



NAIA Eligibility Determination and Certification Guide

Introduction

The NAIA eligibility process includes both initial determinations from the NAIA Eligibility Center (EC) and on-campus certification. Eligibility requirements are outlined in the NAIA bylaws and CFAR policy. Because individual student situations can be complex when determining whether an eligibility center determination is required, this document guides membership through the process, supplemental to CFAR Policy Section III.

Situation Analysis

The scenarios on the following pages are intended to help NAIA members decide when recruits need to:

- [Receive an initial eligibility determination,](#)
- [Reapply through the eligibility center, or](#)
- [Have their continuing eligibility certified on campus.](#)

A couple of things to know about EC determinations:

- They are **term-specific**
- They are **sport-specific** for students who are at least one term removed from high school
- They are **school-specific** for continuing identification (CID) students

Initial EC Determinations

Every situation in this section requires students to come through the EC for an initial determination.

The NAIA Eligibility Center is responsible for determining the eligibility status of each student-athlete seeking to compete in an NAIA-recognized sport for the first time, in accordance with NAIA Bylaws Article V, Section C and CFAR Policy Article III, Section 5, Item A. These determinations are binding for all NAIA institutions. Most recruits are new to the NAIA and must receive a determination of “eligible” from the eligibility center before competing.



Title	Description	Example(s)	Outcome
<p>1. EC Determination for First-Time Participant</p> <p><i>Previous Version: Situation #1</i></p>	<p>Student is seeking to compete for the first time in their first term at the certifying NAIA institution.</p> <p>The following terms are all equivalent:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Term for determination (EC application) • First term at NAIA institution • Term of first participation 	<p>Student graduated high school in May 2026 and is seeking to compete for the first time in women’s soccer during fall 2026 at their NAIA institution. Their NAIA enrollment begins August 1, 2026, and their term for determination is fall 2026.</p> <p>Student graduated high school in May 2025, attended a junior college during 2025–26, and is transferring to an NAIA institution to compete in men’s cross country during fall 2026. Their NAIA enrollment begins August 1, 2026, and their term for determination is fall 2026.</p>	<p>Needs an Eligible Decision from the EC</p> <p><i>Student is a first-time participant in an NAIA-recognized sport</i></p>
<p>2. Delayed Participation</p> <p><i>Previous Version: Situation #9</i></p>	<p>Student has previously identified at an NAIA institution, but never registered with the eligibility center. They are seeking to compete in an NAIA-recognized sport for the first time in a later term.</p>	<p>Student graduated high school in 2025, enrolled at their certifying NAIA institution during 2025–26, and is now seeking to compete in men’s soccer during 2026–27.</p>	<p>Needs an Eligible Decision from the EC</p> <p><i>Student is a first-time participant in an NAIA-recognized sport</i></p>
<p>3. Emerging Sport Participation Prior to Championship Sport Participation</p> <p><i>Previous Version: Situation #12</i></p>	<p>Student is seeking to compete in an NAIA-recognized sport (championship or year-2 invitational or later) after previously competing in an “emerging” sport.</p>	<p>Student competed in women’s flag football during the spring 2025 season (emerging sport at the time) without an EC determination and is now seeking to compete in softball (championship sport) during spring 2026.</p>	<p>Needs an Eligible Decision from the EC</p> <p><i>Student is a first-time participant in an NAIA-recognized sport</i></p>

PlayNAIA Reapplication or On-Campus Certification

This section provides examples of the most common situations that result in EC reapplications or on-campus certification. While some scenarios are straightforward, others may be more complex, so several examples and their appropriate outcomes are outlined below.

When evaluating whether a new EC determination is necessary, keep the following key questions in mind. If **either is true**, the student can be certified on campus:

- Has the student already competed at an NAIA institution after receiving an “eligible” determination from the EC?
- Has the student maintained identification at their same NAIA institution after receiving an “eligible” determination from the EC?

Here are some examples in which the student must reapply for a new determination through the eligibility center:

