



FAFSA



Reference Guide

A Guide to Understanding the Free Application for Federal Student Aid



American Education Services



Need money for college? There's a free app for that.

The crucial first step in the financial aid process is filing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). By doing so, you open the door to numerous student financial aid possibilities. Your FAFSA determines what aid you may qualify for including grants, some scholarships and federal student loans.

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RESOURCES

APPLYING

1. What is the FAFSA?

The **Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)** is the first step in the financial aid application process. You use it to apply for federal student financial aid, such as grants, loans, and work–study funds.

You can electronically access the FAFSA at **EducationPlanner.org**, our **award–winning college planning website**, or at **fafsa.ed.gov**. You can also submit a paper FAFSA.

2. Why complete a FAFSA?

The only way to find out if you qualify for “**free money**” awards, like federal and state **grants** and **scholarships**, and federal student loans is to complete and submit a FAFSA.

The U.S. Department of Education uses the information provided on your FAFSA to determine your eligibility for aid from the federal student financial assistance programs. Many states and schools also use the FAFSA data to award student aid.

There is no charge to complete and submit a FAFSA, whether you file electronically or choose to use a paper FAFSA form.

3. Where can I obtain the FAFSA?

You can electronically access the FAFSA at **EducationPlanner.org** or **fafsa.ed.gov**. You may request a paper FAFSA by calling the U.S. Department of Education at **800.433.3243**.

4. What are the deadlines for applying?

You must complete a new FAFSA form each year. Apply as early as possible after January 1 of the calendar year in which you plan to attend college. Deadlines for aid from your state, from your school, and from private sources may be much earlier than deadlines for federal aid. To ensure that the financial aid package that you receive from the school(s) you select contains aid from as many sources as possible, **apply as soon as you can after January 1.**

5. What do you need to complete your FAFSA?

- Your **Social Security Number**
- Your **driver's license number**, if you have one
- Your **W-2 forms** and your federal **income tax return**
- Your **current bank statements** and records of stocks, bonds, and other investments
- Your records of **other untaxed income** received, such as Social Security, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), or veteran's benefits
- Your **business or farm records**, if applicable
- Your **alien registration number**, if you are not a U.S. citizen
- If you are a **dependent student**, you will also need:
 - The **Social Security Number(s) of your parent(s)**
 - The **income and financial records** (as listed above) of your parent(s)

Use prior year's income tax information to complete the FAFSA. If you have not completed your taxes, use estimated figures so you don't miss a filing deadline. You can correct with actual data later.

6. Who can help me fill out the FAFSA?

Your high school counselor can provide assistance. **You can also get toll-free help by calling the Federal Student Aid Information Center (FSAIC) at the following telephone number(s):**

800.4.FED-AID (800.433.3243) (TTY 800.730.8913)

7. Why fill out the FAFSA online?

- FAFSA on the Web has built-in help to guide you through the application process.
- The schools you list on your FAFSA online application will receive your processed information faster.

Visit EducationPlanner.org or fafsa.ed.gov.

8. What is a PIN and why do I need one?

The PIN is your **Personal Identification Number** and serves as your **electronic signature** which allows access to your personal information in various U.S. Department of Education systems, such as the National Student Loan Data System (NSLDS). **This number does not change.** Each year that you apply for financial aid, you can use your PIN to access and electronically sign your FAFSA. To obtain a PIN, you can apply at the U.S. Department of Education's PIN site, pin.ed.gov. **If you are a dependent student, both you and one parent must obtain a PIN.**

9. What happens after I file the FAFSA?

About two days after you apply online, or two weeks after you submit a paper FAFSA, the federal government will send you a **Student Aid Report (SAR)**, or provide you with access to your electronic SAR. The SAR will inform you and the schools to which you are applying of your **Expected Family Contribution (EFC)**. The EFC formula established by law is used to determine the amount of federal grants, loans, or work-study awards for which you are eligible. **Review the SAR carefully to make sure that all of the information is correct.** If you must make changes, submit corrections promptly. If no corrections are needed, you do not have to return the form.

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

10. What types of student aid are available to students who file the FAFSA?

Federal Pell Grants – Money awarded to an undergraduate student that does not have to be paid back. Awarded based on “financial need” and a formula established by federal laws. You may be subject to a lifetime limit on your Pell Grant eligibility.

Federal Academic Competitiveness Grants – Money awarded to a Pell recipient in the first and/or second year of undergraduate study, which does not have to be paid back. As defined by federal law, you must meet established academic criteria.

