

FLORIDA FAFSA *CHALLENGE*

FAFSA COMPLETION TOOLKIT 2017 – 2018



research • communication • advocacy • support

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INTRODUCTION

- ☐ Welcome!
- ☐ About Florida CAN
- ☐ About the Florida FAFSA Challenge

WELCOME

On behalf of the Florida College Access Network, thank you for participating in the 2016 - 17 Florida FAFSA Challenge! This initiative aims to increase the proportion of Florida high school seniors who complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

Students must complete this application to qualify for financial aid, like Pell Grants, to help pay for college. The Florida FAFSA Challenge encourages schools, districts, and communities to set bold and attainable FAFSA completion goals and to implement strategies that help more students afford college.

Many schools, districts, local college access networks, and nonprofits in the state have already been working hard to boost FAFSA completion rates. This initiative recognizes their achievements and supports their efforts with access to resources and proven strategies. This guide introduces the campaign and provides a one-stop shop for FAFSA resources.

We also ask that you share your successful strategies with us. We may even feature your achievements throughout the campaign! Contact our Statewide Programs Coordinator, Amy Bolick, at abolick@floridacollegeaccess.org or at (813) 974-6429 with all questions and suggestions.

The Florida FAFSA Challenge is made possible thanks to the support of the Helios Education Foundation and the Swift Family Foundation.

Sincerely,
The FCAN Team

ABOUT FLORIDA CAN

Florida College Access Network (Florida CAN) is a statewide network of leaders, organizations, educators, and individuals who are collectively committed to dramatically increasing postsecondary opportunities for all Florida students—especially students traditionally underrepresented in higher education, such as low income students and those who are the first in their families to go to college.

Our Mission: To create and strengthen a statewide network that catalyzes and supports communities to improve college and career readiness, access, and completion for all students.

Our Vision: At least 60% of working-age Floridians will hold a high-quality post-secondary degree or credential by the year 2025.

Our Guiding Values:

- **College is postsecondary education.** Florida College Access Network uses the term “college” to refer to the attainment of high-quality postsecondary credentials beyond high school, including technical certificates and academic degrees.
- **College readiness is career readiness.** All Florida students deserve to receive a high-quality PreK-12 education which prepares them academically for success in college or a career.
- **College is for everyone.** All Florida students deserve the opportunity to pursue a high-quality postsecondary education that prepares them to effectively communicate, engage, and compete in the 21st century knowledge-based global economy.
- **College is a public good.** Postsecondary educational opportunity and attainment are critical to a just and equitable society, strong democracy, robust economy, and healthy communities.
- **Reaching Goal 2025 will require collective action.** Accelerating high-quality degree production in Florida to meet Goal 2025 requires strategic partnerships and active involvement from all sectors.

ABOUT FLORIDA FAFSA CHALLENGE

The FAFSA Makes College Affordable, and Increases Attendance

- Completing the FAFSA is the first step to **accessing grants and loans** to help pay for college
- FAFSA completion is a [strong indicator of future college attendance](#)

Florida is Falling Behind

- According to Florida CAN estimates, high school graduates in Florida leave behind over **\$100 million in Pell grants** each year because they do not complete the form
- In 2014-15, an estimated 59% of all Florida high school seniors would have qualified for Pell grants, but **only 50% of all high school seniors** filed the FAFSA
- Also in 2014-15, **Florida ranked 39th** in the proportion of our seniors who completed the FAFSA

Early Completion Matters

- The earlier students complete the FAFSA, the **more money** they are likely to get
- Research shows students who complete the FAFSA in the first three months after it opens receive **twice as much state and institutional aid** as students who complete the form later
- Although students can complete the FAFSA application throughout the year, many colleges and universities **have deadlines for institutional financial aid**

FAFSA Challenge Outcomes

- During the 2016-17 school year, **153 schools in 17 counties** [registered with Florida CAN](#) to participate in the challenge, up from 50 schools in 14 counties the year before
- As of March 31, 2017, FAFSA completion in Florida **increased by 9.1%**, resulting in an additional **\$37 million in Pell grants** for seniors compared to the prior school year
- A total of **391 schools and 54 districts** increased their FAFSA completion rates by 5% or more
- Counties supported by **Local College Access Networks (LCANs)** saw FAFSA completion rates increase **12.5% higher** than counties not supported by LCANs

Why register?

