

# The Recruiting Guide



There are many aspects to the recruiting process for distance runners. What follows are ten concepts that we think all parents and athletes should consider as they move through the recruiting process. No doubt you'll have questions after reading through this list. Please email us at [info@DistanceRunningRecruiting.com](mailto:info@DistanceRunningRecruiting.com) so we can better help you understand this process.

## ***1. Determine the most important factors in choosing a school. Education, Cost, Team Environment, Coaching, Location, etc.***

The key here is to understand that every student will prioritize these factors differently. Cost is important for all families, as most families have a set amount of money to invest in their child's education. Families need to be honest about what they can afford as this variable will be revisited throughout the process. The prestige of the university or college may be the most important factor in choosing a school. Obviously, every athlete hopes to run faster in college than they did in high school, so the coach and the team environment are important. That said, after a family makes their list of important factors, then prioritizes that list, they may realize athletic factors are slightly less important than cost and the perceived value of the education.

For all families, there will be more than one factor impacting the decision. Identify the factors that are important to your family and let that guide and structure your unique journey through the recruiting process.

## ***2. Have a sense of where your athletic and academic abilities place you.***

Every athlete has their PRs — i.e. their best performances in both cross country and track — that are important in this process. Every athlete has test scores, GPA, and class rank that they can send to a coach. The harsh reality is that those two metrics — athletic performance and academic performance — give each athlete a group of schools that are options for them, and the key here is that parents and athletes are honest about these metrics.

A girl who has run 5:40 for 1,600m or a young man who has run 4:40 for 1,600m can not expect to run at a NCAA Division I school that makes the NCAA Division I national championship meet in cross country. A student with a 26 on the ACT can't expect to be admitted to the top ten or twenty schools in the nation. While these are just examples, the take away is that every athlete has athletic abilities and academic abilities that give them some good options for higher

education. But the flip side is that families who are unrealistic about their student's athletic and academic abilities will waste valuable time contacting schools that are not realistic options. The good news is that families who have a strong sense of both their student's athletic and academic abilities will spend less time in the recruiting process, allowing the student to have a more enjoyable senior year.

### **3. Prepare to be recruited.**

Being recruited comes in many different forms. You have a lot of control over this process and the more you know and the earlier you start, the more you can be a driver in the process.

Here are the four key items to know as you prepare to be recruited. Remember, you can never be in violation of NCAA rules when you contact a coach. Rather, the rules govern how and when the coach can respond to you. You are allowed to initiate any contact at any time with any coach, but they may not always be able to respond to you, per the NCAA rules.

1. **Telephone Calls:** NCAA Division I and Division II coaches can call you on September 1st of your junior year. NCAA Division III coaches can call anytime from your freshman year through your senior year.
2. **Text Message, Email, and Private Messages (Facebook Messenger, Twitter DM):** NCAA Division I and Division II coaches can contact you via these electronic messages starting September 1st of your junior year. This also means that if you sent an email to a coach your sophomore year, all they could send back is, "Thanks for the email, but NCAA rules prevent me from contacting you until September 1st of your junior year." NCAA Division III coaches can contact you starting your freshman year.
3. **Contacts and Evaluations:** A contact is a face-to-face encounter between a student or their parent. NCAA Division I and Division II schools are only allowed seven contacts and evaluations in cross country and track — seven junior year and seven senior year. Division III has no limit. The evaluation is any off-campus activity that's designed to assess the academic qualifications or athletic ability of a prospective student athlete. For example, a visit to the student athlete's high school, watching them at a practice, or attending a competition.
4. **Official Visits:** See section 6 below.

It is recommended that you begin to take standardized tests during the fall of your junior year. This will give you the opportunity to try both the ACT and SAT and determine which test is more suited to you. Taking standardized tests early gives you the opportunity to take them a second time if you think you can improve your scores.

Spring break or winter break of your junior year are both great times to begin visiting schools unofficially. Email coaches and set up meetings with them before you head to campus. This will be a nice opportunity to see the campus and facilities and start to get a feel for which coaches you have a connection with. This will be extremely helpful when trying to create a list of potential schools later in the process. These unofficial visits will let you get a sense of what each school has to offer and where you might fit into their roster.

It's important to understand that your junior year of track is, without question, the most important and impactful from a recruiting perspective. College coaches are going to look at your athletic performances from your junior year and make decisions about who they offer official visits to based upon those performances. It may make sense to take a slightly lighter academic load in the spring of your junior year so that you're well rested for both training and racing. Obviously, this decision will vary from family to family, but if earning a scholarship is important financially for a family, then taking a slightly lighter academic load may make sense.

