The FAFSA

Free Application for Federal Student Aid

This section of the toolkit is designed to provide College Positive Volunteers (CPVs) with a basic understanding of the FAFSA and the application process.

All federal financial aid is tied to the correct and timely completion of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, the FAFSA. Information from the FAFSA is used to determine whether students are eligible for grants, work study programs, and low interest loans.

Federal aid is available for students planning to attend 4–year colleges, 2–year colleges, and other career–focused schools. It's critical that students not assume they will be ineligible for aid based on where they want to go to college or their financial resources; there is no harm in applying.

Several good sources of information about the FAFSA and federal financial aid are:

- High school guidance counselors
- College financial aid offices
- The Federal Student Aid website, *www.federalstudentaid.ed.gov*
- The free federal aid publication, *Funding Your Education: The Guide to Federal Aid.* An electronic copy of the publication is available at *http://studentaid.ed.gov/sites/default/files/2012-13-funding-your-education.pdf.*[18]
- Florida College Goal Sunday, a free on–site program that helps students and families complete financial aid forms; for more information and to find a location, visit *www.navigatingyourfinancialfuture.org/CGS!FLORIDA/Home. aspx.*

The Federal Student Aid Website

The website (*www.fafsa.ed.gov*) is an excellent resource for information about federal student aid. Via the website, students can:

- Find information on federal student aid.
- Use "MyFSA" (a free, personalized student portfolio) to create a folder to record interests, careers, and the college search process, to help them decide on a career and locate schools offering majors in that field. Students can track their progress in the college planning and application process by applying to schools online, accessing other sources of non-federal aid, and storing their personal information to populate fields for FAFSA on the Web.
- Apply online using FAFSA on the Web, the online version of the FAFSA.
- Obtain a Federal Student Aid PIN to sign their FAFSA on the Web.
- Use FAFSA4caster (found on the home page of *www.fafsa.ed.gov*) to get an early estimate of their eligibility for federal student aid and to get an early start in the financial aid process. When they're ready to apply for aid, much of the information they enter in FAFSA4caster will populate FAFSA on the Web.
- Look up the status of their federal student loan.

18. U.S. Department of Education, Federal Student Aid. (2011). Funding Education Beyond High School: The Guide to Federal Student Aid 2012 – 2013.

Completing FAFSA on the Web

If possible, students and their families should complete the FAFSA online at *www.fafsa.ed.gov*. If the student does not have parent/guardian/family member that can help them, then encourage and help students find resources within their school in order to have someone help them complete the FAFSA. Students who do not have access to tax information may apply for an exemption. Students should contact a financial aid representative from the school they wish to attend. Advantages to completing the FAFSA online, according to the government publication, *Funding Education Beyond High School: The Guide to Federal Student Aid,* 2012 - 2013, include:

- A downloadable and printable FAFSA on the Web Worksheet.
- The online application, FAFSA on the Web, looks at the answers provided to previous questions and uses skip-logic to only display questions that apply to each person's individual situation. This makes the application process shorter.
- FAFSA on the Web identifies potential errors right away and prompts on-the-spot corrections.
- There are online instructions for each question and live help is available for additional questions.
- Based on the information provided, screens appear to determine eligibility for various grants.
- Application information can be sent to up to ten schools; the paper form is limited to four.
- Once the application is submitted, the information is immediately sent to the U.S. Department of Education and will be sent a confirmation notice.
- The online application will be processed quickly, if students or their parents provide electronic signatures using the PIN. The PIN is an electronic access code that serves as a personal identifier. Students and their parents can apply for a PIN at *www.pin.ed.gov.*

Completing the Paper-Based FAFSA

Students and their families do not have to complete the FAFSA online. Paper-based copies of the form can be obtained by calling the Federal Student Aid Information Center at 1-800-4-FED-AID (1-800-433-3243) or by downloading a PDF version of the form from *www.studentaid.ed.gov.* The paper-based version of the form includes the same information as the online version. Students can open the PDF file, complete it on their computers, and print it out; or they can print out the form and complete it by hand. Completed forms should be mailed to the address provided on the form.

When to Complete the FAFSA

It depends. Students planning to attend college immediately after they graduate from high school should complete the FAFSA during their senior years once tax forms have been received (IRS 1040). Because the FAFSA can also be used as a basis for aid for the planned college of attendance and for state aid, students have to be aware of all possible submission deadlines.

Applications can be submitted as early as January 1, and no later than June 30. Colleges must have the students' complete and correct FAFSA information by the last day of their enrollment of the school year. Other dates may apply based on how students submitted their FAFSAs, electronically or by mail.

The FAFSA Deadlines for Some Florida Colleges and Universities: Students must check with college financial aid offices or their websites to find out when to submit their FAFSAs.

Below are a few examples from Florida colleges and universities:[19]

- Florida Southern College: early decision deadline is December 1st and regular decision is March 1st.

- Florida Gulf Coast University: spring deadline is November 15th, summer deadline is February 15th and fall deadline is May 1st.

- Ringling College of Art & Design: deadline for computer animation major is January 15th and all other major deadlines are on a rolling basis.
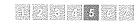
The range of dates included above indicates that students must be diligent about contacting the financial aid offices of the colleges they plan to attend so they will not miss any important submission deadlines. Help students obtain the details regarding dates from the schools they are interested in or help gather the contact information and have the student call to gather the information.

What is needed to complete the FAFSA?[20]

For students and/or their parents/guardians to complete the FAFSA, they will need to have several records/documents on hand to fill out application questions. This information is used to determine families or individuals financial contributions to students' postsecondary education, referred to as the Expected Family Contribution (EFC). The EFC is a calculation based on income and assets and a pre–determined formula.

To complete the FAFSA, students and parents should have the following on hand:

- Social Security card
- Driver's license (if any)
- Permanent Resident Receipt Card (if applicable)
- Alien Registration Card (if applicable)
- W–2 forms and other records of money earned
- Income tax return (see the instructions on the FAFSA if the tax return has not been completed)
- IRS 1040, 1040A, or 1040 EZ
- Your Parent's Federal Income Tax Return (if you are a dependent student)
- Your untaxed income records
- Records of child support paid
- Records of taxable earnings from Federal Work–Study or other need–based work programs
- Records of the student's grant, scholarship and fellowship aid, including AmeriCorps awards, that were included in the student's (or the parents') adjusted gross income
- Current stock, bond, and other investment records
- Current business and farm records
- Current bank statements

WAYS TO PAY FOR COLLEGE

FAFSA deadlines & materials required to complete the FAFSA

19. Dates obtained from college websites.
20. U.S. Department of Education, Federal Student Aid. *www.fafsa.ed.gov/help.htm*

Help for Completing the FAFSA

Students and their family members may need to seek help completing the FAFSA. It's critical that the form be completely correctly so students will be able to get all available aid.

Because of the critical nature of the document and the personal data that must be provided, it is not likely that students and their parents/guardians will ask for your help to complete the FAFSA (and for these reasons, you should not help to complete a student's FAFSA). However, they will need to know where to go to get professional help. Remember to remind them to be cautious of fraudulent websites. The individuals and resources to help them successfully complete the form are some of the same ones they can go to for information about financial aid in general:

- College financial aid offices

- Information available on the Federal Student Aid website: *www.studentaid.ed.gov*

- The Federal Student Aid Information Center at 1-800-4-FED-AID (1-800-433-3243)

- Florida College Goal Sunday, a free on-site program that helps students and families complete financial aid forms: *www.navigatingyourfinancialfuture.org/CGS!FLORIDA/Home.aspx*