



The Parent's Recruiting Checklist

Your athlete has a recruiting checklist. Seven steps, dozens of tasks, a profile to build, emails to write, coaches to contact, visits to schedule, offers to evaluate.

This is yours.

Not a copy of her checklist with your name on it. Not a summary of what she is supposed to be doing that you are tracking on her behalf. A checklist of the specific responsibilities that belong to you — the ones that nobody else on your family's recruiting team can do as well as you can, the ones that fall through the cracks when parents assume they belong to someone else, and the ones that, when handled well, give your athlete a genuinely better chance of finding the right school.

The items on this checklist are organized by stage of the recruiting process. Work through each section as the relevant stage arrives. Check off what is complete, note what needs attention, and return to the full list whenever the process feels like it is getting away from you.

The goal of this checklist is not to make you more involved in your athlete's recruiting. It is to make sure your involvement is in the right places — so she can own the places that belong to her.

Section 1 — Before You Begin

These items belong to the foundation phase — the work that should happen before the first email goes out, the first showcase fee gets paid, or the first campus visit gets scheduled. Families who skip this section consistently report that the process was harder and more expensive than it needed to be.

Have an honest conversation with your athlete about whether she genuinely wants to play college softball.

Not whether she has always played softball. Not whether stopping would disappoint the people around her. Whether she, specifically and personally, wants the experience of competing at the college level — the schedule, the demands, the commitment, the years of continued investment in the sport.

This conversation is not about giving her permission to stop. It is about ensuring that the recruiting process she is about to enter is driven by genuine desire rather than momentum. The answer should come from her, unprompted, in her own words.

If you are not certain she has said this clearly and recently, this is the conversation to have before anything else.

Completed



Have an honest conversation with your athlete about who owns the recruiting process.

She does. Her role: research programs, write emails, make phone calls, lead campus visit conversations, make the final decision. Your role: support, advise, attend, ask questions in designated parent time, handle logistics, provide financial context.

This conversation is most productive when it is explicit rather than assumed. Say it directly: “This is your process. I am here to support you, not to run it for you. The emails go from your account in your words. The phone calls are yours to lead. I will be at visits with you but you are the one the coaches are evaluating. Tell me what you need from me.”

The families who have this conversation clearly at the beginning have significantly fewer tensions about roles during the process than the families who discover the tension only after it has already created problems.

Completed

Understand the division landscape — honestly.

Before the process begins, your family needs a realistic picture of what division level is likely to produce genuine scholarship opportunities for your specific athlete at her specific current level of development.

This means having a direct, specific conversation with her travel coach — not a general conversation about how talented she is, but a specific conversation about what division level she is realistically competitive for right now and what would need to develop for that picture to change.

It also means educating yourself on what the divisions actually mean — not the prestige hierarchy you may have absorbed from the culture around travel ball, but the genuine athletic, academic, and financial realities of each level. The content in [Why College Sports Are Worth Pursuing](#) → covers this directly.

If your family has not had a level-specific conversation with the travel coach, that conversation needs to happen before showcases are booked at the wrong level.

Completed

Establish a realistic recruiting budget.

The recruiting process has direct costs that accumulate over one to three years of active activity: showcase fees, travel, lodging, meal expenses, campus visit costs for unofficial visits, profile platform subscriptions, and camp registrations.



Estimate the annual cost of attending three to five major showcases including travel and lodging. Add profile and platform fees. Add camp registrations if relevant. Add the cost of two to three unofficial campus visits. Compare that total to what your family can realistically spend over the next two to three years without creating financial stress that distorts the recruiting decisions themselves.

Families who do not establish a budget before the process begins often find themselves making showcase and visit decisions based on accumulated financial pressure rather than strategic value — which produces worse outcomes than the budget conversation would have.

Established: Annual budget \$_____ | Total two-year budget \$_____

Read the financial aid overview.

Before your family receives any offers, you need to understand how college athletic scholarships actually work — the equivalency system, the partial award reality, the interaction between athletic and academic aid, and the net cost calculation that is the only financial number that actually matters.

The Understanding Scholarships and Financial Aid → page in this portal covers this completely. Read it before the process begins. Read it again when the first offer arrives.

Families who understand this material before they need it evaluate offers more accurately, negotiate more effectively, and make financial decisions that serve the athlete's long-term interests rather than the family's need to feel that the investment was validated.