*Key Point: While your junior year of track is extremely important, be confident that if the season goes poorly, you will eventually be able to explain to a college coach the reasons why you struggled. Continue to contact the programs you can see yourself being a part of.*

If you didn't get the opportunity to visit schools during your junior year, you definitely want to do that during the summer before your senior year.

The final point is that college coaches are extremely busy and if you are interested in a particular school, you need to be proactive and contact that coach. Send follow up emails if necessary to see if you're a potential recruit for that program. Hopefully you are, but if you're not, it's great to be able to move forward and contact other schools.

#### **4. Use K.I.S.S when contacting college coaches.**

You probably know that K.I.S.S is an acronym for *Keep It Simple, Stupid*. When emailing college coaches, this very much applies. You'll make the college coach's job easier by giving them the following in a clear and succinct email.

1. **Name**
2. **PRs**
  1. All Track PRs. For 800m, and even 400m, make note if it is a relay split. List your fastest PR, then your PRs from your freshman and sophomore years as well. No need to include middle school PRs.

2. Cross Country PRs: Make a note of the course and the date. There is so much variability from course to course that coaches should have an idea of what courses are fast, slow, or “fair.”
3. **Test Scores**
4. **GPA**
5. **Class Rank**
6. **High school coach’s contact information**
7. **Intended major**

This list is hierarchical. A college coach may know from your PRs and your test scores if you are a potential athlete for their program. Many coaches would love to have a young man who has run 4:20 for 1,600m or a young woman who has run 5:05 for 1,600m on their team, yet at some NCAA Division I schools, these times might not be good enough to walk-on. Same idea applies to the student who has 30 on their ACT, has great grades and is near the top of their class; those academic metrics are solid, yet below the average student admitted to the top 20 or 30 schools in the country.

*Key Point: Make the coach’s job easy and give them a short email with your data.*

You can, and should, follow up with an email a week after you sent your initial email to ensure that they received it, and hopefully they can give you an idea of how you may fit into their program.

In the [\*Essential Recruiting Resource\*](#) we discuss when to tell your unique athletic and academic story to coaches, and how to tell that story. College coaches need to know this story, but not in the first email.

## ***5. Have athletes like you developed in the program you are looking at?***

This one is simple. Go to the team’s website, find the roster page and start reading the bios of the athletes on the team. The bio will list their high school PRs and then it will list, chronologically, their college PRs. The first thing you are looking for is to see if athletes are getting faster at this school. So make sure you read the bios of the athletes who have faster or slower high school PRs than you. Then, zero in on the handful of athletes who have high school PRs very similar to you and see how they are doing. For instance, does this team have four athletes that have similar high school PRs to you, yet none of them are on the varsity cross country team or traveling squad for track? If so, this could be a problem if your goal is to make the cross country team and/or travel with the track team.

*Key Point: This process takes time, and it's crucial that someone in the family does this. A parent may be the best person in the family to do this research.*

A good college coach will be happy that you took the time to do this because the coach's ability to develop high school runners into good collegiate runners will be evident. We believe that this is one area in which families often do a poor job. Rather than researching to see if the coach and program are developing athletes, families only listen to the information that has been presented by the coaching staff. Again, good coaches will be happy you did your due diligence as this exercise simply confirms that the coach is capable and can help you run faster in college than you did in high school.

## **6. Official visits and unofficial visits.**

First, you want to remember that visiting a school and meeting the team and coach are an opportunity for you to gain information, but also a chance for the coach and athletes on the team to get to know you. Many families forget that this is a two-way street: families are either too worried about being evaluated by a program that their son or daughter wants to be part of or too cavalier in their interactions with the coach, forgetting that the coach is also gathering information to see if your son or daughter is a good fit for their team.

Official visits are expense-paid trips to NCAA member institutions, meaning four-year colleges. For Division I and Division II schools, you may make an official visit after September 1st of your junior year. For Division III, you are allowed to officially visit a school after September 1st of your junior year. You are allowed five official visits to five different schools.

An unofficial visit is when a student and their parents visit a college campus and the trip is paid for by the students or parents (including travel, meals and accommodations). You may make as many unofficial visits as you like, but you may not make unofficial visits until September 1st of your junior year.

There are many aspects to the official and unofficial visit process. In The [\*Essential Recruiting Resource\*](#) we cover:

- ◆ Deciding to make an official or unofficial visit to a school.
- ◆ What documents you'll need to provide the coach before you can visit.
- ◆ What questions to ask the coach on an official visit.

