real-world application and exposure to the workforce.

Academy Development & Structure

NAF academies are small learning communities within existing high schools that integrate general and career courses, helping students make meaningful connections between subjects. They support open enrollment to maximize opportunities for all students, encourage teacher collaboration across disciplines, and foster personalized learning to meet the goals of students, schools, and districts.

Program of Study (Curriculum & Instruction)

NAF academies deliver a rigorous, career-connected curriculum centered on project-based learning that mirrors the workplace, equipping students with real-world skills and experiences. NAF offers [industry-validated courses](#) in growing industries along with curricular projects. Additionally, NAF recognizes third-party courses and programs of study that align with our standards and [federally recognized career clusters](#), helping districts address community needs while meeting local and state requirements.

Advisory Board

Advisory boards bridge schools and the workplace, leveraging industry expertise to enhance student learning experiences and support local workforce development. They collaborate with academy leaders, serve as NAF ambassadors, and help integrate industry-relevant curriculum and work-based learning experiences. Their support in strategic planning, curriculum review, fundraising, and professional development strengthens academies and helps prepare [Future Ready](#) students.

Work-Based Learning

Work-Based Learning (WBL) connects classroom learning with real-world experience through an intentional sequence of activities in partnership with industry professionals. NAF students progress from career awareness to exploration and preparation, using a data-driven process that includes student voice. This [Outcomes-Driven WBL](#) approach helps students develop the aspirations, skills, and connections needed to refine their career interests and ensure future success.



Start Your NAF Academy Journey

Understand NAF Academy Standards and begin building your Academy Design Team (ADT).

What Makes a NAF Academy?

NAF [Academy Standards](#) outline the core practices for designing and sustaining a high-quality academy.

These standards are grouped into four essential elements:

- Academy Development & Structure
- Advisory Board
- Program of Study (Curriculum & Instruction)
- Work-Based Learning

Building the Academy Design Team

Launch your academy by assembling a multi-disciplinary team to guide planning and development.

The ADT is responsible for:

- Recruiting dedicated members who will champion [NAF's approach](#)
- Co-creating the academy's vision and mission
- Defining the strategic actions required to complete the admissions process
- Leading planning and implementation for a successful Launch Year

Your Next Steps

1. Build the ADT

- Begin outreach and draft a preliminary list of core and support team members
- Share the [ADT Prep Guide](#) with prospective members to establish a shared understanding

2. Host a 90-120 minute ADT Onboarding Meeting to:

- Align on purpose, team roles, expectations, and next steps
- Review key [Admissions](#) resources; Set a Month 1 goal (Resource: [Action Plan template](#))

STEP 1

Build Academy Design Team

STEP 2

Review NAF Standards

STEP 3

Develop Goals & Action Steps

STEP 4

Document Plan & Upload Evidence

STEP 5

Finalize Admissions Deadline: 5/31/26



Academy Design Team Onboarding

Start here: Use guiding questions to help your team align on purpose, clarify goals, and build strong team dynamics.

Orientation & Team Building

Establish your ADT by aligning on purpose, setting norms, and building trust. This stage sets the foundation for collaboration and ensures everyone understands their role in developing a NAF academy.

Guiding Questions:

- Impact: Why is a career-pathway valuable for our students and aligned to local workforce needs?
- Partnerships: Which community or business partners can support us, and how can we engage them?
- Team Roles: What are the roles and time commitments for each ADT member?
- Leadership Support: What ongoing support is needed from school and district leaders?

Staging & Goal Clarification

Co-create your vision and mission, define the graduate profile, and map the program of study to local career pathways. These actions lay the foundation for a successful Launch Year.

Guiding Questions:

- Vision & Mission: What statements will clearly guide and inspire our academy's purpose?
- Graduate Profile: What skills and attributes define a successful academy graduate?
- Program of Study: How will we sequence of courses and projects support that pathway?
- Market Viability: Which career pathway will we focus on, and do workforce data confirm its relevance?

Relationship & Trust Building

Secure stakeholder buy-in by sharing the academy's vision and mission with district leaders, staff, and community partners. Foster open communication, invite unique perspectives, and support one another through each phase of development.

Guiding Questions:

- Leadership & Coordination: Who will lead the ADT and what are each member's roles and responsibilities?
- Representation: Are all key stakeholder groups included (students, families, educators, partners)?
- Community Support: Which school/organizations can champion college and career readiness?
- Open Dialogue: How will we discuss challenges and successes transparently?



Academy Design Team Roles

Suggested roles for a team of at least three members who regularly collaborate to guide academy planning efforts.

Core ADT Members

Role	Expertise & Contributions
Academy Lead (non-administrator)	Leads academy coordination, advocates for the program, and oversees implementation of the NAF design.
School Administrator	Provides school leadership, allocates resources, supports master scheduling, and builds community support.
Counselor	Supports student recruitment, advising, scheduling, and social-emotional and academic interventions.
Career-Pathway Educators	Contribute career-pathway expertise and integrate authentic project-based experiences and work-based learning.
Core-Content Educators	Provide subject-area expertise and align core content with project-based and work-based learning.
Academy Students	Offer insights on student needs, share program impact, and support peer recruitment.
Work-Based Learning Coordinator	Builds partnerships with businesses and community members, and coordinates the WBL program and internships.
College/Career Coordinator	Serves as the postsecondary liaison and supports college and career readiness activities.

