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National Association for the
Education of Young Children

Early Learning Program

Quality Assessment
and Accreditation
Application Guide

July 2025

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Overview

This resource helps early learning programs understand the Recognition or Accreditation Application process, review results, and if needed, make required updates, and resubmit for a final decision.

See the Policy Handbook for more information on the application process (pg. 6) or decision definitions (pg. 10).

For support or questions, email accreditation.information@naeyc.org or call (800) 424-2460 option 3, option 1, option 1.

Application Process

Early learning programs will complete Recognition and Accreditation Applications via the Early Learning Hub. The general process is the same whether a program is completing the Recognition or Accreditation Application. The application includes the document-based assessment items for the applicable tier.

Within 90 days following submission of an application, a decision notification letter will be sent to the primary and secondary contacts on record for the program and the application results can be viewed within the Early Learning Hub.

If a program receives a "Deferred" decision after an initial application, the program can refine documentation and resubmit it one time for reconsideration. Programs have 30 days following the deferral to resubmit documentation. Once documentation is resubmitted, the program will receive an updated final decision.

Submit Recognition or Accreditation Application	⮕	Receive decision notification within 45 days	⮕	Review Assessor feedback and refine application	⮕	Resubmit application within 30 days of initial decision	⮕	Receive final decision notification
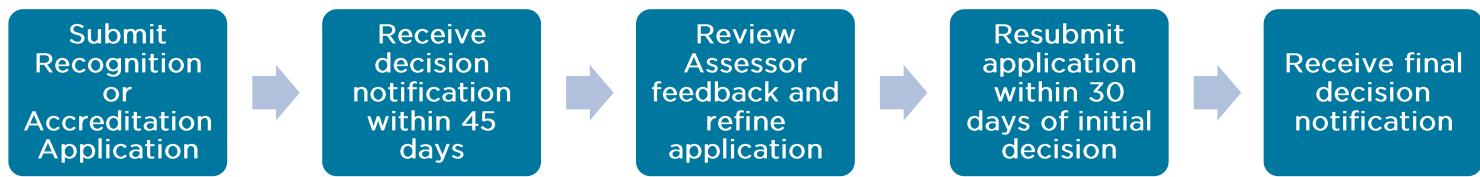
Evidence Types

NAEYC's Quality Assessment and Accreditation document-based assessment items are evaluated across 5 evidence types.

Licensing and Staff Qualifications	These items are related to the program's regulatory status and staff qualifications. Programs are expected to keep this information updated within the ELP Hub.
Staff Handbook	Programs can upload up to 10 files that include relevant staff policies and procedures and will provide the specific page number(s) and file name where the evidence can be found.
Family Handbook	Programs can upload up to 10 files that include relevant family policies and procedures and will provide the specific page number(s) and file name where the evidence can be found.
Show and Describe	Programs will upload specific documentation and provide a written description for these items.
Narrative Description	Programs will provide a written description for these items.

Renewal Applications

Programs that are completing a Recognition or Accreditation Application as part of the renewal process will complete the same general process as an initial application. For more information, see the Policy Handbook – Renewal section (page 14).

The following outlines the high-level process for renewal at each tier:

Recognition	Accreditation	Accreditation+
Application is available in ELP Hub 60 days prior to VUD	Application is available in ELP Hub 1 year prior to VUD *after* the 4th Annual Report has been completed and the Annual Fee has been paid	
1. Application available 60 days prior to VUD 2. Submit application 3. Complete payment 4. Assessment completed 5. Application is scored 6. Decision	1. Renewal application available 1-year prior to VUD 2. Submit application 6-mo. prior to VUD 3. Assessment completed 4. Application is scored 5. Decision 6. Complete payment	1. Renewal application available 1-year prior to VUD 2. Submit application 6-mo. prior to VUD 3. Assessment completed 4. Program notified 5. Site Visit created 6. Pay for site visit 7. Site visit completed 8. Site visit scored 9. Decision 10. Complete annual payment

Preparing for the Application

Step 1: Review the New Assessment Items

What to Do

- Carefully read through the updated NAEYC assessment items, with particular attention to the document-based assessment items.
- Understand what types of evidence are being requested and how each item relates to your current program practices and documentation.

Recommended Actions

- Download and print or save a digital copy of the assessment items.
- Highlight or annotate document-based items that require direct evidence submission. Assign team members to take initial notes or ask questions for clarity.

Key Resources

- NAEYC Assessment Items English
- NAEYC Assessment Items Spanish

Step 2: Review the Self-Assessment Tools

What to Do

- Use the self-assessment tools provided by NAEYC as a roadmap for preparing your responses and documentation.
- Understand how each tool aligns with the assessment items and what level of detail is expected.