Title	Description	Example(s)	Outcome
<p>4. Not Eligible Determination</p> <p><i>Previous Version: Situation #7</i></p>	<p>Student receives a “not eligible” determination.</p>	<p>Student received a “not eligible” determination in men’s lacrosse and is now seeking to compete in a subsequent term.</p>	<p>Reapplication Required</p> <p><i>Student is a first-time participant in an NAIA-recognized sport</i></p>
<p>5. Break in Identification After Eligible Determination</p> <p><i>Previous Version: Situations #5 and #8</i></p>	<p>Student receives an “eligible” determination at their NAIA institution but does not compete.</p> <p>They have a break in identification (did not enroll or enrolled part-time) or transfer outside of the NAIA before seeking to compete for the first time.</p>	<p>Student received an “eligible” determination in women’s basketball for fall 2024, enrolled but did not compete, and then had a break in enrollment. Student is now seeking to compete in 2026–27 at an NAIA institution.</p> <p>Student received an “eligible” determination in women’s basketball for fall 2024 but never enrolled at the NAIA institution (they could have enrolled elsewhere or had a break in enrollment). Student is now seeking to compete in 2026–27 at an NAIA institution.</p>	<p>Reapplication Required</p> <p><i>Student is a first-time participant in an NAIA-recognized sport and did not maintain identification</i></p>
<p>6. Transfer to New NAIA Institution Prior to First Participation</p> <p><i>Previous Version: Situation #6</i></p>	<p>Student receives an “eligible” determination.</p> <p>Student transfers to a different NAIA institution before competing. They subsequently return to an NAIA school and are now seeking to compete for the first time.</p>	<p>Student received an “eligible” determination in women’s volleyball for fall 2025, enrolled but did not compete, and then transferred to a different NAIA institution. Student is now seeking to compete in 2026–27.</p>	<p>Reapplication Required</p> <p><i>Student is a first-time participant in an NAIA-recognized sport and did not maintain identification</i></p>
<p>7. Competition in New Sport Before Original Sport</p> <p><i>Previous Version: Situation #10b(2)</i></p>	<p>Student receives a sport-specific decision and are seeking to add a new sport before competing in original sport.</p>	<p>Student received an “eligible” determination in women’s wrestling for fall 2025 but did not compete. Student is now seeking to compete in softball during spring 2026.</p>	<p>Reapplication Required</p> <p><i>Student is a first-time participant in an NAIA-recognized sport</i></p>

Title	Description	Example(s)	Outcome
<p>8. Mixed Determination – Not Eligible Sport Competition Before Eligible Sport Competition</p> <p><i>Previous Version: Situation #11b</i></p>	<p>Student receives a mixed-determination and seeks to compete in the “not eligible” sport before competing in the “eligible” sport.</p>	<p>Student received an “eligible” determination in men’s basketball and a “not eligible” determination in baseball for fall 2025. Student did not compete in men’s basketball during the 2025-26 season. Student is now seeking to compete in baseball during spring 2026.</p> <p>Student received an “eligible” determination in men’s basketball and a “not eligible” determination in baseball for fall 2025. Student only participated in men’s basketball scrimmages during the 2025-26 season. Student is now seeking to compete in baseball during spring 2026.</p>	<p>Reapplication Required</p> <p><i>Student is a first-time participant in an NAIA-recognized sport and are not eligible in the sport they would be competing in first</i></p>

Here are some examples in which the student’s eligibility is certified on campus:

Title	Description	Example(s)	Outcome
<p>9. Maintained Identification After Eligible Determination</p> <p><i>Previous Version: Situations #2, #3, and #4</i></p>	<p>Student with continuing identification is seeking to compete for the first time at the certifying NAIA institution after they received an “eligible” determination in a prior term.</p>	<p>Student received an “eligible” determination in men’s volleyball for spring 2025 and has maintained continuous identification at their NAIA institution. Student is now seeking to compete for the first time in spring 2027.</p> <p>Student received an “eligible” determination in men’s volleyball for spring 2025, maintained continuous identification, and only participated in scrimmages. Student is now seeking to compete in spring 2027.</p>	<p>Certify on Campus</p> <p><i>Student has maintained identification at the certifying NAIA institution since the initial “eligible” determination</i></p>
<p>10. Decision Applicable to All Sports</p> <p><i>Previous Version: Situation #10a</i></p>	<p>Student receives a decision for all sports and is now seeking to compete in a new or additional sport to what they initially intended to compete in.</p>	<p>Student received a determination as a men’s soccer recruit. Because they receive a determination right out of high school, their decision is applicable to all sports. Student has maintained continuous identification but has not yet competed in men’s soccer. They are now seeking to compete in men’s lacrosse.</p>	<p>Certify on Campus</p> <p><i>Student has maintained identification after receiving a determination applicable to all sports</i></p>

Title	Description	Example(s)	Outcome
<p>11. Competition in Original Sport Before New Sport</p> <p><i>Previous Version: Situation #10b(1)</i></p>	<p>Student receives a sport-specific decision and is seeking to add a new sport after competing in original sport.</p>	<p>Student received an “eligible” determination in women’s wrestling for fall 2025 and competed during 2025–26. Student is now seeking to compete in softball during spring 2026.</p>	<p>Certify on Campus</p> <p><i>Student is no longer a first-time participant in an NAIA-recognized sport</i></p>
<p>12. Mixed Determination – Eligible Sport Competition Before Not Eligible Sport Competition</p> <p><i>Previous Version: Situation #11a</i></p>	<p>Student receives a mixed-determination and competes in the “eligible” sport before seeking to compete in the “not eligible” sport.</p>	<p>Student received an “eligible” determination in the sport of men’s wrestling and a “not eligible” determination in the sport of baseball for the fall 2025 term. The student competed during the 2025-26 wrestling season and now wants to compete in baseball in spring 2026.</p>	<p>Certify on Campus</p> <p><i>Student is no longer a first-time participant in an NAIA-recognized sport</i></p>