Federal TEACH Grants – Money awarded to undergraduate or graduate students who are completing coursework necessary to become an elementary or secondary school teacher in accordance with federal regulatory requirements. You are not required to be a Pell recipient.

Note: If the teaching service agreement requirements are not met, all TEACH Grants received by the student convert to an unsubsidized Direct Stafford loan which must be repaid along with the interest from the date on which the money from each TEACH Grant was disbursed.

Federal SMART Grant – Money awarded to a Pell recipient in the third or fourth year of undergraduate study, which does not have to be paid back. As defined by federal law, you must be a major in specific courses.

State Grants – Money awarded by some states that does not have to be paid back. Most state grants are awarded to students based on financial need; however, some programs are merit-based.

Other Grants/Scholarships – Money awarded that does not have to be paid back.

There are many types of grants and scholarships available for all. Access the Scholarship Search feature at [EducationPlanner.org](https://www.educationplanner.org).

Work-Study Program – Undergraduate and graduate students earn money through employment on-or off-campus to help pay for their education expenses.

Federal Student Loans – Money that has to be repaid with interest.

Stafford loans, which are available to undergraduate and graduate students, go into repayment after a 6-month grace period. The grace period begins after you graduate or cease to be enrolled at least half-time. Repayment of principal and interest begins the day after the grace period ends.

If you qualify for a subsidized Stafford loan based on financial need (see below), the federal government pays the interest on your loan while you are in school, during the grace period, and during any period of authorized deferment. You are responsible for paying the interest during repayment and during periods of forbearance.

If you borrow an unsubsidized Stafford loan, you are responsible for paying the interest that accrues on the loan from the date of disbursement.

Grad PLUS loans, which are available to graduate and professional students, go into repayment within 60 days after the loans are fully disbursed. However, repayment may be deferred while the borrower is enrolled in school at least half-time and for a 6-month post enrollment period after you cease to be enrolled at least half-time. If you do not pay the interest during in-school and 6-month post enrollment deferment periods, the unpaid interest is capitalized and increases the principal balance of your loan. Capitalized interest subsequently accrues interest, which adds an additional expense to the loan.

Parent PLUS loans, which are available to the parents of dependent undergraduate students, go into repayment within 60 days after the loans are fully disbursed. However, repayment may be deferred while the dependent student or the parent borrower is enrolled in school at least half-time and during a 6-month post enrollment deferment period. If the parent borrower does not pay the interest during the in-school and 6-month post enrollment deferment periods, the unpaid interest is capitalized and increases the principal balance of your loan. Capitalized interest subsequently accrues interest, which adds an additional expense to the loan.

11. Can I receive federal student aid if I am enrolled less than full-time?

Yes, students enrolled half-time are eligible for most types of federal student aid. Some state-sponsored programs require full-time enrollment.

12. Who is eligible to receive federal student aid?

Aid is available to ALL students if they are eligible, provided that they submit the FAFSA and meet the following requirements:*

- Be a U.S. citizen or eligible non-citizen with a valid Social Security Number. For more information, visit **fafsa.ed.gov**.
- Be registered with Selective Service, if required (see sss.gov for more info).
- Be enrolled in an eligible degree or certificate program at a participating school.
- If currently enrolled, must meet satisfactory academic progress standards as determined by the school.

ALSO:

- **Must not owe a refund on a federal grant or be in default on a federal education loan.**
- **Must have financial need (except for unsubsidized Stafford loans and PLUS loans).**
- **Eligibility must not be suspended due to a drug conviction while enrolled in school and receiving federal student aid.**

* Other requirements may apply.

FINANCIAL NEED

13. What is financial need?

Financial need is the projected amount of financial aid that you are potentially eligible to receive.

COA – EFC = YOUR FINANCIAL NEED

Cost of Attendance (COA) at a college or career school **includes tuition, fees, room, board, books, supplies and personal expenses associated with attendance (transportation, etc.)**. Other allowances may be made for students with disabilities, dependent care, study abroad programs, or other special circumstances.

EXPECTED FAMILY CONTRIBUTION (EFC)

The calculated amount the family can reasonably be expected to contribute toward the cost of attendance as determined by federal guidelines. **This is not the amount the student or parent must ultimately pay the institution for actual charges.**

For more information, see your high school counselor or financial aid officer of the school that you plan to attend.

