NAF BE FUTURE READY



Academy Design Team Prep Guide

2026–2027

Prepare your team for a successful NAF academy launch.

Assess Needs

Plan for Success

Build Culture

Track Progress

Questions? Contact your Portfolio Manager or **support@naf.org**

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Why an Academy Design Team?

A strong NAF academy starts with a multidisciplinary Academy Design Team (ADT): at least three members who meet regularly to guide academy planning. Your team drives the work, and your NAF Portfolio Manager coaches you along the way.

Assess Needs	Plan for Success	Build Culture	Track Progress
Gather insights from school, community, and industry.	Develop strategies for long-term sustainability.	Foster a positive academy environment.	Monitor development with NAF's online tools and resources.

What Your Team Does

- Recruits members who will champion the academy and the NAF design
- Co-creates the academy's vision and mission
- Completes the strategic actions in the YOP Guide (or the Fast Track Evidence Checklist & Planner) to build your Academy Design Plan
- Leads planning and implementation for a successful launch year

Your Path to Graduation



Year of Planning: self-paced (timing above)	Fast Track: 90-day timeline
• Set goals in your Action Plan Template • Track evidence in the YOP Evidence Checklist & Planner • Upload all evidence at least two weeks before graduation	• Follow the sample timeline in the Fast Track Application Checklist • Assign leads and dates in the Fast Track Evidence Checklist & Planner • Upload all evidence at least two weeks before graduation

See both paths at a glance on page 8.

Getting started

New to NAF? Start with About NAF and The NAF Design, which describe the four core elements your academy is built on. Your team drives the work, and your Portfolio Manager is your dedicated coach (see page 5).

Academy Design Team Roles

Suggested roles for a team of at least three members. Not every role needs to be filled on day one.

Core Members

Role	Expertise & contributions
Academy lead · Primary NAF liaison	Leads academy coordination, advocates for the program, manages NAF deadlines, and oversees implementation of the NAF design. Should be a non-administrator.
School administrator	Provides school leadership, allocates resources, supports master scheduling, and builds community support.
Counselor	Supports student recruitment, advising, scheduling, and academic and social-emotional interventions.
Career-pathway educators	Bring career-pathway expertise, authentic project-based learning, and work-based learning.
Core-content educators	Provide subject-area expertise and connect core content with project-based and work-based learning.
WBL coordinator	Builds business and community partnerships and coordinates work-based learning and internships.
College & career coordinator	Serves as postsecondary liaison and supports college and career readiness activities.
Academy students	Share student needs and program feedback, and support peer recruitment.

Support Members

Role	Expertise & contributions
Business partners	Provide industry expertise and resources, and serve on the advisory board.
Community partners	Share local workforce needs and connect the academy with community resources.
Postsecondary partners	Share postsecondary expectations and credential requirements, and serve on the advisory board.
Parents & guardians	Represent family perspectives and support recruitment and community outreach.
District leaders	Provide district-level leadership, resources, and policy support.

Record your team on the roster on page 7, or use the Academy Team Roster Template.

The Academy Lead

The academy lead coordinates the academy, leads the multidisciplinary team, and serves as the primary liaison with NAF, making sure the NAF design is implemented in line with district priorities. In some districts, an academy director at the district office shares this role with an academy administrator at the school.

Key Functions

Academy team meetings	Lead regular meetings to address academy development and career-connected, project-based learning.
Academy Quality Level Process	Complete annual Data Collection starting in launch year, and the Academy Assessment and evidence by published deadlines.
Data	Use academy- and student-level data to inform practice and promote access for all students.
Work-based learning	Oversee an outcomes-driven WBL process that supports NAFTrack Certification and tracks student progress.
Advisory board	Work with the advisory board to support student learning and academy sustainability.
Professional learning	Join professional learning on career pathways and college and career readiness, including NAF Next.

Skills & Experience

- Strong communication, analytical, and problem-solving skills
- Experience coordinating educators and community partnerships
- Skilled at guiding teams to collaborate effectively, including on WBL and CTE initiatives

Working with Your Portfolio Manager

Your team drives the work, and your Portfolio Manager is your dedicated coach, helping you keep the plan aligned with district goals and the NAF Academy Standards.

How Your Team Drives the Work

Define the academy vision	Set goals and shape your academy around the NAF design.
Build a program of study	Develop a career-connected curriculum with authentic project-based learning, aligned with district and state requirements.
Engage partners	Collaborate with business, postsecondary, and community partners.
Manage progress	Meet regularly, monitor timelines, and keep your Action Plan Template and Evidence Checklist & Planner current.
Complete the quality process	**YOP:** Complete the YOP Snapshot twice and the YOP Assessment before graduation (YOP Assessment Sample).
	Fast Track: Complete the Fast Track Assessment (Fast Track Assessment Sample).
Document progress	Upload evidence to the Academy Support Hub (ASH).
Build your capacity	Take part in coaching, online modules, and NAF professional learning.
Apply NAF branding	Use NAF branding consistently, including your free custom logo.

How Your Portfolio Manager Supports You

Dedicated coaching	Recurring coaching sessions and strategic guidance for your academy team
Technical assistance	Hands-on help aligning your goals with the NAF design and its standards
Progress monitoring	Check-ins at least monthly, with support in between, to keep your plan on track and celebrate milestones
Network connections	Introductions to peer academies, partners, and NAF opportunities

What Your Team Will Achieve

Academy Design Plan	Digital evidence	Launch-ready team	Ongoing support plan
A plan aligned with the NAF Academy Standards	Documentation that shows readiness to launch	Aligned and prepared to implement the NAF design	Next steps and resources for continuous improvement

> **Tip**
>
> The academy lead coordinates the team and guides the academy vision; the Portfolio Manager provides coaching and resources to help the team reach key milestones. Keep your Portfolio Manager informed of team changes, especially a new academy lead or administrator.