Recommended Actions

- Review each self-assessment tool in a team meeting.
- Determine who will be responsible for completing each section.
- Discuss how current practices align with the indicators within the tool.

Key Resources

- [Self-Assessment Tools](#)

Step 3: Compile Evidence and Narrative Responses

What to Do

- Begin organizing documents and drafting narratives within the self-assessment tools.
- Collect examples, documentation, and supporting materials that align with the evidence required.

Recommended Actions

- Create a digital folder structure (or binder system) organized by standard or assessment item.
- Draft narrative responses directly within the self-assessment files for leadership and peer review.
- Establish a regular review timeline with your team to monitor progress.

Tips

- Use clear labeling and consistent formatting for documents.
- Include dates, context, and outcomes when describing program practices.

Step 4: Review Additional NAEYC Resources

What to Do

- Explore NAEYC's resources to support your understanding of the accreditation process and standards.

Recommended Actions

- Access recorded webinar, FAQs, and resource guides.
- Sign up for NAEYC ELP Program News or attend workshops/webinars relevant to accreditation.
- Join peer networks or discussion groups for shared learning.

Key Resources

- [NAEYC Accreditation Resource & FAQ Page](#)

Application Tips

General Recommendations

- Save the application often so you do not lose any uploaded files or details entered.
- Compile responses in Self-Assessment Tools ahead of completing the application.
- Use the latest version of Google Chrome as your web browser.
- The application is best viewed on a computer or larger mobile device, like an iPad.
- Invite others to view or collaborate on an application using the "Add Collaborator" option within application.

Common Reasons Items Are Not Met

- Didn't provide 2 specific examples when required
- Descriptions were vague or too general
- Responses were the same for all age groups
- Documentation didn't match the prompt

Tips to Improve Future Submissions

- Prioritize all items listed as Not Met
- Use comments as a checklist to update your documentation
- Revise evidence so it's clearly aligned with each specific prompt
- Make sure responses are age-group specific when required
- Use Self-Assessment Tools to see guidance from applications and to prepare responses

Completing an Application

Once all the program information has been entered in the ELP Hub, the Quality Journey widget will update and allow the program to complete the appropriate application, based on their status and intended next steps within the system.

IMPORTANT NOTE - Program information within the ELP Hub should always be kept up to date so it's reflective of the program's location, ages served and enrollment at any given time, including closure dates or changes to days and hours of operation.

Example of option to start Recognition Application
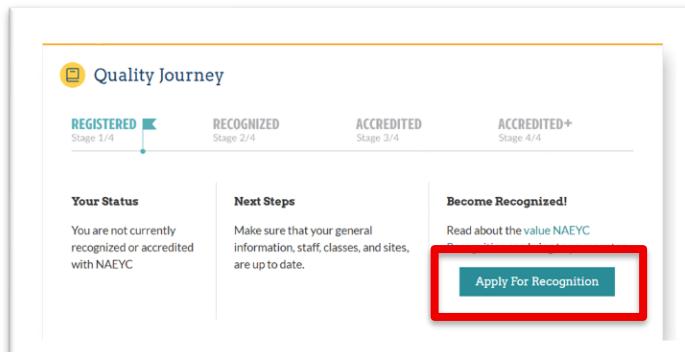
Example of option to start Accreditation Application
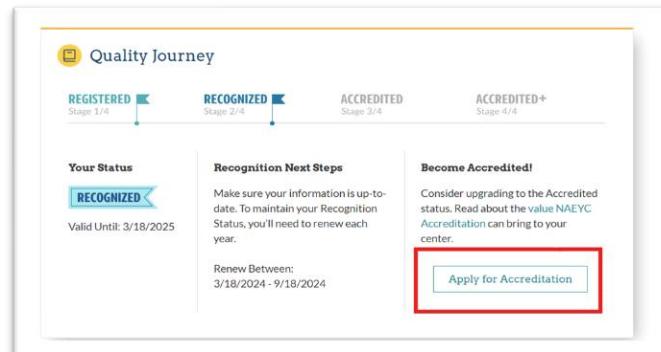
After selecting the apply option on the Quality Journey widget, the application opens in another browser within a survey application.

Select "**Start**" to begin the application.

Select "**Review Application Instructions**" to continue.

Review the Application Instructions and complete the signature at the bottom of page.

Select "**Mark as complete**" when ready to continue working on the application.

Select "**Save and continue editing**" to save changes.

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Based on the application you are completing, select either "**Recognition Application**" OR "**Accreditation Application**" to proceed to the documentation submission for recognition

Review the instructions on the page.

To continue to the application, select the "**I confirm**" option and select "**Next**".

