Year of Planning

Frequently Asked Questions · 2026–27

Welcome to the Year of Planning (YOP). With personalized support from your NAF Portfolio Manager, your Academy Design Team aligns district goals with the NAF design and builds a strong foundation before your academy launches. YOP is self-paced and flexible, so you can shape the process around your school's needs and timeline.

ABOUT THE YEAR OF PLANNING

1. What is the Year of Planning?

A guided admissions path for schools building a new NAF academy. Your team works through the YOP Roadmap, which puts the NAF design into practice, to develop an Academy Design Plan before launch.

2. How long does it take?

Typically one school year. Because YOP is self-paced, your team can extend the timeline based on your target launch year.

3. How is the Year of Planning different from Fast Track?

- **Year of Planning:** for teams building a new academy, with Portfolio Manager coaching throughout the process.
- **Fast Track:** for existing career programs already aligned with the NAF design; a self-paced validation path with an accelerated timeline to joining the NAF network.

4. What does the admissions fee include?

The Year of Planning admissions fee includes Portfolio Manager coaching, the YOP Guide and planning tools, access to the Academy Support Hub (ASH), and graduation. The fee is due before graduation. Once your academy launches, annual membership is $2,000. See YOP Benefits for details.

YOUR TEAM AND SUPPORT

5. What is the Academy Design Team (ADT)?

The multidisciplinary team that designs your academy during the Year of Planning and aligns it with the four elements of the NAF design: Academy Development & Structure, Advisory Board, Curriculum & Instruction, and Work-Based Learning. The ADT Prep Guide outlines core roles. Teams typically include:

- School and academy staff, including the academy lead
- District leaders
- Business, community, and postsecondary partners

6. What does the academy lead do?

The academy lead coordinates the team's work and serves as NAF's primary contact for your academy.

7. How does my Portfolio Manager support our team?

Your Portfolio Manager leads your on-site kickoff, holds regular check-ins, monitors progress, and coaches your team through graduation and into launch year.

8. Who needs a NAF account?

Every team member who will use ASH or enter academy data, such as the academy lead, school administrators, teachers, and district leaders, needs a NAF account. Create a NAF account. Send your team's names and email addresses to NAF so we can set up access.

PLANNING TOOLS

9. What is the YOP Guide?

An online resource in ASH that walks your team through the Year of Planning, with the strategic actions, activities, and guiding questions for building your Academy Design Plan. Open the YOP Guide.

10. What is the YOP Snapshot?

A self-assessment that measures progress on your Academy Design Plan and informs your Action Plan. Your team completes it at the kickoff to set priorities and again before graduation to check readiness. View the YOP Snapshot sample.

11. What tools help us plan and track our work?

- YOP Evidence Checklist & Planner: plan your year and track the evidence you'll need for graduation.
- Action Plan Template: turn your Snapshot priorities into goals, action steps, owners, and due dates.

12. What are some best practices?

- Hold team meetings on a regular schedule, and set recurring check-ins with your Portfolio Manager.
- Create a shared folder and add evidence as you go, organized by strategic action.
- Update your Action Plan as work is completed.

13. Can students get started before we launch?

Yes! KnoPro is a free digital work-based learning platform for students ages 13–20, with no membership required. Emerging academies in the Year of Planning can also enter a $500 raffle by piloting a KnoPro challenge before officially opening as a NAF academy (KnoPro for Emerging Academies).

GRADUATION AND LAUNCH

14. What is the YOP Assessment?

Your team's final review of the Academy Design Plan, completed with NAF at graduation. A final score of 15+ confirms eligibility for NAF membership, and your results help set launch-year goals. Graduation can be held:

- **On site (at least 3 hours):** includes action planning and support for setting launch-year goals.
- **Virtually (75 minutes):** when timing or team schedules don't allow an on-site session.

15. What is launch year?

Your academy's first full year of operation as a NAF academy, with access to all membership benefits. Start with Launch Year Tips & Resources, and set launch-year goals with the 90-Day Launch Strategy – Action Plan.

16. What are NAF's annual membership requirements?

An academy in good standing:

- Pays annual membership fees
- Submits required academy and school-level data and evidence in ASH by the annual deadline

17. What is the Quality Level process, and when do we start?

NAF's annual process for measuring how academies are implementing the NAF design. It has two parts:

- **Data Collection:** completed every year by all operating academies, including those in launch year.
- **Academy Assessment:** begins in an academy's second year of operation. Launch year academies are exempt unless they choose to complete it or their district requires it.

18. Where can we get help?

Contact your Portfolio Manager or support@naf.org. Save the date for NAF Next, July 19–22, 2027, in Anaheim, CA.