

# PART 3

## COMMISSIONED AGENTS AND NACAC'S GUIDE TO ETHICAL PRACTICE SERIES VETTING AND EXTERNAL TRAINING

This paper is the third in a series of NACAC resources designed to guide member institutions in the implementation of the *Guide to Ethical Practice in College Admission*, approved by the association's Assembly in September 2020.

This installment focuses on resources institutions can use to identify and vet agent partners. It also provides examples of organizations and efforts aimed at quality assurance of agents and agencies.

This paper is organized into three sections: 1) identifying prospective agency partners, 2) agent training courses, and 3) institutional vetting of prospective agency partners.

Institutions should exercise particular care in the selection of international student recruitment agencies. Identifying and vetting prospective agency partners requires careful research and follow-through. Given the number of unsolicited requests by agents to develop partnerships, it is critically important to have a transparent process in place for vetting and selecting agency partners. Although organizations and resources can assist your institution in identifying and vetting potential agency partners, it is advisable to exercise your own due diligence as well.

### 1. Identifying Prospective Agency Partners

One prudent approach to identifying agency prospects is asking trusted colleagues for recommendations. Read [Wading into the Waters of International Student Recruitment Agents](#) for one perspective on the importance of engaging with professional peers in the process. Tapping into regional and other international recruitment consortia, as one [Canadian institution shared](#), is another way to network with professionals who may have experience with agency-based recruitment. Inquire about agents or agencies with earned reputations for professionalism and strong student support.

There are also organizations that can serve as a starting point for identifying potential agent partners. Many of these organizations host conferences or events to facilitate introductions, networking, and the development of partnerships for the purposes of increasing international student enrollment. The following are examples.

#### AIRC

The American International Recruitment Council (AIRC) is a US-based nonprofit membership organization that works to safeguard the interests of both international students and enrolling institutions that work with recruitment agencies. AIRC certifies agencies through an independent review process that benchmarks agencies against [AIRC's Certification Standards](#), which cover the following categories: organizational effectiveness; integrity of recruitment process; student and family engagement pre- and post-enrollment; institutional engagement pre- and post-recruitment, and the agency's complaints process. AIRC hosts an [annual conference](#) attended by [certified agencies](#) and representatives of accredited academic institutions, nonprofit organizations, and government agencies.



National Association for  
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## ICEF

International Consultants for Education and Fairs (ICEF) is a for-profit company headquartered in Germany that runs networking events in a number of countries to help institutions and recruitment agents create strategic partnerships. ICEF screens agencies using an application form and references, and requires agents to demonstrate an established focus on sending students to the particular country or region where the workshop is being held. For example, the annual ICEF Miami workshop requires agents have experience sending students to North America. After reviewing comprehensive agent profiles, participating institutions can schedule one-on-one business meetings with potential agents who have compatible interests and experience.



## National Agency Associations

Agency associations exist in a number of countries and work to promote industry standards and professional practice. Some are longstanding, while others are fledgling; they also vary in terms of member eligibility and commitments. Members in these associations typically consist of private companies focused on counseling and supporting students in studying abroad, as well as public organizations and trade associations. Some offer counselor training programs. Examples of these associations include:

- [Association of Russian Educational Providers \(AREA\)](#)
- [Beijing Overseas Study Services Association & China Alliance \(BOSSA & COSSA\)](#)
- [Brazilian Educational and Language Travel Association \(BELTA\)](#)
- [Japan Association of Overseas Studies \(JAOS\)](#)

Many national associations are members of the [Federation of Education and Language Consultants Associations \(FELCA\)](#). FELCA member associations agree to abide by a [Code of Practice](#) aimed at advancing professional ethics and standards.

## StudyTravel Ltd.

StudyTravel is a UK-based for-profit company that produces *ST Magazine*, targeted at agents as a source for news, industry statistics, and articles on the international education sectors. It also hosts the ST Alphe Conferences. The Alphe Conferences, held around the world, bring together educators and trusted agents—as determined through a reference check process. The development of potential partnerships is facilitated by pre-arranged meetings with additional networking opportunities to build professional relationships.