- [Registering](#) for the FAFSA challenge allows Florida CAN **to track the success** of schools hosting FAFSA Completion activities
- Florida CAN provides **free resources** like **stickers and posters** to schools that register
- Florida CAN uses registration information to help **connect schools with local resources** like donations, volunteers, and community partners

STRATEGIES

In this section you will learn about:

- ☐ Setting FAFSA Goals
- ☐ Hosting a FAFSA Completion Event
- ☐ Promoting FAFSA Completion

SET A GOAL AND TRACK YOUR DATA

Choosing a Goal

- We recommend participants set a goal **5% higher** than their FAFSA completion rate as of March 31st of last year
- Schools are welcome to set **more ambitious goals**, or goals that fit their **unique circumstances**
- To find your school's **FAFSA completion rate for last year** as of March 31st, visit the [Florida FAFSA Finish Line Data Dashboard](#). There you can look up your high school's and/or district's FAFSA completion rate for last spring
- Beginning in October 2017, you can use the dashboard **to track your progress** toward your goal
- When you [register](#), make sure to let us know your goal!

FAFSA Goal Tips

- Make your **goal ambitious but attainable**, keeping in mind your school's unique needs
- Work with **a broad team** at your school to set and support your goal
- If you have a **local college access network (LCAN)** in your community, make sure your school's goal aligns with any community-wide FAFSA goals
- **Make your goal public!** Post your goal in a prominent location in the school and track and report on your progress throughout the challenge

Florida CAN Resources

- The Florida FAFSA Finish Line data dashboard features FAFSA completion rates for **12th graders at over 500 public schools in Florida**, including district- and state-level figures
- Thanks to Florida CAN's advocacy, the dashboard will now include FAFSA completion data **for 19-year-old students!**
- The Florida FAFSA Challenge Leaderboard, which is updated weekly and shows which schools are leading the challenge

Student-Level Data

- The Florida Department of Education Office of Student Financial Assistance (OFSA) is working with school districts to **make student-level FAFSA completion data** available to schools
- Knowing which of your students have completed the FAFSA can help you identify and reach out to students who have not
- For more information on how school districts can have access to this data, contact Lori Auxier, OFSA Director of Outreach, at lauxier@fldoe.org

Host A FAFSA COMPLETION EVENT

Types of Events

- Host a **FAFSA Information Night** where students and families can learn about what they need to complete the FAFSA
- Host a **FAFSA Lab** where students and families have the opportunity to complete the FAFSA with the assistance of on-site volunteers.
- Partner with an **existing event** in your community

Using Incentives and Fostering Competition

- Create an incentive for students who complete the FAFSA. **Door prizes, raffles, and food** (like pizza at a FAFSA night) are great examples.
- Districts can host a **challenge among their high schools** with awards and prizes. Post weekly updates in a public place where school counselors, teachers and administrators can see them.
- Some schools require eligible students to complete the FAFSA in order to buy prom tickets, or offer a discount on tickets to FAFSA completers.

Tip: If your school has students who are not eligible to complete the FAFSA, be sure to include them by encouraging them to apply to a scholarship as an alternate way of participating!

Potential Community Partners

- Local College Access Networks (LCANs)
- Ask your **mayor or city council** for a proclamation to celebrate your goal or to adopt a city-wide FAFSA completion goal.
- Ask local businesses to **donate prizes or food** or **provide volunteers** for a FAFSA event.
- Check with your local education foundation. Many education foundations support or lead college access programs in their districts.
- Staff from **the financial aid office at a local college** are often willing to assist with or even organize events. These professionals can provide valuable expertise on the process.
- Florida Department of Education Office of Federal Student Aid. Contact Pete Hernandez (Pedro.Hernandez@fldoe.org) or Jan Smith (Jan.Smith@fldoe.org)

Florida CAN Resources

- **Stickers and posters** for event promotion
- Facilitating conversations with LCANS
- Connecting schools with local volunteers or donors

PROMOTING FAFSA COMPLETION

Educating Students and Families

- Many students and families are unfamiliar with the FAFSA, or are intimidated by it
- Families often assume they will not qualify for federal aid
- Students may not realize that the FAFSA is a prerequisite to qualify for other types of aid, beyond federal aid. For instance, many scholarships require a completed FAFSA.