Completed

Section 2 — Academic Foundation

These items do not belong to the athlete alone. They belong to the family. Academic eligibility is a shared responsibility, and the consequences of gaps discovered late fall on everyone.

Confirm NCAA core course completion status with the guidance counselor.

NCAA Division I eligibility requires 16 specific core courses completed before graduation. Many families discover gaps in this requirement in junior or senior year — when there is insufficient time remaining to fill them without significant disruption.



Schedule a meeting with your athlete's high school guidance counselor specifically to review: which core courses have been completed, which remain, and whether the current four-year course plan completes all 16 before graduation. Do this no later than the end of freshman year. Earlier is better.

Meeting scheduled: _____ | Core courses completed: ____ of 16 | On track: Yes / No

Verify NCAA Eligibility Center registration.

Go to ncaa.org/eligibilitycenter and confirm that your athlete's account has been created and is being maintained. Registration should happen no later than the end of sophomore year. Junior year registration is manageable but late. Senior year registration creates problems.

Registered: Yes / No | Registration date: _____

Monitor GPA each semester — specifically the unweighted core course GPA.

NCAA eligibility is calculated using the unweighted GPA in core courses — not the overall GPA, not the weighted GPA. Monitor this number specifically at the end of each semester. Know what the minimum GPA requirement is for the division levels your athlete is targeting and know how much room your family has above that minimum.

A GPA that is declining in sophomore or junior year is a more urgent recruiting issue than almost anything else on this list. Address academic performance before showcases.

Current unweighted GPA: _____ | Division minimum: _____ | Buffer: _____

Create a standardized testing plan.

ACT and SAT scores factor into D1 eligibility sliding scales and into academic merit aid calculations across all levels. Most athletes should test at least twice: an initial attempt in sophomore year or early junior year to establish a baseline, and a second attempt in junior year to improve it.

Research the testing dates available in your area. Register for the first test. Determine whether test preparation resources — a prep course, tutoring, practice materials — are appropriate based on the first result.

First test date: _____ | Score: _____ | Second test date: _____ | Score: _____



Run the net price calculator for every school under serious consideration.

Every college and university is required by federal law to provide a net price calculator on its website. This tool estimates the financial aid package your family would receive based on income, assets, GPA, and test scores — before the application process begins.

Run this calculator for every school your athlete is seriously considering, at every division level, before any visit. The results are estimates, not guarantees, but they provide the baseline comparison your family needs to evaluate options honestly.

Calculators run for: _____

File the FAFSA as early as possible in senior year.

The FAFSA opens October 1 of senior year. File it as early as possible. Some institutional need-based aid programs have limited funds distributed on a first-come basis, and families who file late miss aid they would otherwise qualify for.

Filing the FAFSA is not a commitment to any school. It is a prerequisite for accessing need-based financial aid that your family may qualify for across multiple institutions simultaneously.

FAFSA filed: Date _____

Section 3 — Profile and Preparation

Verify that the recruiting profile is complete and current.

Before any active outreach begins, audit your athlete's recruiting profile against this list: current season statistics, verified athletic measurables, current GPA and academic information, intended major or academic area, NCAA Eligibility Center registration number, graduation year, updated contact information, working video link, and a complete personal statement.

Every section should be filled. Nothing should be placeholder text. The video should be current — from within the last competitive season — and the link should work from a browser that is not logged into the platform.

Profile audited | Last updated: _____ | Video current: Yes / No | All sections complete: Yes / No



Build the research infrastructure.

Before outreach begins, your family needs a working list of programs under consideration and an organizational system for tracking progress. This is your responsibility to help establish and maintain — not to manage for your athlete, but to make sure the system exists.

The list should include programs at multiple division levels, organized into realistic, stretch, and safety tiers. The tracking system — whether the Team Recruiting Tracking Sheet → adapted for family use, a spreadsheet, or another organizational tool — should capture which programs have been contacted, when, what the response was, and what the next action is.

School list created | Programs: ____ | Tracking system established: Yes / No

Review your athlete's initial outreach emails before they are sent.

Your role is to review and advise, not to write or rewrite. Read each draft email your athlete produces and give her specific, useful feedback: Is it specific to this program or generic? Is it free of spelling errors and casual language? Does it clearly state who she is, why she is interested in this specific program, and what she is offering athletically and academically? Is it an appropriate length — long enough to be substantive, short enough to be read?

