

2026 Accreditation Process and Criteria Changes

Fred Lado, MD, PhD and Stephan Schuele, MD, MPH

NAEC President and Vice President

September 22, 2025



Agenda for Today's Webinar

- Housekeeping
- NAEC's mission and current accreditation process/criteria
- Changes to process and criteria for 2026 based on NAEC Board and Accreditation Retreat this summer
- Expanding Surgical Pilot
- Reminders about Process
- Q+A



NAEC's Mission

NAEC supports epilepsy centers in delivering quality comprehensive care to people with epilepsy, by setting standards of care, advocating for access to high quality epilepsy center services, and providing knowledge and resources to its member centers.



Reminder: Transition to 3-Year Cycle

- NAEC is continuing transition to 3-year accreditation to mitigate burden for members and to more evenly balance # of members completing the full accreditation process every year.
 - In 2025, 88 centers are the first group to be awarded 3-year full accreditation. (Centers that met all criteria).
 - To facilitate transition, for 2026, NAEC randomly identified 114 centers to have a 2nd year of interim accreditation. At centers' request, we kept adult and ped centers that recently split on same cycle as much as possible.



Reminder: Transition to 3-Year Cycle

- **NAEC notified all centers in June on their accreditation process for 2026. Please contact NAEC with any questions.**
- **Remember: Despite the move to a three-year cycle, centers that receive conditional accreditation will continue to have to complete the full process in the following year and any level 3 center that wishes to apply for level 4 accreditation may do so during any accreditation process.**

Reminder: Accreditation Steps

Accreditation Steps	Applicants	Level 3 Center Applying for Level 4 Status*	Accreditation Expires in 2025: Centers Doing Full Process in 2026	Accreditation Expires in 2026 or 2027: Centers Doing Interim Process in 2026
Pay Annual Dues	YES	YES	YES	YES
Complete Center Annual Report	YES	YES	YES	YES
Upload Documents	YES	YES	YES	NO

***If your center is currently accredited as a level 3 center and wishes to apply for level 4 status, please notify NAEC.**



Overview of NAEC Accreditation Criteria

Providers

- Physicians
- Neuropsychologist
- Social worker
- Nursing, APPs, PA
- EEG technologist
- Trained personnel for 24/7 monitoring
- **Neuroradiologist**
- Training for staff – center-specific and partnerships with sister orgs

Services

- **Electrodiagnostic**
- **Imaging**
- Pharmacological
- Neuropsych
- **Surgical (level 4)**
- Rehabilitative

Protocols

- **9 required protocols – 4 new**
- EMU policy
- Order set

Infrastructure

- EMU meeting certain criteria
- Layout and furnishings to minimize risk of injury
- **Referral agreement with level 4 center (level 3)**

2026 Accreditation Process Clarifications and Changes



2026 Clarifications and Changes

EMU Monitoring
by Third Parties

EMU Caring

AANN/NAEC
Certificate
Program

Training for
Monitor Watchers

Referral
Agreements for
Level 3 and 4
Centers

New Patient
Reports

Neurologist Board
Certification

New Protocols

EMU Monitoring by Third Parties

- NAEC is clarifying that 24/7/365 monitoring of patients admitted to the EMU may be provided by a third party that is off-site from the center.
- The third party must follow NAEC requirements and protocols for monitoring patients, including safety standards and the ability to contact physicians and nurses on-site when needed.
- The Center Medical Director must ensure that standards are being met by any third party that provides monitoring services.



EMU *Caring*

- NAEC will continue to require centers to have one physician, and a center nurse or technologist take the existing [AES/NAEC EMU Caring Course](#), which is available on the AES website at no cost to NAEC members.
- NAEC and AES have agreed to update EMU Caring curriculum and are working on a modular training program for physicians, residents, nurses, techs and other members of the epilepsy center multi-disciplinary team; the revised course(s) will likely not be available until NAEC's 2027 accreditation process.