## US Commercial Service

The US Commercial Service is an arm of the US Department of Commerce's International Trade Administration. It provides services for US educational institutions and consortia to assist with international promotions and partnership development. Among these services are opportunities to meet international student recruitment agencies, including webinars and in-person networking events. The service's overseas offices work to identify agencies deemed fit for participation in these activities.

## 2. Agent Training Courses

A number of organizations offer training to agents in an effort to provide a measure of quality assurance. Agency or agent involvement in these courses signals a certain commitment to professionalism; consider successful participation in training or certification programs as an important criterion for any agency that wishes to represent your institution. The following are examples.

### British Council Foundation or Advanced Certificate for Agents

The British Council is the United Kingdom's international cultural relations organization. It has played an integral role in the UK's agency-based international student recruitment efforts over many years. One facet of its quality assurance approach consists of formal training for agents. It also maintains a database of agents who have successfully completed its training program.

### Canada Course for Education Agents

The online Canada Course for Education Agents supports professional development for agents specializing in Canada as a study destination. It is offered by ICEF, Languages Canada, and the Canadian Association of Public Schools International (CAPS-I), with the support of the Canadian Consortium for International Education (CCIE). The course provides agents with an overview of study options in Canada, information about how to apply, and tips to best prepare for studying in the country. The course is free, but agents may take an optional exam for a fee. Agents who pass the exam are acknowledged with a Canada Course Graduate listing on the ICEF and CCIE websites. Exam completion does not provide authorization, endorsement, or accreditation by the Canadian government.

### Education Agent Training Course (Australia)

The Education Agent Training Course is a free, online, industry-recommended course that provides education agents with information about studying in Australia and recent

changes and developments in international education. This course is supported by Australian Education International and the Department of Immigration and Border Protection. Agents who successfully pass a fee-based certification exam are added to the [Qualified Education Agent Counsellor Database](#)—a global online network of professionals in international education.

### [Education New Zealand Training Program for Agents](#)

Education New Zealand leads the country's outreach to prospective international students. One component of this work is an agent-training program, consisting of seven free e-learning modules. Agents who complete this training and achieve a 100 percent passing score can receive a Record of Achievement. These agents also gain access to New Zealand education marketing materials. Education New Zealand also developed a program to identify a small group of proven, committed, and ethical agents who receive the designation of [Education New Zealand Recognized Agency \(ENZRA\)](#). Approximately 300 agencies have received the designation.

### [US Agent Training Course](#)

The US Agent Training Course (USATC) provides professional development for agents specializing in the United States as a study destination. Created and developed by ICEF, the USATC provides agents with an understanding of study options in the US and tips on preparing to study in the country. The course is free, but agents may take an optional exam for a fee. Agents who pass the exam are acknowledged with a [US Course Graduates listing on the ICEF website](#). The US government does not officially accredit or endorse agents who pass the exam.

## 3. Institutional Vetting of Prospective Agency Partners

Once a prospective agency partner has been identified, it is important that institutions conduct their own research and analysis of a potential partner in preparation for a business relationship. This phase of the vetting process is also critical to assessing the agency's or agent's understanding of NACAC's guide to ethical practice.

Two primary means of evaluating agencies include requiring them to complete an agency application or questionnaire, and conducting a corresponding reference check. It is also recommended that every effort be made to visit the agency's office(s) prior to establishing an agreement. Short of this, requiring agency staff to visit the campus is another opportunity to assess the suitability of the agency. In either setting, interviewing agency personnel face-to-face is part of a sound vetting process.

As part of the application or questionnaire, the agency should be asked to furnish at least two professional references from institutions. Consider also obtaining references from international students or parents the agency has served. Upon receiving a completed application or questionnaire,

check references and verify the accuracy of the information submitted. This assessment should seek to confirm that the agency has served students ethically and has referred them to best-fit institutions.

An institution might designate a campus official with the responsibility of receiving initial applications from prospective agency partners and providing ongoing agency oversight. Regardless, consider establishing a campus committee—or involving an existing one—to evaluate agency applications and render decisions about whether to proceed with a contractual relationship.



Be aware of potential conflicts of interest if contracting with individuals who may have personal relationships with campus employees.