To stop and save changes, select "**Save and continue editing**".

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The application appears with all assessment items arranged by Evidence Type:
- Staff and License Questions
- Staff Handbook
- Family Handbook
- Show & Describe
- Narrative Description

The **Staff and License** section requires that you provide details on the program's staff qualifications and license or regulatory status.

A copy of the current license or regulation status is required for upload.

To save changes, select "**Save and continue editing**" at the bottom of the page.

The **Family Handbook** section requires that you upload PDF file(s). Up to 10 PDF files can be uploaded.

Upload the Family Handbook File(s) and any other supplemental policy or procedure that include the applicable information within Family Handbook items.

Indicate whether the program meets meet EACH assessment item applicable to the age(s) served.

Provide guidance on where to find the specific information based on each item, including specific page numbers.

The **Staff Handbook** section requires that you upload PDF file(s). Up to 10 PDF files can be uploaded.

Upload the Staff Handbook File(s) and any other supplemental policy or procedure that include the applicable information within Staff Handbook items.

Indicate whether the program meets EACH assessment item applicable to the age(s) served.

Provide guidance on where to find the specific information based on each item, including specific page numbers.

Staff Handbook Questions

The following questions are assessed based on information in the uploaded staff handbook(s).

Upload the staff policy and procedure handbook(s) here. You may upload up to 10 policy and procedure handbooks/manuals. Each document must be **clearly identified** and **must include page numbers**. Items without this information will be rated as unmet.

Minimum: 1 Maximum: 10

⬆ Upload a file   Accepted formats: .pdf

R.6.02

The staff handbook includes information about when and how to wash hands and change diapers (if applicable).

Programs and providers that do not serve children who wear diapers only need to provide information related to handwashing.

Does the program or provider meet this assessment item?

🔘 Yes

⚪ No

Clear

Evidence of this assessment item must be in the **uploaded staff handbook(s).**

Please share the **page number(s)** in the staff handbook where this information can be found.

If more than one handbook/manual is uploaded, please **provide the name of the document** within the description.

Family childcare and home-based providers that do not employ staff may submit separate evidence rather than a staff handbook to address this item.

Programs and providers that do not serve children who wear diapers must confirm this in the description box below and then only need to provide evidence related to handwashing.

The **Show and Describe** section include questions that are assessed based on narrative description AND uploaded evidence. Both the uploaded evidence and descriptions are required for entry.

Indicate whether the program meets EACH assessment item applicable to the age(s) served.

Upload appropriate evidence based on guidance.

The description needs to include information responding to the item prompt and needs to clearly explain/provide examples (when applicable) of how the program meets this item.

Provide narrative that is within the sentence limitation indicated for each item.

Show and Describe Questions

The following questions are assessed based on a narrative description AND uploaded information. Both the uploaded evidence and description are required unless otherwise noted.

R.3.03

The curriculum or learning approach addresses each of the following domains:

      1. social and emotional development,

      2. physical development,

      3. language and communication development (literacy, writing, speaking),

      4. cognitive development (math, science, engineering), and

      5. creative arts.

"Curriculum or learning approach" refers to the program or provider's methods of planning and responding to specific learning goals and meeting the needs of children. Examples may include lesson plans, graphic organizers, curriculum webs and mapping, unit reflections and evaluations, individualized learning activities, among others.

Does the program or provider meet this assessment item?

  ◉ Yes

  ○ No

Clear

This assessment item requires both a description and uploaded evidence of **one example for each domain** of the program or provider meeting the assessment item.

Describe in **3 - 5 sentences** how the program or provider meets this assessment item. This description may also indicate where in the uploaded evidence a NAEYC assessor can find proof that the program or provider has met the assessment item.

Upload evidence of **one example for each domain** of how the program or provider meets this assessment item.

If necessary, use the description box above to describe where in the uploaded material a NAEYC assessor may find the required evidence.

[⬆ Upload a file]

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Th **Narrative Description** section includes questions that are assessed based on narrative description.

Indicate whether the program meets EACH assessment item applicable to the age(s) served.

Review the guidance and provide examples of how the program meets these items when indicated. Provide narrative that is within the sentence limitation indicated for each item.

Select "Next" to proceed with saving the application.

Any field missing required data will show a RED ERROR. All errors must be resolved to move forward.