CFAR Policy Exceptions to the EC Requirement

There are two exceptions to the initial EC requirement in [CFAR policy](#):

Title	Description	Example(s)	Outcome
<p>13. Invitational Sports Exception</p> <p>CFAR Policy, Section III, Item 5a – Invitational Sports</p>	<p>Student is seeking to compete in year 2 of an invitational sport after being certified and competing for the same sport in year 1.</p>	<p>Student was certified, competed, and met all eligibility requirements for varsity-sponsored women’s flag football during the 2025-26 academic year (year 1 invitation status) and seeks to continue competing on the team during the 2026-27 academic year (year 2 invitation status).</p>	<p>Certify on Campus</p> <p><i>Student meets CFAR Policy, Section III, Item 5a exception to the eligibility center requirement</i></p>
<p>14. New NAIA Members Exception</p> <p>CFAR Policy, Section III, Item 5b – New NAIA Members</p>	<p>Student is seeking to compete at a new-NAIA member institution after being certified under the institution’s previous association, competing for the institution in the varsity-sponsored sport, and meeting all other NAIA eligibility requirements.</p>	<p><i>The NAIA Eligibility Center will inform new NAIA members during onboarding whether they qualify for this exception, either for all sports or for specific sports.</i></p>	<p>Certify on Campus</p> <p><i>Student meets CFAR Policy, Section III, Item 5b exception to the eligibility center requirement</i></p>

On-Campus Certification Information

Once a student receives an “eligible” determination from the eligibility center, the NAIA institution is responsible for certifying the student’s eligibility to represent the institution in a given academic term. Certifying student eligibility is called the Eligibility Certification Process (ECP) and is completed within [NAIA Connect](#). Campus certification for a first-time student-athlete is based on the eligibility center’s determination **and** the proper application of institutional, conference, and NAIA rules.

Below are helpful resources to guide you through the proper on-campus certification process:

- [NAIA Official & Policy Handbook](#)
 - Contains the bylaws that determine if a student meets the necessary national eligibility requirements to be certified for competition.
- [ECP Training Materials](#)
 - Provides ECP step-by-step videos and guides.
- [Legislative Forms](#) Related to Certification:
 - [Transfer Player Eligibility Statement](#)
 - Required for all transfer students prior to their competition at an NAIA institution. While this document serves as a paper reference, the Faculty Athletics Representative (FAR) must complete and submit the form directly within ECP prior to participation.
 - [Outside Competitive Experience](#)
 - Helps institutions assess whether a student's participation in outside competition triggers a season of competition. This document serves as guidance for institutions to determine what student-athletes are required to compete an OCE review.

Reminder: The [Certificate of Clearance](#) must also be completed on-campus in addition to submitting the eligibility certificate.

Interactive Versions of the Situation Analysis

- [“Who Needs an EC Determination”](#) virtual course (NAIA Connect login required)
- Coming soon: Situation analysis flow chart
- Coming soon: Situation analysis interactive quiz

Important Terms

Several terms used throughout this document are important to understand in order to apply the situations correctly. Most of these terms are defined in the [NAIA handbook](#).

Identification: NAIA Bylaws Article V, Section B, Item 8

- In this document, the terms “continuing” and “maintaining” identification are used. These refer to students who have either maintained full-time enrollment and/or competed at the certifying NAIA institution in the immediately preceding term of attendance prior to the term for determination.

NAIA-Recognized Sport: NAC Policy, Section XXVII, Item 2c and Item 3

- For the purposes of this document, an “NAIA-recognized sport” refers to an NAIA championship sport or a sport in invitational year 2 status.

Participation: NAIA Bylaws Article V, Section B, Item 14

Scrimmage: NAIA Bylaws Article V, Section B, Item 19

Have a Scenario Not Covered? Contact Us!

The eligibility center and legislative services teams understand that these situations can be complex and confusing. We are here to help!

For questions about who needs an eligibility center determination or how to begin a new application, please contact the NAIA Eligibility Center [here](#) or call 816.595.8300. For questions about certification, please contact the NAIA Legislative Services team at legislative@naia.org or call 816.595.8180.