Some institutions require a prospective agency partner to refer one or more applicants prior to the establishment of a contractual relationship as a means to assess the agency's professionalism before making any formal commitments. Consult with legal counsel about a proper approach to structuring and communicating any trial period or similar arrangement.

### [Sample Agency Questionnaire](#)

Consider developing an agency application or questionnaire that meets the needs of your institution. The following questions can also be incorporated into agency interviews.

#### **COMPANY INFORMATION**

- Name of company and parent company, if applicable
- Contact information
- Address(es) of main and any branch offices
- Telephone number(s)
- Email address
- Website URL
- Mission and values statement
- Background of principals/owners
- Year agency was established

- Details of legal authorization to operate, business licensure, and certifications/credentials
- Membership in relevant professional associations
- Number of staff, their responsibilities, professional experience, educational background, and training
- Method of staff compensation (e.g., fixed salary, commissions, bonuses)
- Method in which staff or external contractors engage with students around admission documents, for example, whether employees serve as “writers” of application materials
- Methods of training and providing professional development for staff, including information on the resources and/or technology used
- Relationship with sub-agents; if sub-agents are used, supply the following information:
  - Number, names, and addresses of sub-agents
  - Nature of work performed (e.g., student advisement, application assistance, etc.)
  - Process used to ensure the ongoing training, professional development, and consistency of representation by your sub-agents
  - Other businesses run, if any (e.g., immigration consultancy)
  - Partnership or affiliation with external businesses

- advertising and promotional assistance
- support for school representatives at fairs
- travel and logistics assistance for school representatives
- recommendations of in-country partner institutions

#### **PROFESSIONAL REFERENCES**

- Three to five professional references with contact information, including at least two references directly employed by an accredited/recognized school, college, or university

#### **STUDENT/PARENT REFERENCES**

- Two or more references from international students and/or parents whom the agency has served

#### **NACAC’s GUIDE TO ETHICAL PRACTICE IN COLLEGE ADMISSION**

- Acknowledge review and understanding of NACAC’s *Guide to Ethical Practice*

#### **Sample Reference Check Questions**

The following are topics to consider addressing when conducting an agency reference check. When possible, try to ask these questions by phone. This will allow for a more well-rounded assessment of a referee’s experiences working with the agency. Short of this, consider emailing reference check questions.

#### **INSTITUTIONAL REFERENCES**

- Length of time the institution has worked with the agency
- The number of applicants the agency has referred to the institution over the last year, or other duration, and their enrollment rate
- Caliber, fit, success, and satisfaction of students referred, in comparison with international students who have enrolled without the agency’s assistance
- Evaluation of the agency’s professionalism and service to students and staff
- Description of any challenges or problems faced while working with the agency
- Recommendation as to whether or not to work with the agency

#### **INTERNATIONAL STUDENT/PARENT REFERENCES**

- Whether the student had a positive experience being served by the agency
- Whether the student’s experiences at the school matched the advisement they received from the agency prior to arrival
- Whether the fees charged by the agency were felt to be appropriate
- Whether the student would recommend the agency to friends without hesitation

#### **STUDENTS AND FAMILIES SERVED**

- Services provided to students and families during the recruitment and application processes (e.g., advisement, application assistance, translation services, English language or test preparation courses, student visa application assistance, travel and logistics support, etc.)
- Fees for each of these services, and the manner in which fees are disclosed to students and parents
- Nature of contractual relationship or agreement with students who use the agency’s services
- Manner in which agency discloses the names of its postsecondary institutions with whom they partner
- Number of students assisted/sent abroad in the last 12 months and the countries in which they are studying
- Methods used to promote the agency’s services to prospective students, including copies of or links to promotional materials
- Methods of assessing the legitimacy and readiness of prospective students

#### **INSTITUTIONAL PARTNERSHIPS**

- List of your current partner schools
- Type of institution or academic level/program for which you recruit (e.g., ESL, undergraduate, graduate, particular majors)
- Expectations/requirements of institutional partners (e.g., participation in fairs run by the agency)
- Reason(s) for wanting to partner with our institution
- Ability to participate in, provide, or arrange the following (and cover any related fees):
  - virtual and in-person training sessions on the institution for agency staff
  - virtual and in-person information sessions for prospective students and their families