Select "Submit" to officially submit the application to NAEYC for review.
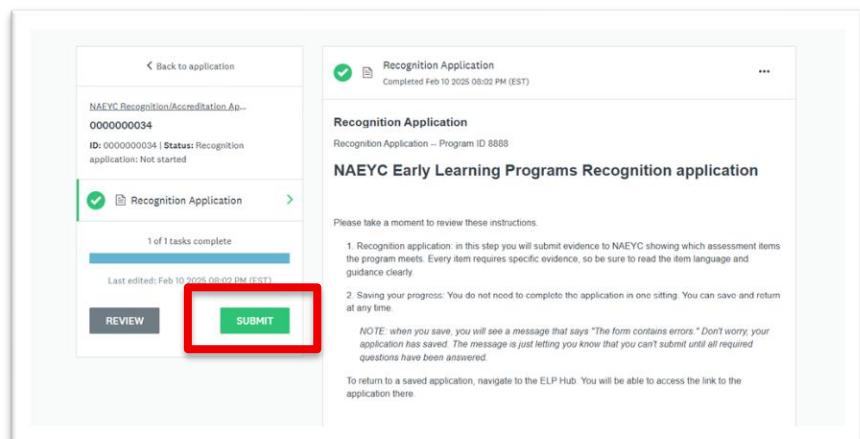
Select "Submit" again to confirm.

Once the application has been submitted, a confirmation message will appear.

For initial applications, the required next step to is submit payment for the Application. For renewal applications, see [Renewal Applications](#) for guidance on when the payment is due by tier.

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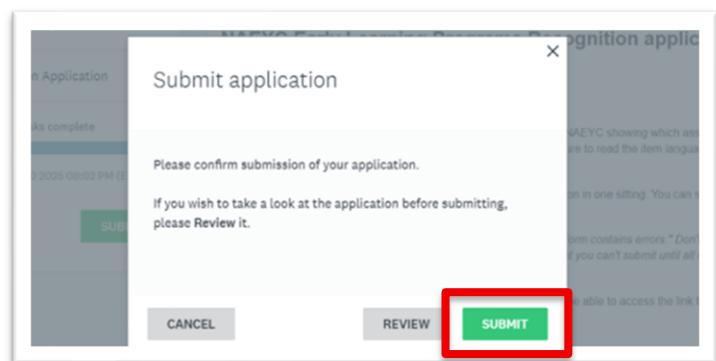
Completing a Re-Submission Application

If a deferred decision is received after an initial application submission, the program has 30 days to correct and resubmit the application one time for free. Carefully review the scores and comments on your initial application. See Decision Notification & Application Results.

Programs are encouraged to reflect on the assessment items where they did not meet the required thresholds, develop a plan of implementing and embedding changes to their policies, practices, etc., seek support if/when needed and ensure any updated policies or practices are fully in place prior to resubmitting.

To start the re-submission application, navigate to the Early Learning Hub and select the "**Re-Apply…**" option on the Quality Journey widget.
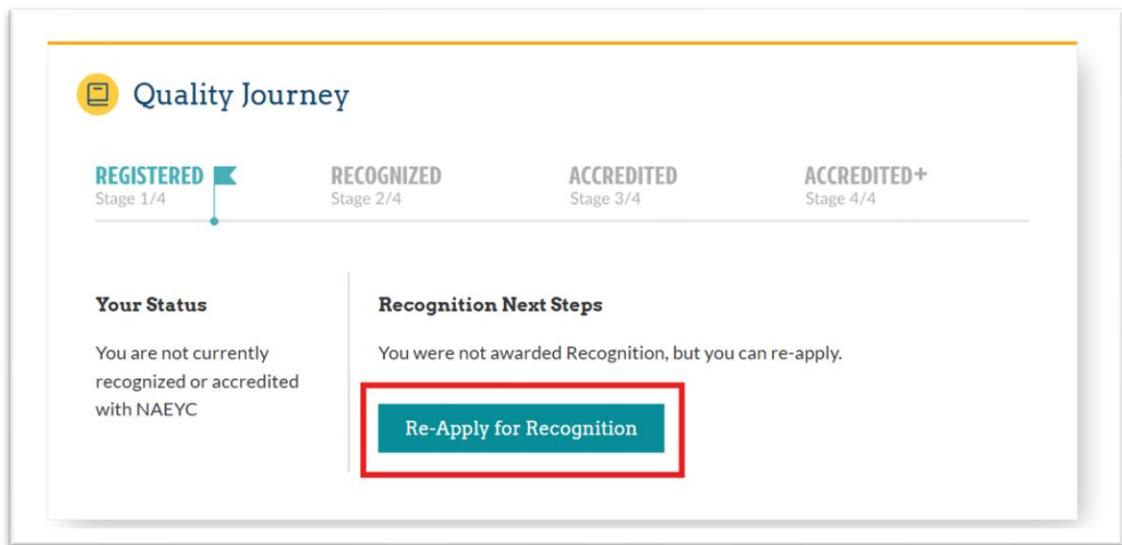
Select "**Start**" (or "Continue" if returning)
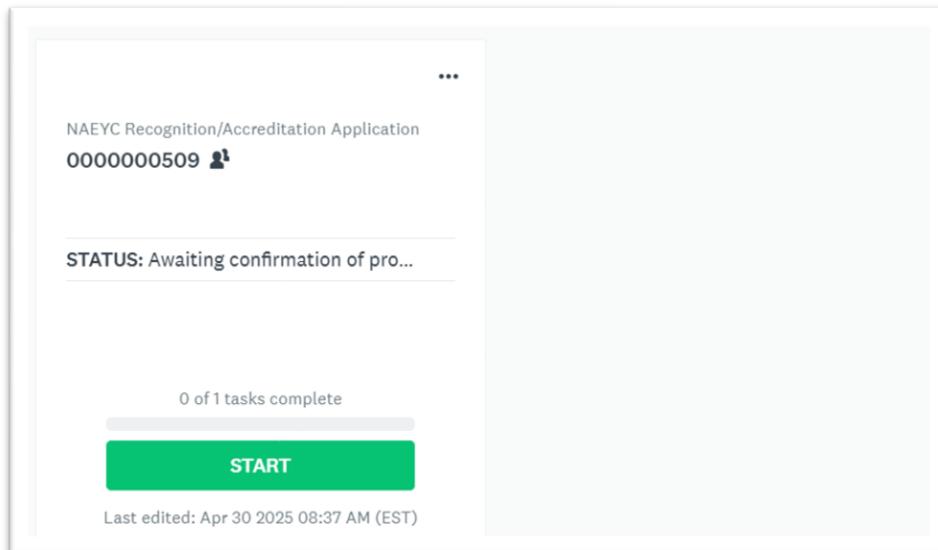
Under "Your tasks" select "Recognition Application (Resubmission)"