Launch Your Team

Hold an **Academy Design Team onboarding meeting (90–120 minutes)**: your team's own strategic planning meeting to onboard new teammates, build a shared understanding of the NAF design, set team norms, and level-set on needs for the year. Use these guiding questions to shape the conversation.

The NAF design at a glance

Academy Development & Structure	Curriculum & Instruction	Advisory Board	Work-Based Learning & Internships
A small learning community within the high school, open to all students	Career-connected courses with authentic project-based learning	Business and community leaders who connect the academy to the workplace	A continuum from career awareness to internships

Stage	Guiding questions
The NAF design *Build a shared foundation*	• How will each of the four core elements look in our school? • Where are we already strong, and where will we need the most support? • Review together: The NAF Design and the NAF Academy Standards
Orientation & team building *Align on purpose and roles*	• Why is this career pathway valuable for our students and local workforce? • What are each member's role and time commitment? • What support do we need from school and district leaders? • Which partners can support us, and how will we engage them?
Goals & direction *Shape your academy*	• What vision and mission will guide our academy? • What skills and attributes define a successful academy graduate? • Which career pathway will we focus on, and do workforce data confirm it? • How will courses and projects be sequenced?
Relationships & trust *Build buy-in and norms*	• Are students, families, educators, and partners represented? • How will we share our vision with leaders, staff, and partners? • How will we discuss challenges and successes openly?

Leave the Meeting With

- A completed Academy Team Roster (page 7) with names and roles, by the end of the meeting
- Team norms and a recurring meeting schedule, by the end of the meeting
- A first-month goal in your Action Plan Template within two weeks (Fast Track: a lead and date for each requirement in the Evidence Checklist & Planner)

Resources: YOP Guide: Team Building & Leadership · YOP Roadmap · Team Meeting Agenda

Questions? Contact your Portfolio Manager or Jennifer Geisler, Director, Emerging Academies, at **jgeisler@naf.org**.

Academy Team Roster

Fill in names and contact information for each role. Leave unfilled roles blank, and add rows as needed.

Academy: _____ **School:** _____ **Date:** _____

Role	Name	Email	Member expectations
Academy lead (non-administrator)			*Lead coordination and advocacy; manage NAF deadlines and deliverables*
School administrator			*Provide school leadership, resources, and planning support*
District leader			*Secure district resources and champion the academy*
Counselor			*Advise on scheduling and interventions; analyze student data*
WBL coordinator			*Build partnerships; oversee internships and WBL*
College & career coordinator			*Coordinate with colleges; monitor college and career plans*
Career-pathway educator			*Provide pathway expertise; lead authentic projects and WBL*
Core-content educator			*Connect core content with projects and WBL*
Academy student			*Share student needs and feedback; support peer recruitment*
Parent/guardian			*Share family perspectives; support recruitment and outreach*
Business partner			*Offer pathway expertise; recruit advisory board members*
Community partner			*Identify local resources and workforce needs*
Postsecondary partner			*Share postsecondary expectations and credential requirements*

Next step: upload your roster as evidence

After the meeting, transfer this roster into the Academy Team Roster Template, upload it to ASH as evidence, and update it as your team changes.

Your Path at a Glance

Year of Planning: YOP Roadmap

Self-paced; graduate by May 31. Start with Team Building & Leadership, then follow your YOP Snapshot.

START HERE
Team Building & Leadership
Form a multidisciplinary team, set a shared vision, and secure funding.

FOCUS AREA
Academy Quality
Develop an Action Plan and a continuous improvement process.

FOCUS AREA
Curriculum & Instruction
Build a career-connected program of study with advanced academic and early college opportunities.

FOCUS AREA
Recruitment & Enrollment
Create an open-enrollment student recruitment plan that reaches all students.

FOCUS AREA
Advisory Board
Develop an employer engagement plan and recruit advisory board members.

FOCUS AREA
Work-Based Learning
Develop a work-based learning plan for each academy grade level.

FOCUS AREA
Authentic Projects
Develop a career-connected project-based learning plan for each grade level.

FOCUS AREA
College & Career Readiness
Develop a college and career readiness plan.

FINISH BY MAY 31
Graduation
Finalize your Academy Design Plan and prepare for graduation.

Resources: YOP Roadmap · YOP Guide · YOP Evidence Checklist & Planner

Fast Track: 90-Day Timeline

Sample timeline for academies already aligned with most NAF standards.

BEFORE Day 1
Getting Started
Build your team, set expected outcomes, and complete the Admissions Interest Survey.

DAYS 1–14
Admissions
NAF reviews alignment. Meet with NAF to review the process and Evidence Checklist & Planner.

DAYS 15–21
Assessment
Complete the online Fast Track Assessment. A provisional 15+ is needed to continue.

DAYS 22–45
Evidence
Submit evidence of alignment with the NAF design. NAF completes an initial review.

DAYS 46–60
Adjustments
Address feedback and revise the assessment and evidence. NAF completes a final review.

DAYS 61–75
Membership
Sign the Membership Agreement to formalize the partnership.

DAYS 76–90
Graduation
Join a virtual validation meeting. Score 15+ to join the NAF network.

THEN Launch
Academy Launch
Use assessment results to set launch-year goals in your Action Plan.

Resources: Fast Track Application Checklist · Fast Track Evidence Checklist & Planner