Promoting the Event

- Promote FAFSA completion through all channels available: morning announcements, posters and flyers, social media, letters home, newsletters, etc.
- Stress the importance of FAFSA completion, address common misconceptions, and build excitement around your goal
- Use the many available resources for student and family outreach described in the “Additional Resources” section, including flyers, posters, modules and YouTube videos on the FAFSA and financial aid.

Texting Students with Updates

- As part of the Better Make Room initiative, the U.S. Department of Education has partnered with **Up Next** (<https://www.whatsupnext.us/>). This free service sends text reminders to guide students through the application and financial aid process.
- If you are interested in setting up a text-based outreach platform for FAFSA completion for students in your school/district/community, the National College Access Network (NCAN) partners with **Signal Vine**, a technology company which provides this service for NCAN members [at a discounted price](#).
- Another tool, which is free for educators, is [Remind](#), formerly known as Remind101. Many schools already use Remind for a variety of purposes, and FAFSA messaging can be easily added in.

Did You Know?

Several communities have **texting projects** with reminders specific to local and state colleges, including FAFSA reminders. Contact your LCAN or Florida CAN for specific resources in your area

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- ☐ General FAFSA Information
- ☐ Event Planning Tips
- ☐ Training for Counselors/Access Professional
- ☐ Help Working with Special Populations
- ☐ Social Media
- ☐ Data and Research

FAFSA INFORMATION

Webinar: Announcing the 2016 Florida FAFSA Challenge

<http://www.floridacollegeaccess.org/event/florida-can-webinar-announcing-the-2016-florida-fafsa-challenge/>

The Florida College Access Network hosted a webinar in December 2015 to announce the 2016 Florida FAFSA Challenge and highlight strategies to benefit students. The webinar recording and slides are available at the above link.

Webinar: It's FAFSA Season, Let the "Funds" Begin!

<http://www.floridacollegeaccess.org/event/its-fafsa-season-let-the-funds-begin/>

In January 2015, the Florida College Access Network hosted a webinar featuring strategies and resources for boosting FAFSA completion. The webinar recording and slides are available through the above link.

FAFSA Demo Site

<http://fafsademo.test.ed.gov/>

This FAFSA demonstration website allows you to walk through the FAFSA process as a student would. This is a great training tool for staff and volunteers who will help students and families with the FAFSA. You can access the demonstration site using *eddemo* as the User name and *fafsatest* as the Password.

2017-2018 FAFSA on the Web Preview Presentation

<https://www.ifap.ed.gov/eannouncements/attachments/1718FOTWPreviewPresentation.pptx>

This presentation, produced by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Federal Student Aid, provides a step-by-step preview of this year's FAFSA. The slides can also be used or modified to create your own FAFSA presentation.

English-Spanish Glossary

<http://www.tgslc.org/spanish/glossary/index.cfm?id=A>

This extensive glossary can help financial aid professionals and others find the Spanish-language equivalents for common financial aid terms.

The FAFSA Completion Project: An Annotated Bibliography

<http://www.floridacollegeaccess.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/FAFSABibliography.pdf>

Published in 2011 by the U.S. Department of Education, this annotated bibliography links to free resources available online to support school systems with FAFSA completion programs and policies.

EVENT PLANNING AND HANDOUTS

Form Your Future Event Toolkit

<http://www.floridacollegeaccess.org/event/florida-can-webinar-announcing-the-2016-florida-fafsa-challenge/>

The Florida College Access Network hosted a webinar in December 2015 to announce the 2016 Florida FAFSA Challenge and highlight strategies to benefit students. The webinar recording and slides are available at the above link.

Financial Aid Toolkit: Hosting an Event

<http://www.floridacollegeaccess.org/event/its-fafsa-season-let-the-funds-begin/>

In January 2015, the Florida College Access Network hosted a webinar featuring strategies and resources for boosting FAFSA completion. The webinar recording and slides are available through the above link.