On the next page, select "**Next**"

NOTE - If completing the Accreditation Application, the Accreditation Re-submission will be visible.
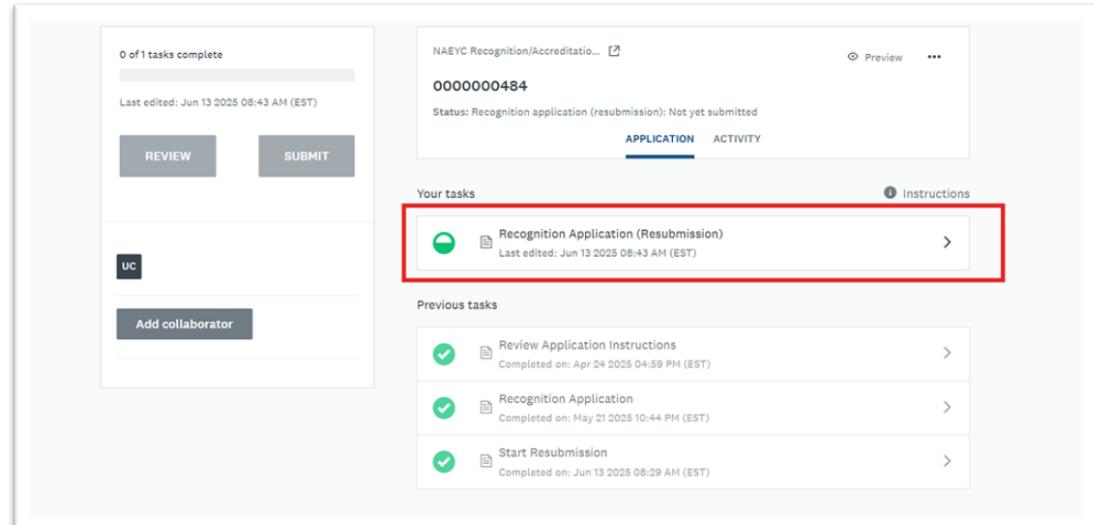
On the next page, the re-submission application should appear, **and any assessment item that was UNMET should be available** for you to re-upload and add a comment.

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Once all questions have been responded to select "**Next**" to proceed with submission OR Select "**Save & Continue Editing**" to save the responses.

On the next page select "**Submit**"

On the next page select "**Submit**".

