



SITE COORDINATOR MANUAL



WHAT IS THE OHIO FAFSA COMPLETION INITIATIVE?

The Ohio FAFSA Completion Initiative is a school's collection of events and activities that are coordinated under one goal: ensuring that students have appropriate financial resources to attend college. This handbook contains suggestions for possible programming. You do not need to do everything you see here! Feel free to add your own ideas. Successful campaigns focus on both FAFSA completion and scholarships, as well as providing students and families with information about educational loans and financial literacy.

For many students and families, learning about and accessing financial resources for college occurs over a long period of time: the grant and scholarship season lasts several months, and financial aid may play a large role in where a student chooses to attend college. Because your campaign serves as an umbrella under which all of your financial aid activities will occur, you may host Ohio FAFSA Completion events beginning in September and last until May or June.

Visit <https://fafsaohio.org/fafsa.html> for additional resources.



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**Ohio FAFSA
Completion Initiative!**

WHO IS THE OHIO FAFSA COMPLETION INITIATIVE FOR?

Everyone! All of our senior year events are designed to be inclusive, not exclusive. The goal of the Ohio FAFSA Completion Initiative is to help students and families access all of the financial aid resources for which they are eligible. Focus on all forms of financial assistance for college to help your students and families make the best decisions for their circumstances. Hosting events and activities for both students and families will increase your success.

Set a goal to host at least one activity or event that helps students and families:

1. Learn about financial aid;
2. Complete a FAFSA;
3. Submit scholarship applications
4. Compare financial aid awards;
5. Understand education loans, including how to decide when and what types of loans are worth the investment; and
6. Look ahead to developing a budget and managing money in college.



OHIO FAFSA COMPLETION COORDINATOR CHECKLIST

CAMPAIGN OVERVIEW

Get Ready

- Review the Coordinator Handbook.
- Recruit your FAFSA Completion team. Include a variety of people who will help plan and host your event - administrators, teachers, parents, and students are all good choices.
- Meet with your FAFSA Completion team to choose what types of events workshops for students, family nights, school-wide activities, etc. you want to host.

Include at least one event that assists with each of the following to increase your students' awareness of all the different ways to pay for college: overview of financial aid, FAFSA completion, Scholarship application completion, understanding educational loans, and budgeting & financial literacy.

Set your objectives and goals for each event. What do you want participants to learn or do? How many people do you hope will participate?

- Decide what days, weeks, or months you will host activities. Use the [Planning Calendar for 12th Grade College Events](#) to map out your plan for all activities intended to help seniors apply, pay for, and go to college. This will help ensure you -and your students- aren't overwhelmed with tasks or events. See the Ohio FAFSA Completion Coordinator Handbook for suggested timelines/monthly themes.
- Post or hand out a schedule of the year's events so students and families know what's coming.
- Add the event to your school/organization calendar.
- Reserve space. Do you need a computer lab, classroom or cafeteria? If you will be using a computer lab, make sure they'll be functional during your event. Check websites students will use to be sure they aren't blocked by firewalls. For best results, check that computers have the most up-to-date version of Chrome, Internet, or Safari.

New in 2018-19! Students can submit FAFSA using mobile devices, including smart phones. However, make sure computers are available for those who do not have mobile devices.

- Review your event objectives. How will you meet them?
- Plan for additional needs for after-hours or family events.
 - Will offering food or childcare increase the number of families who can participate? Can these services be donated? Make appropriate arrangements for your community's needs.
- Use guest speakers, especially for topics you are less comfortable leading.
- Recruit volunteers. They can help welcome students & families to an event, answer questions, assist with filling out forms, set up/ clean up, and a whole lot more. Consider using younger students as volunteers when appropriate.
- Ask faculty and staff how they would like to get involved.

Spread the word

- Remind students and families about your event. Use your school's most effective means of communicating important information. Include suggestions of ways parents/guardians can help their senior prepare for the event.
- Remind teachers and staff about your event and encourage them to reinforce the importance of participating with their 12th grade students.
- Hang posters around your building to advertise the event.
- Send a press release to your local media if your event is open to the public or will include participation of the majority of your 12th graders. Invite them to send a reporter to cover the event.

Prepare you space

- Hosting an event that requires computers? Check that your district hasn't blocked relevant websites. Open the website on all computers where you want students and families to start.
- Designate a clear place where students will sign out so you can track who has participated and what they have accomplished.

Make it easier: print a complete list of your senior class to use as a sign-sheet during your event. Include space to ask if they have met the objective.

- Greet volunteers, give them a nametag, and assign them a job to do. Be sure to give volunteers a "3 To Get Ready!!!" campaign button.

Do It!

- Help students and families complete the task. Celebrate their successes when they do.
- Remind students to sign out on your sheet, including verifying they completed the task.

If families participated in your event, make note of the number in attendance.

- Post photos to social media. Use #3ToGetReady. If your objectives included completing applications for scholarships or financial aid, add #IApplied as well.

Evaluate

- Debrief with your planning team and volunteers. What went well? What will you change?
- Decide if you need to offer any additional support related to this theme, topic, or objective.

Look ahead

- Begin planning your next activity or event designed to help students pay for college.

Make a Schedule

Decide how many activities, workshops, or events you want to host during the year. Try to host at least one event that helps students accomplish the critical tasks of applying for various types of financial aid. Choose what makes sense for your school. That could mean one event per type of aid, or it could mean providing time and space for students to accomplish multiple applications.

For each activity or event:

Select the date(s) – be thoughtful about timing; spread activities out over the months-long campaign to help students organize their college planning

Identify your primary audience: students, families, or both.