FAFSA Event Volunteer Training

<http://fafsademo.test.ed.gov/>

This FAFSA demonstration website allows you to walk through the FAFSA process as a student would. This is a great training tool for staff and volunteers who will help students and families with the FAFSA. You can access the demonstration site using *eddemo* as the User name and *fafsatest* as the Password.

Financial Aid Toolkit

<http://www.financialaidtoolkit.ed.gov/tk/>

The Financial Aid Toolkit provides information and outreach tools for counselors, college access professionals, nonprofit mentors, and others. It includes videos, infographics, how-to guides, event planning assistance, presentation templates, and a variety of other financial assistance resources.

Navigating your Financial Future: Resources

<http://www.navigatingyourfinancialfuture.org/Resources.aspx>

This resource guide, produced by the Florida Department of Education's Office of Student Financial Assistance, includes a variety of tools to help schools and communities promote FAFSA completion.

Khan Academy: Paying for College

<https://www.khanacademy.org/college-admissions/paying-for-college>

This Khan Academy module consists of free video tutorials to help guide students and families through the process of paying for college, including a step-by-step guide to filling out the FAFSA.

Top 10 Mistakes Students Make on FAFSA

<http://www.nerdwallet.com/blog/loans/student-loans/top-10-fafsa-mistakes/>

This short article by NerdScholar highlights some of the most common FAFSA mistakes, and is a useful tool to share with students and families

TRAINING FOR COUNSELORS/ ACCESS PROFESSIONALS

National College Access Network Training Resources

<http://www.collegeaccess.org/ELearning>

The National College Access Network (NCAN) provides e-learning resources to college access professionals, with select modules focusing on federal student aid programs, financial aid and FAFSA completion. The modules are self-paced, available year-round, and reflect evidence-based practices. While some of the modules are free, the two FAFSA-focused modules are \$119 each.

National Training for Counselors and Mentors (NT4CM) Webinar

Archived webinar & slides: <https://financialaidtoolkit.ed.gov/tk/training/trainers/training.jsp>

Additional training materials: <https://financialaidtoolkit.ed.gov/tk/training/trainers/elibrary.jsp>

Offered live August 18th, from 1:30pm - 3:00pm. The National Training for Counselors and Mentors is a collaboration between a number of agencies to provide financial aid training to school counselors and mentors. The webinar is 90 minutes long, and covers Federal Student Aid programs, Scholarship searches and Financial Aid fraud.

2017–18 Counselors and Mentors Handbook on Federal Student Aid

<https://www.edpubs.gov/document/en1341p.pdf?ck=1>

This handbook is another resource for those that will be assisting students and families complete the FAFSA. It includes both information specifically on completing the FAFSA, as well as information on federal student aid more generally.

Mapping Your Future: FAFSA Training for Service Providers

<https://mappingyourfuture.org/services/webinars.cfm>

Mapping Your Future offers a free FAFSA training to financial aid professionals and others helping students complete the FAFSA. To register for one of these webinars, follow the link above. Past webinars are also available on-demand.

Florida Department of Education Office of Student Financial Assistance (OSFA)

<http://www.navigatingyourfinancialfuture.org/>

OSFA provides resources to districts, schools, and community partners on the FAFSA and financial aid, and can also connect you to outside resources that can provide you with the training you need.

Fundamentals of Financial Aid PowerPoint

<http://www.navigatingyourfinancialfuture.org/>

OSFA provides in-person training and resources to districts, schools, and community partners on the FAFSA and financial aid, and can also connect you to outside resources that can provide you with the training you need.

WORKING WITH SPECIAL POPULATIONS

College Board: Advising Undocumented Students

<http://professionals.collegeboard.com/guidance/financial-aid/undocumented-students>

This page provides a brief introduction to the basics of advising undocumented students through the college admissions and financial aid process. While this is primarily intended for school counselors, it may also be helpful to share with any volunteers you have at a FAFSA completion event.