A confirmation page will appear when once the re-submission application has been submitted for review and scoring.
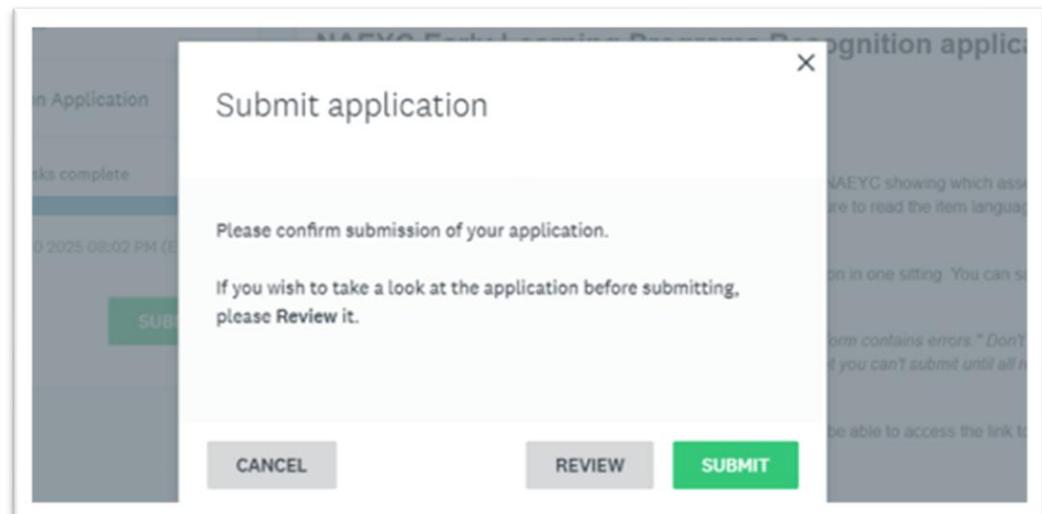
Adding Collaborators to Application

Access to the application can be provided to others through the Survey Monkey tool. These individuals will use the information received via email from Survey Monkey to access the application information.

When the application has been started, there is an option to add a collaborator on the left-hand menu.

To add a collaborator to the application, select "**Add Collaborator**". Enter the email address of the user that should be provided with access to the application.

"Add Collaborator" option allows others to view or edit application:
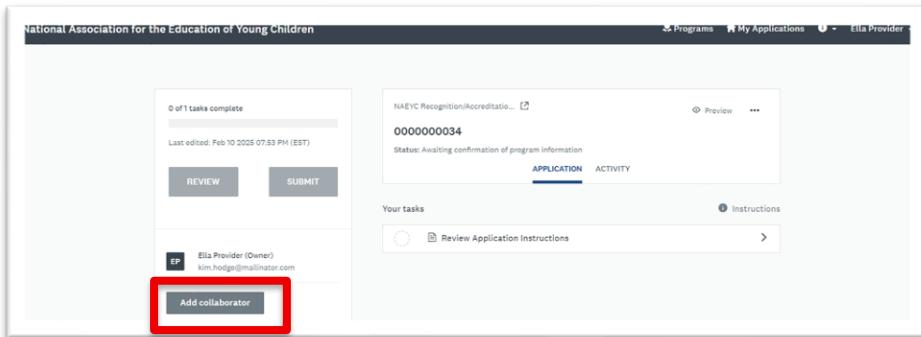
Individuals can be provided with "View & edit" or "View only" access. This is selected when adding a collaborator:
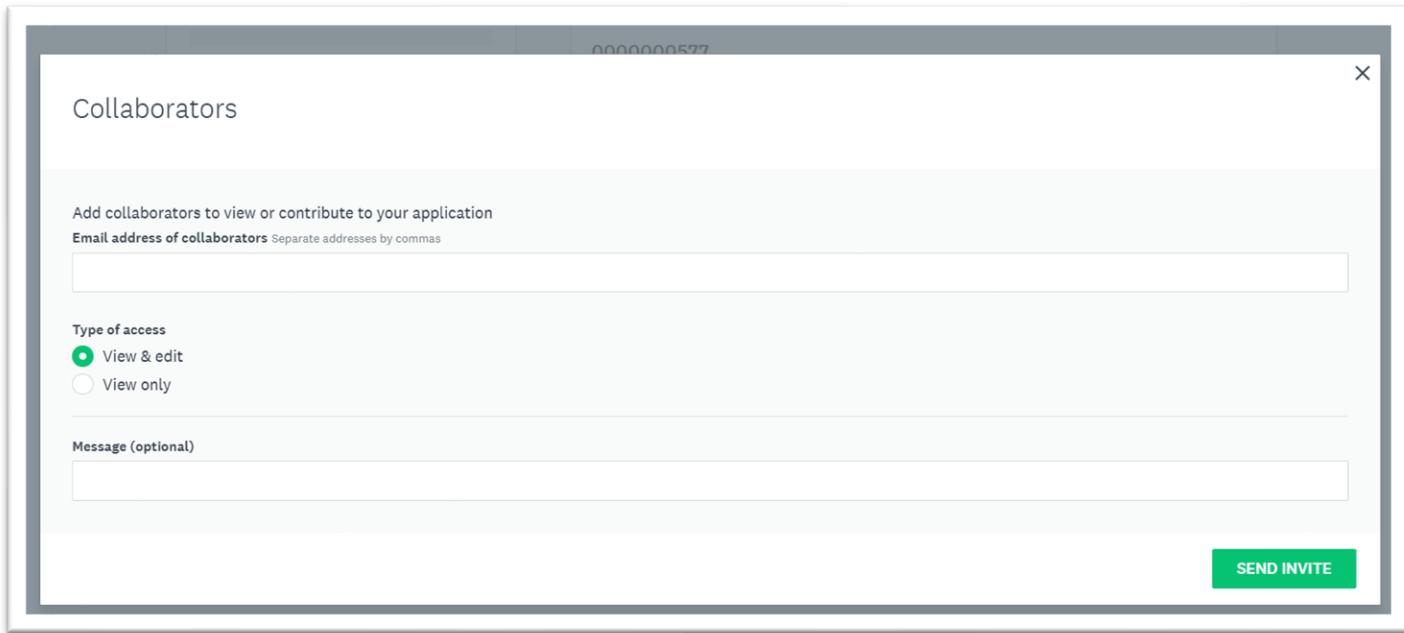
The individual will receive an email after "**Send invite**" is selected.

