QUALITY REVIEW GUIDE
2026-2027



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Introduction

This guide outlines the steps for a virtual Quality Review. It includes a copy of the observation checklist used during the review, a sample agenda, sample focus group questions, and a description of what happens after the review.

NAF's design is built around four essential elements of practice: Academy Development & Structure, Advisory Board, Program of Study (Curriculum & Instruction), and Work-Based Learning. Each of these elements is comprised of standards that articulate important aspects of NAF's design. These standards are the cornerstone of the academy quality process. The first step in this process is completing the Academy Assessment – an online assessment tool involving teachers, school and district administrators, and advisory board members in a dialogue to determine their academy's level of fidelity to NAF's design.

This process leads to a second step, for academies meeting eligibility requirements, to participate in a virtual Quality Review. The purpose of a Quality Review is to determine if the academy *lives* NAF's design. NAF staff visit the school virtually to determine if members of the school community can demonstrate how they activate the elements of NAF's design. The Quality Review Observation Checklist measures the academy on five domains that reflect *living* NAF's design. Academies reaching Distinguished level serve as exemplars to the NAF network, and to business, civic, post-secondary, and foundation leaders across the country.

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Quality Review Observation Checklist

The Quality Review Observation Checklist contains five domains: Academy Culture & Visit Preparation, Academy Development & Structure, Advisory Board, Program of Study (Curriculum & Instruction), and Work-Based Learning. The review team determines an academy's quality level by assessing observation criteria met during the virtual Quality Review.

Each criterion is assessed separately by the review team. An academy earns **2** points for every criterion observed as *fully met*, **1** point for a *partially met* criterion, and **0** points for each criterion *not met*. The points are totaled and the basis for determining quality levels is as follows:

48-50 points = **Distinguished**
<48 points = **Model**

Domain 1: Academy Culture & Visit Preparation

Criteria	Points (0-2)
1. Academy prepares for the visit through responsive communication with NAF's review team and creates an agenda that meets NAF's Quality Review guidelines.	
2. A strong academy identity is evident online and through reflections of academy awareness from students, teachers, and other stakeholders.	
3. Leaders clearly articulate the function and purpose of the academy within the school, its contributions to preparing future-ready students, and their vision and support for academy growth and development.	
4. Students demonstrate pride in their academy membership and articulate the advantages of being a part of the academy.	
5. Students describe the positive relationships developed with their peers, school personnel, and other adults in the local community that contribute to a sense of belonging within the academy.	

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Domain 2: Academy Development & Structure

Criteria	Points (0-2)
6. Academy offers open choice enrollment that ensures all students are eligible to participate in the academy.	
7. Academy uses clearly defined processes and activities to intentionally build students' abilities to plan their pathway by exposing them to postsecondary options throughout the academy experience.	
8. Students articulate their future aspirations related to college and career and how they plan to achieve their goals.	
9. Leaders participate in the academy's continuous improvement process and ensure that the academy submits, reviews, and uses data to inform action planning.	
10. Leaders cultivate community partnerships with local organizations that support business and workforce development.	
11. Leaders are ambassadors for the academy and participate in practices that build support and advocacy for their academy programs.	

Domain 3: Advisory Board

Criteria	Points (0-2)
12. Advisory board members articulate an understanding of the advisory board's role in the academy's mission.	
13. Advisory board creates a strategic plan with specific annual outcomes that directly address the need to increase work-based learning activities including internships for students.	
14. Advisory board works to engage community, postsecondary and civic leaders to promote and sustain academies as an integral part of the local workforce and economic development systems.	
15. Advisory board meets regularly and strategically plans to provide supports for students and teachers.	
16. Advisory board members support learning by providing work-based learning, informing career pathway curriculum alignment, and providing professional learning opportunities for teachers.	

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Domain 4: Program of Study (Curriculum & Instruction)

Criteria	Points (0-2)
17. Teachers and counselors ensure that academy students successfully complete an approved program of study.	
18. Students describe the curricular content and projects that they are working on and their alignment with the designated career cluster.	
19. Students participate in extended-length, authentic project learning experiences that provide innovative solutions to real-world challenges.	
20. Teachers and academy leaders engage industry professionals to enhance student learning outcomes.	
21. Industry certifications, dual enrollment, Advanced Placement (AP), Cambridge (AICE), or International Baccalaureate (IB) courses are available to academy students.	

Domain 5: Work-Based Learning

Criteria	Points (0-2)
22. Students demonstrate well-developed future ready skills, particularly in communicating and engaging with adults and peers.	
23. Work-based learning plans/calendars ensure all students experience multiple elements of the work-based learning continuum throughout their academy tenure.	
24. Students learn about various career pathways within a career cluster.	
25. Students use future ready skills beyond the scope of the academy classroom.	