AANN/NAEC Comprehensive Epilepsy Center for Seizures and Epilepsy Certificate Program

- For 2026, NAEC will require that **all centers have their lead inpatient and outpatient nurses that are listed in the Center Annual Report complete the two epilepsy center focused training modules.**
- Center nurses listed in these positions that have already taken the 8-module epilepsy course will not need to retake the 2 modules.
- NAEC encourages centers to enroll all nurses affiliated with the center in the 2 modules.
- NAEC is underwriting the cost of providing access to these modules for NAEC centers, so centers will not incur any cost for them. AANN is also providing a discount to NAEC center nurses interested in taking the full 8 module course.
- More information on how to access the two AANN epilepsy center modules and the full course can be found [here](#).



Training for Monitor Watchers

- NAEC is seeking to standardize and ensure the quality of training for staff who monitor EMU patients.
- As a result, NAEC will require **all monitor watchers / neurodiagnostic assistants to complete the ASET Neurodiagnostic Assistant Course (LTM100)**.
 - Monitor watchers who are registered EEG technicians or EMU nurses who complete the AANN 2-modules on epilepsy center care described above are exempt from this requirement.
- This course is available to NAEC member centers at no cost.
- Centers may still have in-house training programs for monitor watchers in addition to the LTM100 course, though **they will no longer be required to upload details on their in-house programs during their full accreditation year.**

Strengthening Referral Arrangements Between Level 3 and 4 Centers

- NAEC requires all level 3 centers to have a referral arrangement with a level 4 center.
- For the 2026 accreditation process, NAEC has sample referral agreements available on its website and **will require the signatures of both the level 3 and level 4 center medical directors on the agreement** to further document the relationship.

New Criteria for 2026 Stemming from the NAEC Guidelines



New Patient Reports

- **Intracranial VEEG Requirement:** Rather than submitting 6 comprehensive intracranial reports, Level 4 centers will now submit **1 comprehensive intracranial VEEG report and 6 surgical implantation reports for extraoperative monitoring.**
 - The six reports must be from the past three years with at least one in the prior year.
 - The comprehensive VEEG report can be (but is not required to be) for the same patient as one of the surgical reports.
- This should reduce burden for centers for deidentification since surgical reports are shorter and simpler

Inclusion of MEG Reports

- Level 4 centers **may submit a MEG**, PET or SPECT report for full accreditation, rather than just a PET or SPECT report.

Minutes of One Epilepsy Patient Management Conference

- All centers will be required to **upload the minutes of one epilepsy patient management conference.**
 - The conference minutes must be de-identified of all patient-identifying data, like patient reports.
 - Minutes should include who attended, including the epileptologist, neurosurgeon, neuroradiologist, and neuropsychologist; a summary of tests reviewed; treatment options discussed; and the final decision.

MRI Patient Report

- NAEC will require that the MRI report required for full accreditation **include a statement and/or technical description of the epilepsy specific protocol followed or the center should upload an MRI protocol** with this technical statement in their protocol folder in Box.com.
- Sample MRI Protocols/technical statements can be found on NAEC website.

Sample MRI Protocol Elements

- Field strength (1.5T, 3T, or 7T)
- Clear statement that an **epilepsy protocol** was performed
- Contrast agent and dose (if given)
- Concise list of the major required sequences: 3D T1-weighted, Coronal T2 perpendicular to hippocampus, 3D FLAIR, DWI, SWI/GRE
- Optional advanced techniques (DTI, fMRI, volumetry, etc.) can be noted if performed but are not required for accreditation.

Neuroradiologist Board Certification

- **NAEC will require that the neuroradiologist listed by the center on the Center Annual Report be board certified** and will validate the board certification with the American Board of Radiology.
- NAEC also requires that the MRI Report submitted for full accreditation be signed by this neuroradiologist.