The recipient should select "**Join Now**" from the email to accept the invitation to collaborate on the application.

Paying the Application Fee

For initial applications, the application fee is due following submission of the application.

For renewal applications, the fee is due following the decision notification. See the Renewal Appliation section for details on when the payment is due based on the tier of renewal.

To submit the payment, return to the Home page of the Early Learning Hub.

Select the "Submit Payment" option to proceed with making the payment.

On the Payment page, select the option that reflects how the program would like to pay the fee. Options include:

- Pay Now with Credit Card
  o This option will provide an option to add credit card information.

- Email a Payment Link
  o This option allows the invoice to be mail to a specific email that will receive a link to make the payment.

Review the Terms and Conditions and select the checkbox to agree. Select "Next" to continue.

NOTE – Any program affiliated with a NAEYC Large System User (LSU) that has billing options set up will also allow the user to bill the charge to the LSU.

Decision Definitions

For a successful Recognition or Accreditation Application decision, a program must demonstrate through documentation review that it:

- Meets 100 percent of all required items
- Meets 80 percent of overall items*

✔ 100% pass rate for assessed required items

✔ 80% pass rate for all assessed items

*Based on items assessed based on the ages served by the program. Items that are by age group count as individual items and included in total items used in overall percentage.

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Decision Notification & Application Results

Within 90 days following submission of an application, the primary and secondary contacts affiliated with a program will receive a decision notification by email and instructions for how to access the application resu[] within the Early Learning Hub.

Follow these steps to locate the application results:

1. Log into your NAEYC account at my.naeyc.org/
2. Click "**My Organizations**" in the top right corner
3. Select "**Early Learning Hub**" for the program
4. Under "**Application & Reports**," select "**Application History**"
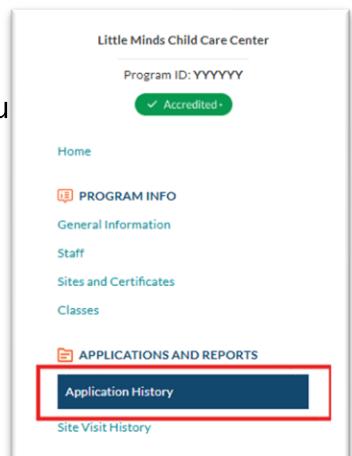
On the **Application History** listing, the following is available:

- Tier of application
- Renewal indication
- Submitted date
- Application result
- Link to score summary
- Link to score detail
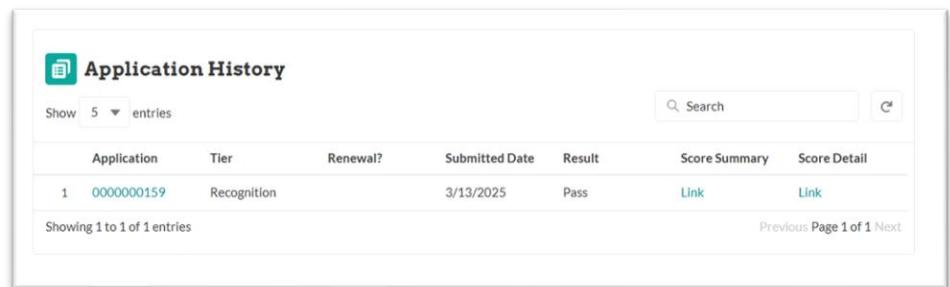
Application Score Summary Report

The **Application Score Summary** includes the following:

- **Criteria Name**: Indicates if All Items and Required Items
- **Attained Percentage**: Percentage of assessment items met, based on the number of items met divided by the total number of items assessed
- **Result**: Pass or Fail
- **Unmet Items**: List of assessment item that were NOT met (e.g., R.1.01, A.1.01)

Important Note:

You must meet **100% of required items** AND **80% of all items** to receive Recognition or Accreditation status.