FAMILY FACTS

14. How do I know if I am an independent student?

If you answer “**YES**” to any of the following questions on the FAFSA, you will be considered “**independent**” for financial assistance purposes for the academic year.

- Will you be **at least 24 years old** by December 31 of the award year?
- Are you **married**?
- Are you a graduate student **working on a Master’s or Doctoral degree** such as an MA, MBA, MD, JD, PhD, EdD or graduate certificate, etc. at the beginning of the award year for which the FAFSA is being completed?
- Are you **currently serving on active duty** in the U.S. Armed Forces for purposes other than training, or are you **a veteran of the U.S. Armed Forces**?
- Do you **have at least one child** who receives more than half of their support from you?
- Do you **have dependents** (other than your children or spouse) who live with you and who receive more than half of their support from you, now and through June 30 of the award year?
- At any time after you were age 13 or older, were your **parents deceased**, were you in **foster care** or were you **a dependent/ward of the court**?
- Are you an **emancipated minor** or are you **in legal guardianship** as determined by a court in your state of legal residence?
- Did your high school or school district homeless liaison, or the director of an emergency shelter program funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development determine that you were **an unaccompanied youth who was homeless**?
- Did the director of runaway or homeless youth basic center or transitional living program determine that you were an unaccompanied youth who was homeless or were **self-supporting and at risk of being homeless**?

If a student does not meet any of the above criteria, the student is considered a dependent of his/her parents.

15. My biological parents divorced and I live with my mother who has remarried. Must I include my stepfather's income and assets?

If you are a dependent student and your mother remarried, your stepfather's information must be provided on the FAFSA in order for you to be considered for federal financial aid.

16. How is my household size determined?

If you are a dependent student, household size includes you, the student, and your parent(s), even if you are not living with your parents. Your sisters and brothers are also included if they will receive more than half of their support from your parent(s) from July 1 through June 30 of the application year. Any other person who resides in your household and receives more than half of their support from your parent(s) may also be counted, as long as the support is expected to continue through June 30. An unborn child who will be born between July 1 and June 30 of the application year and who will receive more than half of his or her support from the parent(s) from birth through June 30 may also be counted in the household size. Foster children, however, are not included in household size.

If you are an independent student, household size includes you, your spouse, and your children, regardless of where they live, if you are providing more than half of the support for your children from July 1 through June 30 of the application year. Any other person who resides in your household and receives more than half of their support from you may also be counted in household size, as long as the support is expected to continue through June 30. An unborn child who will be born between July 1 and June 30 of the application year and who will receive more than half of his or her support from the parent(s) from birth through June 30 may also be counted in the household size. Foster children, however, are not included in household size.

17. If my parents are divorced, whose information do I need?

If you are a dependent student, use the information of **the parent with whom you lived longer during the 12 months prior to the date that you complete the FAFSA**. It does not make a difference which parent claims you as a dependent for tax purposes. If you did not live with either parent or lived the same amount of time with each parent, **the parental information must be provided by the parent from whom you received the most financial support** or the parent from whom you received the most support during the last calendar year for which support was given.

18. My parents separated four months ago. I live with my mother. My parents filed a joint tax return and claimed me as an exemption. Do I report both of their incomes, or just my mother's?

If you are a **dependent student**, report only your mother's income and asset information because you lived with her the most **during the past 12 months**. Use a W-2 Form or other record(s) to determine her share of the income reported and taxes paid on the tax return.

RESOURCES

Here are some great, **free resources** available for you to use as you research ways to pay for school:

- **College financial aid administrators** are available at your school(s) of choice to answer your questions and provide information on school-specific awards and other financial aid.
- aesSuccess.org
- EducationPlanner.org
- fafsa.ed.gov
- pin.ed.gov
- sss.gov
- **Federal Student Aid Information Center (FSAIC):** 800.4.FED-AID (800.433.3243)
TTY 800.730.8913
- YouCanDealWithIt.com

AES helps students and families from every walk of life afford higher education, because we believe in the potential of everyone who wants to learn.

AES offers comprehensive student aid services, which means that we're there for you all the way. Starting from the time you apply for a loan, we deliver the funds, stay with you through the academic years and guide you through successful repayment.

Because in making an education affordable, we do more than help you go to college. We guarantee the next generation of leaders, thinkers and doers.

aesSuccess.org



Be Next.

1200 North Seventh Street, Harrisburg, PA 17102-1444

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