Student Aid Tips for Unique Student Populations

[http://www.nasfaa.org/Unusual Student Circumstances](http://www.nasfaa.org/Unusual_Student_Circumstances)

These handouts prepare counselors and volunteers to provide assistance to students in unique situations, including wards of the court, foster youth, single parents and more.

Special Student Populations PowerPoint

<http://www.collegegoalsundayusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/2014-2015-3-Special-Student-Populations.pdf>

For more in-depth information on supporting unique student populations, review this PowerPoint prepared by the Illinois Student Assistance Commission. The PowerPoint focused on homeless and unaccompanied students, students in DCFS/foster care, undocumented students, and students with unique situations that may require professional judgement.

U.S. Department of Education: Financial Aid and Undocumented Students

<https://studentaid.ed.gov/sites/default/files/financial-aid-and-undocumented-students.pdf>

This handout answers a number of frequently asked questions about undocumented students and financial aid.

Webinar: Supporting Florida's Undocumented Students

<http://www.floridacollegeaccess.org/event/florida-can-webinar-supporting-floridas-undocumented-students/>

This webinar hosted by Florida CAN brought together a number of experts to discuss the unique challenges facing Florida's undocumented students.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Office of Federal Student Aid YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCEnu3BHoR9IYgBnCkqQdgmA>

The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Federal Student Aid has a YouTube channel with a number of simple and engaging videos that can be shared with students and families. Be sure to use the most recent videos, as some information has changed.

Office of Federal Student Aid Twitter Page

<https://twitter.com/FAFSA>

The FAFSA Twitter page, maintained by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Federal Student Aid, provides reminders of information and deadlines related to federal student aid programs. The site hosts live question and answer sessions during “#AskFAFSA Office Hour” to give students and parents the chance to ask financial aid questions.

U.S. Department of Education's Homeroom Blog: Federal Student Aid

<http://www.ed.gov/blog/topic/federal-student-aid/>

Homeroom publishes timely information and resources relevant to FAFSA completion and federal student aid. Some examples of blog topics include: 5 Things to do After Filing Your FAFSA, Top 5 FAFSA FAQs, 7 Common Myths about Financial Aid, and 7 Common FAFSA Mistakes.

Federal Student Aid on Social Media

<https://financialaidtoolkit.ed.gov/tk/outreach/social-media.jsp>

The Department of Education's Office of Federal Student Aid has a strong social media presence. In This page includes some tips on sharing these resources with students and families, such as sample tweets.

DATA AND RESEARCH

Policy Brief: \$100 Million in Pell Grants Left Behind: FAFSA Completion in Florida

<http://www.floridacollegeaccess.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/FAFSA-Completion-in-Florida.pdf>

The U.S. Department of Education makes over \$150 billion in federal student aid available to college students each year, yet tens of thousands of Florida students failed to complete the form needed to access these funds. Analyzing state and federal data, Florida CAN estimated that Florida students graduating in 2013 left behind over \$100 million in Pell grants, simply because they didn't complete the form. The December 2013 policy brief highlighted this and other findings, including resources available to students as well as recommendations moving forward.

Pell Grants Lost by Florida School Districts

<http://www.floridacollegeaccess.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Printable-2014-Summit-FAFSACompletion-Data.pdf>

This analysis of FAFSA completion data was provided to attendees of the 3rd Annual Summit on Florida College Access and Success in October 2014. It includes a district-level breakdown of Pell Grants left behind for Florida students graduating in 2013.

Florida Economic Security Report, Beyondeducation.org

Economic Security Report: http://beyondeducation.org/temp/ER_Report.pdf

Report Landing Page: <http://beyondeducation.org/>

Accompanying Workforce Outcomes Database: <http://esm.beyondeducation.org/esm/florida/>

In 2013, the Florida Legislature passed a bill to provide economic and workforce outcome data for graduates of all public postsecondary institutions in the state, which can be a useful resource when discussing the costs and benefits of a postsecondary education with students and families.

Florida CAN Updates, Releases

<http://www.floridacollegeaccess.org/contact/>

Florida College Access Network publishes a monthly e-newsletter, as well as information and resources for students, families, community leaders, and education professionals. Sign up for free to stay in the know on college and career readiness, access and success news and best practices, including Florida CAN's free webinar series.