Determine who is responsible for planning and hosting the event

Compare your event schedule to other major school events or activities, especially those for seniors. You may want to use the [Planning Calendar for 12th Grade College Events](#) to help map out the necessary tasks to help students apply, pay, and go to college. Make adjustments as necessary.

Based on the dates and deadlines set by Federal and State agencies, we suggest the following general timeline for focusing on the 6 key topics:

SEPTEMBER	OCTOBER	NOVEMBER*	DECEMBER	JANUARY
Financial Aid Overview	FAFSA Completion	Scholarship Applications	Scholarship Applications	FAFSA Completion
FEBRUARY	MARCH	APRIL	MAY	
Scholarship Applications	Scholarship Applications	Understanding Financial Aid & Student Loans	Budgeting 101	

Special Consideration Think about how you might integrate you're the Ohio FAFSA Completion and College Application Month activities. OCAM is October 1st-November 15th. For students who have already completed their college applications or for students who quickly complete their applications, providing resources to get started on paying for college is a great next step.

Key Questions to Consider

Your Ohio FAFSA Completion activities may range from a 30 minute classroom presentation about education loans to a day of FAFSA completion to a full Scholarship Week celebration. The amount of time you spend planning will vary depending on the type of event you host, but answering these [key questions for each event](#) will help keep you on track:

What is your objective for this activity?

- What do you want students/families to learn?
- What do you want them to accomplish?
- How will you help students/families meet the objective?
- How will you know a student has met the objective?

How many students/families do you want to participate?

- How will you encourage participation?
- Do you need to offer any special accommodations like childcare or food to increase family engagement?

Where will you host your event?

- What kind of space do you need? Will students need to use computers?

Will you need volunteers?

- How will you recruit them? Do you need students, families, teachers/school staff, or community members?
- What kind of training will they need?

How will you celebrate your students' accomplishments?

How will you collect the required information for each event?

FINANCIAL AID OVERVIEW

Paying for college can be intimidating for all students and families, but it's especially so for low-income and/or first-generation families who may not believe they have the resources or information necessary to make it possible. Sharing information is one key way to help alleviate those fears:

Host a financial aid night.

- Include information about all the different types of financial aid students might be eligible for
- Provide a calendar of your Ohio FAFSA Completion events so they know when, where, and how assistance will be available

Be inclusive. When possible, include information about paying for college as an undocumented student in all of your presentations. You never know if you might have a student or family who needs the information but is afraid to ask.

FREE APPLICATION FOR FEDERAL STUDENT AID

Students must complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) to be eligible for federal financial aid programs like the Pell grant and Stafford Loans.

Completing the FAFSA can be daunting for some families. You can help:

Track your school's FAFSA Completion Rates:

- Use [weekly updates from the US Department of Education](#) to keep an eye on overall numbers.
- Track building-specific FAFSA completion details. For more information, visit <https://www.ohio-k12.help/2017/11/15/free-application-for-federal-student-aid-fafsa-completion-initiative/>

Publicly display your progress:

- Distribute "1 and done!" stickers to celebrate students who complete required financial aid forms

Host a FAFSA Completion event:

- Invite both students and their families to participate.
- Provide dedicated time and computers for families to complete the FAFSA/ORSAA in your building. Ensure you have volunteers who can assist those who need it.

SCHOLARSHIPS

There are a *lot* of scholarships available for students. Finding scholarships and submitting applications can be daunting, so it's critical to provide time and support for students to do this work.

Host a Scholarship Week. Provide dedicated time and computers. Ensure you have volunteers who may need help.

Remind students of institutional scholarships. Some colleges and universities automatically consider students for all available scholarships when they submit an application for admission. Others have additional application forms or deadlines.

Highlight scholarship opportunities throughout the year.

- Share scholarships on your school's website and social media channels.
- Post a calendar of scholarship opportunities and deadlines in a visible place.
- Announce one scholarship each day during school announcements.

Celebrate students' accomplishments. Make a bulletin board or other display to show when students have completed their applications.

FINANCIAL AID AWARDS & LOANS

Financial aid award letters are often confusing to students and families. It may not be easy to make direct comparisons between schools or to understand the specifics.

In addition, higher education loans and indebtedness dominate the news cycle around college application time. Taking out loans for college can be scary for students and families, yet most students find they need to do so to be able to afford to go. Many educators aren't experts in financial advising, and many more don't want the responsibility of offering advice. But you can help students understand what a loan is, what repayment will mean for them, and encourage families to have difficult conversations about what works for them.

Help students and families understand and compare financial aid award letters.

Give a presentation about responsible student loan borrowing.

Invite a college financial aid administrator to speak to your students and/or families about borrowing money for college. Ask them to talk frankly about the differences between Federal student loans (both subsidized and unsubsidized), Parent PLUS loans, and private student loans.

Teach students to use a [loan repayment calculator](#) and provide time for them to use it for every financial aid package they receive from colleges.

Encourage them to pay particular attention to the estimated salary required to afford repayment. The [College Scorecard](#) has the average salary and default rates for colleges.

Tip: Remind them to multiply the loan amount by the number of years they plan to be in college!

FINANCIAL LITERACY & BUDGETING

Paying for college doesn't end with financial aid applications and award comparisons. In fact, many students find that they struggle with the part of paying for college that comes once they're on campus – not just paying their tuition bill, but also buying books, getting around town, and participating in fun activities. Helping students think about the future by teaching them about building a realistic college budget can alleviate potential problems:

Start early! Incorporate financial education in the classroom using free financial literacy curriculum. **Make it part of class.** Encourage math teachers to build a budgeting exercise into their lesson plans.

Use volunteers from local banks, credit unions or organizations like Financial Beginnings to teach students how to make good financial decisions that will help them successfully transition from high school to college.

Post information about financial awareness in visible places. Help make conversations about money a regular thing in your building.