- ◆ The importance of getting to spend time with the athletes on the team during an official visit and what questions you should be asking the athletes.
- ◆ Etiquette during the visit.
- ◆ If and when it is appropriate to discuss scholarships during the visit.
- ◆ Why you may not need to take all five visits

## **7. FAFSA - Free Application for Federal Student Aid**

Many families wrongly believe that they should not fill out this form because “we won’t qualify for anything.” While that statement will be true for many of you reading this (that you will not receive Federal Student Aid), there are still two key reasons families should fill out the FAFSA.

First, many private schools have large endowments with money earmarked for need-based student aid. With many of the most prestigious academic institutions costing between \$50,000 and \$70,000 a year, there will be thousands of families that will qualify for aid at these schools who would not qualify for aid at their state university.

Second, what families need to understand about the FAFSA is that the “Estimated Family Contribution,” or EFC, changes once you have more than one student in college. For a simple example, let’s say your oldest child attends a school and received no financial aid from the school. But when your second child applies to that school, you are now paying double and your EFC goes down. When your EFC goes down, your family may qualify for money that was unavailable when your first student started college.

## **8. Scheduling your official visits**

An official visit is any time spent at an NCAA Division I and Division II institution in which you are having expenses paid for you. You are allowed to take up to five official visits. They cannot last longer than 48 hours and you are not allowed to officially visit a school more than once. When scheduling an official visit, you need to do the following:

1. Register with the NCAA and get an NCAA Identification Number.
2. Provide the coach or compliance officer at the institution your NCAA ID number and a copy of your transcript (unofficial transcript is fine, and most common).

The NCAA no longer requires you to provide SAT, ACT or PSAT scores, but some institutions do require it.

*Key Point: You need to get this information to the college coach a few weeks before they arrange your travel for the visit.*

Be upfront when asking for an official visit. In many cases, if you aren't offered an official visit, it is likely that you aren't a first choice recruit for that particular coach and school. However, this does not mean that the program would not want you to join their program, so if you're intent on joining a particular program, make sure to make that known to the coach.

Most of the time, you should try to schedule some official visits early in the fall so the visits don't conflict with your championship races at the end of the cross country season. It is also recommended that you save one or two visits for later in the process if things don't work out at the schools you have initially targeted or if you have a huge spike in performance that opens up new opportunities.

Remember that you only get five official visits, so use them wisely. The official visit is your best opportunity to get to know the team, the coach, and what it might be like to be a student at that school. It is important for you to remember that this is only a small window into the school and that if done well, everything should seem new and exciting. This is also your best opportunity to interact with the athletes on the team. They will be the most open and honest people to give you real and meaningful feedback about the school, the coach, and the team. Don't be shy. They will appreciate it if you are straightforward.

## **9. National Letter of Intent (NLI)**

The NLI or National Letter of Intent is a document that you sign that is associated with receiving scholarship money at a particular school. When you sign an NLI, it means that you are being issued scholarship money to attend a particular institution. That is a binding document as it relates to scholarship dollars. Meaning: if you sign an NLI at *School A* and then decided that you don't wish to enroll there, and instead you enroll in *School B*, then you will not be able to receive scholarship money at *School B* unless you get released by *School A*. It is a fairly simple process but an important one.

The signing period for cross country and track, for both NCAA Division I and II, begins November 14th, 2018. The NLI signing period concludes August 1st, 2019, when some institutions resume classes.

Remember that NCAA Division III schools and Ivy League schools do not offer athletic scholarships and thus do not participate in the NLI process. They have different methods of having you commit that are based on an academic commitment.

You can find more information on the National Letter of Intent [here](#).

### **10. Don't overthink the process. Make a decision.**

If you're a high school runner and want to compete in college, then you eventually have to choose one college and attend that school. Simple, but often the journey to get to this point is difficult. If you're a parent, you may need to help your daughter or son choose a school. There will be several schools with elements that are important to you, and students can combine the best aspects of a handful of schools to create their ideal school. This sounds obvious, but so many students and so many families hit a roadblock in the recruiting process because they can't wrap their mind around choosing one school. The remedy is to not overthink the process and to make a decision.

We hope this guide has been helpful. What questions do you have? Send them to [info@DistanceRunningRecruiting.com](mailto:info@DistanceRunningRecruiting.com)

The bottom line is that families should not be intimidated, confused, or lost in the recruiting process. Ideally, a student will find a school and team and that is a great fit. To get to that destination, most families need a bit of help, and that's where the **Essential Recruiting Resource** comes in. Families who invest in the resource and then invest the time to listen to the audio will be empowered with information and be able to communicate clearly and effectively with college coaches.

The **Essential Recruiting Resource** – nine hours of audio that will empower you to navigate the recruiting process successfully, comes with a seven-day money-back guarantee. You can learn more about the resource at [DistanceRunningRecruiting.com](http://DistanceRunningRecruiting.com).