Return the draft with feedback and let her revise it. Do not edit it yourself and send it from her account.

Review process established: Yes / No

Section 4 — Campus Visits

These items represent the most time- and attention-intensive phase of your direct involvement in the recruiting process. Do them well.

Read A Parent's Guide to Campus Visits before the first visit.

The Parent's Guide to Campus Visits → covers what to observe, what questions belong to you, what not to do, and how to debrief afterward in a way that helps rather than distorts your athlete's evaluation.

Reading it before the first visit — not during, not after — gives you the framework you need to use each visit well.

Completed



Prepare your own question list before each visit.

Parent questions are different from athlete questions. Your questions address scholarship renewal conditions, coaching staff stability, injury protocol, graduation rates for athletes specifically, academic support infrastructure, the financial aid office's picture of the complete package, and the institution's financial health.

The Questions Only Parents Should Ask → page provides a comprehensive list organized by category. Review it before each visit and select the questions most relevant to this specific program and your family's priorities.

Questions prepared for each visit: Yes / No

Schedule a separate meeting with the financial aid office during every official visit.

Do not allow the financial conversation to happen exclusively through the coaching staff. Request an independent meeting with a financial aid representative during every official visit. Use that meeting to understand the complete aid package — athletic scholarship, academic merit aid, need-based grants — and to ask the questions that produce the most accurate picture of what this institution will cost your family.

If the program does not facilitate this meeting, request it independently. A financial decision of this magnitude deserves direct access to the people who control the financial information.

Financial aid meeting requested for each visit: Yes / No

Take notes after each visit — immediately.

Within a few hours of returning from each campus visit, write down your observations while they are fresh: what stood out positively, what concerned you, how current players seemed to carry themselves, how the coaching staff interacted with each other and with players, what the facilities and academic support resources actually looked like beyond the tour, and what questions were not answered satisfactorily.

These notes become your reference material when your family is comparing options under real pressure weeks later. They are also a useful discipline — the act of writing forces you to identify what you actually observed rather than what you wish you had observed.

Notes completed after each visit: Yes / No



Debrief with your athlete after each visit — in the right order.

Ask her what she observed and what she felt before you share your own observations. Her experience of the visit is the primary input. Your observations are secondary context. If something concerned you, share it as a question rather than a conclusion. Give it 24 hours before the substantive debrief — the emotional high or low of a visit settles meaningfully in a day.

Debrief process established: Yes / No

Use the College Cost Comparison Tool to compare net costs across every visited school.

As each campus visit happens and financial information becomes available, enter it into the College Cost Comparison Tool →. The tool compares cost of attendance, scholarship amounts, academic aid, and net cost across up to five schools simultaneously and produces a four-year projection.

The comparison should be complete — all serious options entered and analyzed — before any commitment conversation moves toward a final decision.

Tool populated for all serious options: Yes / No

Section 5 — Offers and Decisions

Get scholarship terms in writing before any commitment is finalized.

Verbal offers are not binding on either party. Before your family treats an offer as real — before your athlete responds with anything that could be interpreted as a verbal commitment — the scholarship terms should be in writing.

Ask the coaching staff to send a written confirmation of the offer terms: the dollar amount, what it covers, the duration, and the specific renewal conditions. A program that hesitates to put terms in writing before commitment is a program that prefers you to rely on verbal assurances rather than documented commitments.

Written terms received for each offer: Yes / No



Verify scholarship renewal conditions specifically.

Ask directly: What specific conditions would cause this scholarship to be reduced or not renewed? What is the program's actual history of scholarship renewal for athletes who are meeting their commitments? What happens to the scholarship if an injury prevents the athlete from competing? What happens if the head coach leaves?

These are not hostile questions. They are responsible ones. Document the answers.

Renewal conditions verified and documented: Yes / No

Complete the Before You Sign Checklist before any financial aid agreement is signed.

The Before You Sign Checklist → in the main recruiting steps covers everything that should be verified, confirmed, and understood before the financial aid agreement — the binding document — is signed. It is more comprehensive than this checklist for the specific pre-signing phase.

Work through it completely. Do not sign anything until every item on it has been addressed.

Before You Sign Checklist completed: Yes / No

Resist the pressure to decide before the evaluation is complete.

Coaches apply timeline pressure during the offer phase. Some of that pressure is legitimate — programs do have class size limitations and they need to manage their recruiting classes. Some of it is a negotiating tactic designed to get a commitment before your family has completed its comparison.