New Protocols for 2026

- Protocol of verbal and written patient and caregiver education in preparation for EMU admission.
 - *Protocol should include all logistics for admission (date, time, location) and a contact name and number, along with information on what to expect and what patient should bring to hospital for the EMU stay.*
- Protocol for the identification of patients who would most likely benefit from genetic testing, even if their seizures are well controlled.
 - *Protocol should provide guidance in identifying appropriate patients for genetic testing, which may include age of onset, epilepsy type, comorbidities that trigger testing and family history of epilepsy; the workflow for testing and counseling if done at center or referral, and steps for sharing results with patients and referring physicians.*

New Protocols for 2026

- Protocol of nursing procedure for patient communication utilizing telephone and virtual healthcare access services with prompt response to patient concerns for outpatients.
 - *Protocol should differentiate patient requests that need immediate attention, response needed that day, response needed within 3-days – a week.*
- Protocol for how center involves both epileptologists and mental health providers in diagnosis and follow-up planning for patients with PNEE.
 - *Protocol should explain how patients are evaluated and the PNEE diagnosis is confirmed; that a psycho/social evaluation or a referral for such evaluation is provided and that a referral for therapy is provided. Protocol should include that patient education on the diagnosis is provided.*

Protocol Reminders

- All new and existing protocols must be on center or hospital stationery.
- Samples of all NAEC required protocols can be found on NAEC website.
- Centers will have to upload these new protocols in their next full accreditation year.

Expansion of Surgical Pilot

Preparation and Timeline for Level 4
Centers Submission of Procedure-
Level Surgical Data

Requirement to Submit Procedure-Level Surgical Data

- For the last three years, NAEC has had a successful pilot program to explore whether and how centers can submit de-identified data and track outcomes for surgical procedures. Thanks to the 15 centers that have participated and shared data!
- At the Dec 2024 Annual Meeting, NAEC announced that the pilot would be expanded to all level 4 centers to support NAEC's accreditation process.
- NAEC is planning a **phased-in approach to expand the program beginning in 2026 once the 2026 Accreditation process ends.**
- Centers **will not be required to submit any procedure-level surgical data for 2025 cases before January 31, 2026**



Requirement to Submit Procedure-Level Surgical Data

- In preparation of expanding to all centers in 2026:
 - NAEC is working with our IT firm to ensure that the web-based portal front and back end are user-friendly and technically sound
 - NAEC has hired a HIPAA lawyer and expert statistician to certify that we are not collecting any protected health information (PHI) and thus do not need Business Associate Agreements (BAAs) with program participants
 - NAEC is drafting data governance and use policies and procedures
 - NAEC is preparing FAQs and training materials to walk centers through how to enter data
- We will roll out these materials in the next few months and at the NAEC Annual Meeting in December.



Requirement to Submit Procedure-Level Surgical Data

- All centers will be required to submit procedure-level surgical data over time
- NAEC will provide resources and training to support centers in meeting this new requirement
- More info on exact timing to come – but we will give centers ample notice, time, and assistance to get up and running

Accreditation Process Reminders



Timeline

- **November 2025**: NAEC 2026 accreditation process begins; Instructions are distributed.
- **January 31, 2026**: Deadline to pay dues, complete the Center Annual Report, and upload required documents to Box.com.
- **February 1-15, 2026**: Review and Revise Period: NAEC staff will review your center's submission for completion and let you know if anything is missing.
- **March 2, 2026**: Final deadline for any revisions and additions. We cannot accept dues or materials after this date.

We will hold webinars in Dec and Jan with comprehensive overview of accreditation criteria and logistics to answer accreditation questions!



Reminders about Process

Accreditation Steps	Applicants	Level 3 Center Applying for Level 4 Status*	Accreditation Expires in 2025: Centers Doing Full Process in 2026	Accreditation Expires in 2026 or 2027: Centers Doing Interim Process in 2026
Pay Annual Dues	YES	YES	YES	YES
Complete Center Annual Report	YES	YES	YES	YES
Upload Documents	YES	YES	YES	NO

NAEC Website has Many Resources

www.naec-epilepsy.org/accreditation



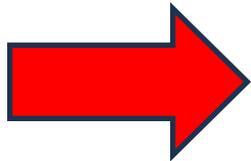
About Resources ▾ Latest News Contact

Find a Center

Log Out



NAEC Accreditation



Training

Policies

Sample Documents

Processes

Note: 2026 report isn't live yet!



Q+A



If you have further questions, please email:
info@naec-epilepsy.org