Application Score Details Report

The **Application Score Details Report** includes item-level feedback:

- **Question Number**: NAEYC assessment item code (e.g., R.2.03, A.2.03)
- **Reviewer Response**: "Yes" means met, "No" means not met
- **Review Comments**: Specific feedback on what was missing or unclear

Exporting Application Results

The Application Score Summary and Detail Reports can be exported by selecting the **"Export"** option in the upper right when viewing a report. Export options include:

- **Formatted Report**: Export the report, including the report header, groupings, and filter settings.
- **Details Only:** Export raw data from the report, including the detailed rows. Use this to do further calculations or for uploading to other systems. Detailed files can be exported as Excel or Comma delimited.
- Choose the CSV "format" export option to ensure all comments are included in download.

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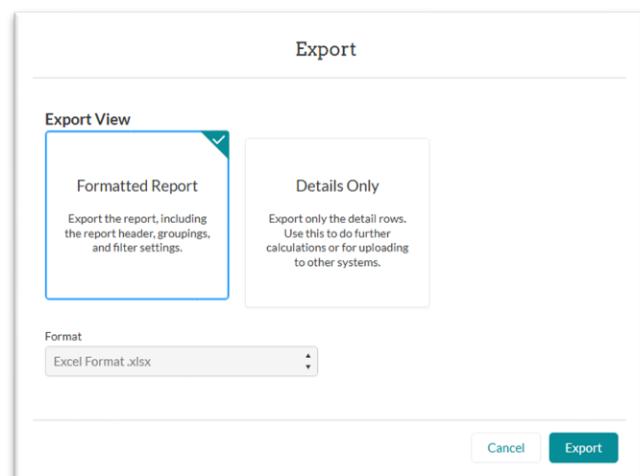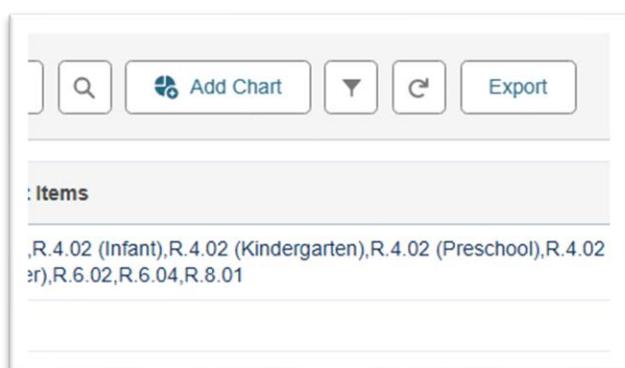
Deferred Decision Next Steps

Initial Deferred Decisions

If a deferred decision is received, you can resubmit the application one time for free. Carefully review the scores and comments on your initial application.

To resubmit, navigate to the Early Learning Hub and click resubmit. Once you are taken to the application, you will have the ability to pre-fill your responses from your initial submission, so you don't need to start from scratch. Just be sure to update or change the responses to items that you did not meet so that the NAEYC assessor can review new information.

You only have 30 days to correct and resubmit your application. If you choose not to resubmit your application, you will not be awarded the desired tier status at this time. See **Final Deferred Decisions** for next steps by tier.

Final Deferred Decisions

- **Programs that are currently Registered.** You may reapply for Recognition at any time.

- **Programs that are currently Recognized.** You may reapply for Accreditation at any time. Your Recognition term will end at the valid until date. You must reapply for Recognition to extend the term.

- **Programs that are currently Accredited.** Your current Accreditation term will be terminated, and the program will become Recognized for a one-year term. You will be able to apply for Accreditation at any time.

- **Programs that are currently Accredited+.** Your current Accreditation+ term will be terminated, and the program will become Recognized for a one-year term. You will be able to apply for Accreditation at any time.

Appeal Options

The Council for NAEYC Accreditation provides a formal appeal process for programs that receive an Accreditation "Deferred" decision. The program must submit its appeal within 30 days of the receipt of the "Deferred" decision via the Early Learning Hub. During the appeal window, there is no change in the program's public accreditation status. Appeals are made to the Quality Assurance Committee of the Council for NAEYC Accreditation.

Click here for more information on the appeal process or email QualityAssurance@naeyc.org.