Support ADT Members

Role	Expertise & Contributions
Business Partners	Provide industry expertise, serve on the advisory board, and contribute industry resources.
Community Partner	Share knowledge of local workforce needs and connect the academy with community-based resources.
Postsecondary Education Partner	Share postsecondary academic expectations, provide career-pathway expertise, serve on the advisory board, and offer curriculum resources.
Academy Parent/Guardian	Represent student interests, offer parent perspective and support, and contribute community connections.
School District Leader	Provide district-level leadership, resources, and policy support for academy development.



Academy Team Roster

The Academy Team is a multi-disciplinary group that meets regularly to plan, analyze data, and engage in professional learning to continuously improve career-pathway curriculum and college-and-career readiness.

Team Roles & Member Expectations

Name	Role	Member Expectations
	School District Leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Secure district-level resources and funding• Champion academy collaboration and provide leadership support
	School Administrator	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide school leadership and community engagement• Oversee operations, resource allocation, and planning
	Academy Lead (non-administrator)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lead program implementation, coordination, and advocacy• Collaborate with counselors and administration• Manage NAF deadlines and deliverables
	Counselor	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Advise on scheduling and interventions• Analyze academy and student data
	Work-Based Learning Coordinator	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop partnerships with civic and business organizations• Oversee internships and WBL activities
	College and Career Coordinator	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Coordinate with colleges and career programs• Monitor students' individualized college-and-career plans
	Career-Pathway Educator	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide field expertise in career pathway• Integrate authentic projects and WBL strategies
	Core-Content Educator	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Deliver core-content instruction• Integrate authentic project-based and WBL strategies into lessons
	Academy Student	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Advocate for student needs• Provide feedback on program impact and peer recruitment
	Academy Parent/Guardian	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Communicate student interests and needs• Support recruitment and community outreach
	Business Partner	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Offer career-pathway expertise and resources• Recruit advisory board members and support sustainability
	Community Partner	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify local resources and workforce needs• Recruit advisory board members
	Postsecondary Education Partner	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Share postsecondary expectations and credentials requirements• Recruit advisory board members



Academy Lead Overview

The Academy Lead is responsible for coordinating and leading the academy program, ensuring the NAF design is implemented in alignment with district priorities.

Role & Purpose

The Academy Lead serves as the primary liaison with NAF and leads a multi-disciplinary academy team. The team includes representatives from the district, school administration, parents, students, and partners from civic, business, and postsecondary communities.

In some cases, the Academy Lead may serve as a Academy Director based in the district office, with an Academy Admin located at the school. The Academy Admin shares responsibilities with the Academy Lead to ensure the academy is aligned with [NAF Academy Standards](#).

Key Functions Aligned to the NAF Design

- Academy Team Meetings: Lead regular meetings to address academy development needs and integrate career-connected project-based learning.
- Quality Level Process: Complete NAF's annual Quality Level Process each fall by submitting the Academy Assessment and required evidence by published deadlines.
- Data Analysis: Use academy and student-level data to inform practices and promote equitable access.
- Work-Based Learning Program: Develop and oversee an Outcomes-Driven Work-Based Learning (ODWBL) program that supports NAFTrack Certification (NTC) and tracks student progress.
- Advisory Board Collaboration: Work with the advisory board to support student learning and ensure academy sustainability.
- Professional Learning: Participate in professional learning on career pathways, college and career readiness, and Career Technical Education (CTE), including participation in NAF's signature professional development event, NAF NEXT.
- Membership Fees: Oversee timely payment of NAF annual membership fees with district support.

Skills & Experience

- Strong analytical and problem-solving skills.
- Excellent written and verbal communication.
- Experience coordinating educators and community partnerships.
- Skilled in guiding teams for effective collaboration.
- Skilled in leading teams for work-based learning and CTE initiatives.



Working With Your NAF Portfolio Manager

Your Portfolio Manager (PM) is your dedicated coach throughout the academy planning process. The PM provides guidance, tools, and feedback to help your team stay aligned with district goals and NAF Academy Standards. This support includes regular coaching sessions, planning resources, and feedback on key deliverables to keep your team on track.

What Your Team Will Accomplish

- Define your academy's vision: Lead development of goals and the design framework.
- Build a program of study: Develop a project-based curriculum aligned with district and state requirements.
- Engage partners: Collaborate with business, postsecondary, and community stakeholders.
- Manage deliverables: Meet regularly and complete required planning tasks.
- Complete the quality process: Submit a self-assessment.
- Document progress: Upload evidence to the digital platform in Academy Support Hub.
- Participate in professional development: Attend coaching sessions, online modules, and NAF-sponsored events.
- Apply branding and communications: Use NAF branding consistently by following the [NAF Style Guide](#).

What Your Team Will Achieve

- ✓ Academy Design Plan: Aligned to NAF Academy Standards.
- ✓ Digital Evidence: Required documentation validating the academy design plan.
- ✓ Launch-Ready Team: Prepared to implement the NAF design.
- ✓ Ongoing Support Plan: Outlines next steps and resources for continuous improvement.

How This Supports the Academy Lead's Role

- The Academy Lead is responsible for coordinating the ADT, guiding vision and design, and ensuring alignment with district priorities. The PM works closely with the Academy Lead to provide coaching, resources, and accountability throughout the planning process. Together, they ensure the team completes key milestones, develops a launch-ready academy design plan, and lays a foundation for ongoing success.

For admissions inquiries, contact us.



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