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Early Learning Program Accreditation

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Program News: January 2026

Welcome to the January 2026 edition of **Program News**, your source for up-to-date info on NAEYC Early Learning Program Quality Assessment and Accreditation! This month, we are sharing newly available resources that supports early learning programs in preparing for **new system site visits**. Check out the resources we have available to support the transition to the new system and to help prepare your program for success.

Explore Our New Accreditation System

NAEYC has redesigned its Early Learning Program Accreditation System to better support programs in achieving and maintaining high-quality early education. The new Early Learning Program Quality Assessment and Accreditation System is:

- **More inclusive, flexible, and streamlined**, reflecting the current early learning environment.

- **Grounded in Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP)** and aligned with NAEYC’s Early Childhood Program Standards.
- Designed to make it **easier for all types of programs** to demonstrate and sustain quality.

Get to Know Our New Accreditation System

Updates for NAEYC Accredited Programs



Be Prepared for the New System!

New Resource Available: Accreditation Application Resource Guide

We’re excited to share a new tool designed to support programs as they prepare for initial or renewal accreditation: the Accreditation Application Resource Guide.

This comprehensive guide brings all accreditation document-based assessment items together in one place and goes beyond the “what” to explain the why behind each requirement. For every assessment item, the guide includes:

- The intent and rationale of the item
- Practical recommendations to strengthen submissions
- Common errors to avoid, based on frequent questions and application reviews

Whether you are submitting your first accreditation application or preparing for renewal, this resource is designed to help programs submit clear, strong, and aligned documentation—saving time and reducing the need for resubmissions.

We encourage program leaders and staff involved in accreditation to explore this guide and use it as a planning and reference tool throughout the application process.

Access the Accreditation Application Resource Guide


Accreditation+ Renewal: What You Need to Know

Programs may begin their Accreditation+ renewal up to one year before their Valid Until Date (VUD) once the fourth annual report is submitted and the annual fee is paid.

The renewal application is available in the Early Learning Hub (under the Quality Journey widget) for a six-month window — from 12 to 6 months before the VUD. Programs are encouraged to start early and use the [Self-Assessment Tools](#) to prepare.

After submission:

1. The application is reviewed and scored.
2. Upon a successful decision on the application, programs receive an invoice for the Site Visit Fee.
3. Once paid, a six-month window for the site visit is set.
4. A decision is issued within 45 days after the visit.
5. Upon a successful decision, the annual fee for the first year of the new 5-year term is due.

 Tip: Submitting early helps ensure your renewal is complete before your VUD. If needed, extensions may be granted to allow time for the visit and decision.

Access the Accreditation+ Renewal Guide

*Programs that do not wish to renew at Accreditation+ should contact the NAEYC Support Team to request a change of status.

New System Site Visits Have Begun – Be Prepared!

NAEYC has officially launched new system site visits, including random visits for programs at the Accreditation and Accreditation+ tiers. Programs at these tiers are eligible for random visits at any time, so it's important to stay ready.

To help you prepare and succeed, we've created resources designed to make the process smooth and transparent:

- **Site Visit Protocols** — Explains what programs can expect from NAEYC during site visits that include observation-based assessment items (2025).
- **Observation Tool** — Includes the Accreditation observation-based assessment items and guidance that is used by NAEYC assessors when completing any type of site visit under the new system.
- **Site Visit Readiness Checklist** — A high-level tool designed for program administrators to help prepare for a successful site visit.
- **Site Visit Forms** — Detailed documents used by Assessors during the site visit, including interview questions for orientation and closing meetings.

Access these resources today and ensure your team is confident and prepared for every step of the process.

Visit [our webpage](#) to explore all new system resources.

New Resources for Accredited Programs

- **Self-Assessment Tools** — Contain each tier's assessment items and evidence types, along with guidance from the electronic application. This explains item language and provides scoring guidance to help programs submit the right evidence.
- **Accreditation Application Resource Guide** — Includes the intent, rationale, and recommendations across Accreditation Document-based items that included in the new system Accreditation initial and renewal application.
- **Accreditation+ Renewal Guide** — Overview of the Accreditation+ Renewal Process
- **Site Visit Readiness Checklist** — A high-level tool designed for program administrators to help prepare for a successful site visit.

Check Out Our New System Resources

Do you have feedback?

We look forward to your feedback on how to make our new system even stronger. We are continuously challenging ourselves to innovate and to hold ourselves accountable to our stated values. To share your feedback with us, please follow the link to complete our survey.

Complete the Survey



Resources For Families

You can find great articles and resources for families on our website. **Check it out!**



Get Connected!

Connect with us on social media, and NAEYC members can share ideas on **HELLO!**

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