Your family is entitled to adequate time to evaluate any offer — to visit the campus, review the financial package, compare it against other options, and discuss it privately before responding. Any coach who tells you the offer expires in 48 hours without adequate time for evaluation is applying pressure that should itself be a data point in your evaluation of that program.

A commitment made under pressure rather than from genuine evaluation is more likely to be the wrong commitment.

Decision made only after complete evaluation: Yes / No



Have the honest conversation about what a good outcome looks like at every realistic level.

Before any commitment is made, your family should be able to articulate genuinely — not just tolerantly — why any division level that is a realistic outcome for your athlete would still be a good outcome.

This conversation is harder than it sounds for many families. If you cannot find genuine enthusiasm — not resigned acceptance, but genuine enthusiasm — for a D2 or D3 outcome before the process produces one, the time to examine that is now, not when an offer arrives at a level that does not match your expectations.

Completed

Section 6 — After Commitment

The recruiting process does not end at commitment. The transition from committed to enrolled requires its own attention and its own checklist.

Verify eligibility center certification before signing day.

The NCAA Eligibility Center must certify your athlete's academic eligibility before she can receive athletic financial aid. Confirm that the eligibility center account is complete, that all required documentation has been submitted, and that certification is expected before signing day.

If there are any outstanding academic or eligibility questions, resolve them before the signing — not after.

Eligibility center certification confirmed: Yes / No

Review the financial aid agreement before it is signed.

The financial aid agreement — also called the National Letter of Intent at D1 schools — is the binding document. Once signed, it commits your athlete to this institution for one year and commits the institution to the scholarship terms documented in the agreement.

Read it. Confirm that the scholarship terms match what was offered and documented in writing during the recruiting process. If anything is different — if the amount is lower, if the conditions are different, if the renewal terms have changed — address it before signing.

Do not sign a document you have not read.



Agreement reviewed: Yes / No | Terms match documented offer: Yes / No

Handle enrollment logistics before August.

Once the commitment is signed, the administrative transition to enrolled student begins. This includes housing applications, academic advising appointments, course registration, meal plan selection, and any medical or athletic clearance requirements.

These are not your athlete's logistics alone — they are family logistics that require your involvement to complete on time. Most institutions have specific deadlines for each of these items. Missing them creates problems that are more difficult to resolve after the semester has started.

Housing: _____ | Academic advising: _____ | Course registration: _____ | Medical clearance: _____

Connect with the program and her future teammates before arrival.

The transition to a college program is significantly smoother for athletes who have begun building relationships with their future teammates before they arrive on campus. Encourage your athlete to participate in any team communication channels the program maintains, to attend any pre-enrollment events the program hosts, and to reach out directly to future teammates she connected with during the recruiting process.

Your role here is encouragement — not management of the relationship-building, which belongs to her.

Team connection initiated: Yes / No

Have the independence conversation — explicitly.

Before your athlete leaves for campus, have an explicit conversation about what her independence at college looks like and what your family's communication and involvement will look like going forward.

This is not about withdrawing your support. It is about establishing the right relationship for the next phase — one where she is the primary agent in her own life and you are the person she calls when she needs support, not the person who manages the details of her daily experience.

The athletes who transition most smoothly to college independence are the ones whose families prepared for that transition explicitly rather than discovering its necessity when she was already away from home.

Completed



A Final Note

This checklist is long because your role in the recruiting process, done well, is substantive. It involves real responsibilities, real financial decisions, real advocacy on behalf of your athlete's wellbeing, and real self-discipline to stay in the support role when the process makes the management role feel more useful.

The families who work through this checklist thoroughly — who handle their responsibilities well, who stay in their lane, who make financial decisions based on complete information, who build an environment in which their athlete genuinely owns her own process — are the ones whose athletes consistently arrive at the right school, prepared, connected, and ready.

That outcome is worth the work.

🏀 Related resources:

- [Understanding Scholarships and Financial Aid](#) → — the financial foundation every parent needs before any offer conversation
- [Questions Only Parents Should Ask](#) → — the complete question list for visits and financial conversations
- [A Parent's Guide to Campus Visits](#) → — how to observe, what to ask, and how to debrief
- [Before You Sign — The Commitment Checklist](#) → — everything to verify before the financial aid agreement is signed
- [College Cost Comparison Tool](#) → — compare net costs across every school your family is evaluating