Preparing for a Virtual Quality Review Visit

Virtual Quality Reviews take about 2 hours to complete. An agenda for the review must be finalized with a member of the Quality Review team at least two weeks prior to the review and should include the following components:

- **Introduction**
- **Focus Groups** (Leader, Teacher, Student & Advisory Board)
- **Debrief/Closing**

The following is a sample agenda for the review including the required participants. **Please note that academies have the agency to adjust the start time and order of focus groups to best fit their school schedule.**

Sample Virtual Quality Review Agenda

- 8:00 am **-10 min-** **Introduction/Overview** *Academy Lead/Admin*
- 8:10 am **-20 min-** **Leader Group** *Academy Lead/Admin, Principal, and District representative*
- 8:30 am **-20 min-** **Teacher Group** 3-*5 academy teachers; may include guidance/WBL staff*
- 8:50 am -10 min- --BREAK--
- 9:00 am **-30 min-** **Student Group** *8-10 academy students; 4-5 seniors and 4-5 sophomore/juniors*
- 9:30 am **-20 min-** **Advisory Board Group** *3-5 Advisory Board members*
- 9:50 am **-10 min-** **Debrief/Closing** *Academy Lead/Admin & selected leaders; 4 people maximum*

Sample Focus Group Questions

Leaders

1. What is the value of the academy to the school?
2. What is your vision for the academy's future?
3. What are the academy's best practices?
4. What is the process students use to enroll in the academy?
5. Describe the academy's processes and activities that help students understand their postsecondary options.
6. What data points are important to you when monitoring student progress and academy growth?
7. Please provide a specific example of when you used data to help make a decision or adjust an academy practice.
8. What organizations do you participate in or interact with to represent the academy in the areas of business and workforce development?
9. What partnerships have been developed to support the academy?
10. Describe the activities or structures you use to increase academy awareness and build program support.
11. Describe the work-based learning continuum that occurs in each operating grade and how you track student participation in work-based learning.

Teachers

1. What are the academy's best practices?
2. Describe the academy's processes and activities that help students understand their postsecondary options.
3. Describe the process students use to choose and enroll in the academy's program of study courses.
4. How do you monitor student progress toward completing the academy's program of study?
5. Authentic project learning experiences provide innovative solutions to real-world challenges. Describe authentic project learning experiences available to academy students. How do industry professionals support these projects?
6. Describe how you use industry professionals in your classroom to enhance student learning outcomes.
7. Describe what work-based learning you've incorporated into your classroom and how that has impacted your students' career aspirations, skill development, and/or connections.

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Advisory Board

1. What is the advisory board's role within this academy?
2. Describe examples of how you help the academy accomplish its goals.
3. What are the advisory board's specific goals and objectives for this year?
4. Describe the process the advisory board uses to update its strategic plan including yearly goals.
5. How does the advisory board use data to inform its work?
6. Describe partnerships the advisory board helped to cultivate between the academy and the community that promote workforce development.
7. Describe how the advisory board is structured and how frequently it meets.
8. Do you provide supports for students and/or teachers? If yes – what are some examples?
9. How do you determine which supports to provide for students and/or teachers?
10. How is the board involved in planning and providing work-based learning activities, and what are some examples?
11. How does the board support the academy teachers' understanding of industry needs?
12. How has the board helped shape the curriculum or program of study for academy students?

Students

1. Why did you choose to enroll in this academy?
2. What does it mean to you to be a member of this academy?
3. Do you feel a sense of belonging to this academy? If so, what does that mean to you?
4. Describe any personal connections you've made with other students or adults through your academy membership.
5. What is the process students use to enroll in the academy?
6. What has the academy done to help you understand the options you have for after high school?
7. When you graduate, what are your plans and what steps are you taking to achieve your goals?
8. Describe lessons, activities, or projects you have participated in that are related to your academy's career pathway.
9. Have you participated in any project that provided a solution to a real-world problem or challenge? If yes, please describe the project and how long it took to complete it?
10. Were there opportunities to interact with industry professionals in your academy classes? If yes, please describe the opportunities.
11. Share any advanced courses like dual enrollment, AP, IB and/or AICE courses you have taken.
12. Have any of you earned industry certifications? If so, which certifications?
13. Describe the work-based learning activities, such as job shadows, guest speakers, or internships, you've been involved with since you entered the academy.
14. What career options have you explored through your academy?
15. Have you ever used information or skills you learned from academy experiences in other areas of your life? If yes, please give an example.

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End of Visit Debrief

At the end of the virtual visit, a short debrief will occur. The academy lead and selected members of the team are invited to attend the debrief. The review team will ask clarifying questions to *fill in* missing information. The review team will not provide recommendations at that time or share the findings. If additional information is needed to complete the report following the visit, an academy lead will be notified.

Quality Level Reporting

Final decisions regarding academy levels will be posted in NAF's Academy Support Hub (ASH) in late March and official reports will be provided to the academy after levels have been posted. Should the academy reach Distinguished level, the academy may be contacted to provide photos or a short overview of an outstanding practice for the NAF website, distinguished brochure, or other promotional opportunities for the academy.

Quality Level Appeals

Academies may use the process below to appeal virtual Quality Review findings if they have concerns regarding the final report. When filing an appeal, please consider that the goal of a Quality Review visit is to *observe* NAF's design in action. Therefore, some constructs may not be appropriate for post-visit evidence submission (i.e. focus group understanding or perceptions).

- An appeal may be filed by an **Academy Lead** or **Academy Admin** in consultation with the school Principal and/or district designee.
- All appeals must be submitted within **2 weeks** after the academy quality levels are officially posted to be considered.
- NAF will respond to appeals within **2 weeks** after the appeal submission is received.
- Appeal submissions should be kept to **3 pages or less,** including supporting evidence provided.
- The appeal submission should 1) state the observation checklist item of concern and 2) provide evidence supporting that the item was met and/or describe other related factors the academy thinks are relevant to consider in reference to the observed item.
- The original review team members and the academy's portfolio manager will participate in an appeal meeting facilitated by NAF's research department. The group will review the appeal submission in conjunction with what was observed during the visit, and a **final quality level decision** will be made.
- The appeal process **concludes** when an official response communicating the academy's **final quality level decision** is sent from NAF's research department to the person(s) who initiated the appeal.