



FAFSA Fridays MANUAL

2020-2021



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LearnMoreIndiana.org

About the Campaign

FAFSA Fridays are an initiative of Learn More Indiana and part of Indiana's Cash for College campaign—a financial literacy campaign that runs from December to March each academic year. Cash for College connects students and parents with information, events and resources to help them save money and pay for college.

FAFSA Fridays can occur **any – and every – Friday in February**, although it suggested that schools, at minimum, participate on **the Friday before College Goal Sunday, which will take place on March 7**. (find dates at CollegeGoalSunday.org). Schools, colleges and community partners will be provided with the resources (including this manual) to host a live, on-site event for high school seniors and college students. The goal of FAFSA Fridays is to have **every high school senior and current college student complete the FAFSA**—not just learn about *how* to do it.

Students whose FAFSAs are not received by the federal processing center by Indiana's April 15 deadline are not eligible for state aid, including Indiana's 21st Century Scholarship and Frank O'Bannon Grant. The FAFSA is also required to qualify for the Federal Pell Grant and the majority of scholarships and other aid from colleges. Financial barriers are one of the most-cited reasons students do not start college or decide not to return to college, so filing the FAFSA is an important step in getting students to – and through – college.

FAFSA Fridays are not intended to replace other effective measures schools and communities are taking to increase FAFSA filing rates, such as financial aid nights, virtual FAFSA events, FAFSA Days or College Goal Sunday events. FAFSA Fridays resources are additional materials to help make FAFSA completion easier for students and families.

Each year over \$1 billion of financial aid is available to eligible students. FAFSA Fridays will help Indiana's students learn that there is cash for college available, and guide them through the steps of accessing it!

Responsibilities of Participating Programs

Schools, colleges and community partners who implement a successful FAFSA Friday(s) event will include the following as part of their initiative:

- **Convene a team** (big or small) to run FAFSA Fridays at your location, whether that is in person or online. See "Building Your Team" for ideas on recruiting volunteers.
- **Advertise the event** to students who need to file the FAFSA. FAFSA Fridays are great for all schools and crucial for schools with historically low FAFSA filing rates.
- **Prepare students** with handouts, checklists and other information they'll need prior to filing the FAFSA online. See "Indiana FAFSA Fridays Resources" for a list of print-friendly and digital resources.
- **Prepare volunteers** to assist students.
- **Reserve** computer lab(s) or a similar space for the event.

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- **Host program(s)** (typically during the school day) where students are able to complete a FAFSA online. You may need to host multiple events to reach every student.
- **Follow up with students** after the event to ensure their FAFSAs have been completely filed by Indiana's April 15 deadline and all necessary corrections are made as soon as possible. This can be done by emailing all students using the included **Next Steps** email template.

Indiana FAFSA Fridays Resources

The FAFSA can be complicated, but Learn More Indiana's Cash for College campaign has compiled the most useful resources. Use these helpful tools to train volunteers, answer student questions and make sure the goal of FAFSA Fridays is met: helping students **complete** the FAFSA on-site.

All the following resources can be found at LearnMoreIndiana.org/classroom-materials.

Preparing for FAFSA Fridays

- **NerdWallet.com's FAFSA guide**: This tool allows you to learn about the different parts of the FAFSA, including FSA ID creation. You can also learn about how students should report different or unique family situations. Have volunteers read this prior to your event, and keep it open the day of your event to assist in answering questions.
- **FAFSA Worksheet**: Visit LearnMoreIndiana.org/classroom-materials to download and print this worksheet. Created by the federal Department of Education, this worksheet will ensure that students have everything they need to complete the FAFSA online. This is available in both English and Spanish.
- **FAFSA Worksheet Coversheet**: Pair this coversheet with the worksheet to help families understand exactly what information they'll need to complete the FAFSA.

During FAFSA Fridays

- **Volunteer Tasks Sheet**: Help volunteers understand their roles with this sheet.
- **Next Steps Handout**: Make sure students know what to do next by giving each participant one of these handouts as they exit the event. In both a print friendly and online format, it includes online resources and College Goal Sunday information if students need additional help to complete the FAFSA.
- **FAFSA Fridays Sign-Out Sheet**: Keep track of your students' FAFSA filing status.

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After FAFSA Fridays

- **Next Steps Email Template:** Use this sample email as a starting place to remind students to make sure their FAFSA is complete and correct.
- **Thank You Letter Template:** Thank your volunteers using this sample note.
- **FAFSA Rankings:** Visit LearnMoreIndiana.org/educators/fafsa-completion-rankings for Indiana FAFSA numbers broken down by school and by county.
- **FAFSA Report:** If your school is participating in the FAFSA Completion Initiative, it is eligible to receive student-level FAFSA reports that list the FAFSA filing status of high school seniors by name. Email Barbie Martin at bmartin@che.IN.gov to learn more.

Building Your Team

FAFSA Fridays can be led by anyone who has a passion for helping students connect to financial aid. Volunteers do not need to be FAFSA or financial aid experts.

At a **high school**, the following people would make good leaders for a FAFSA Friday event:

- Assistant principal or principal.
- School counselors.
- Interested teachers.
- Student government leaders or other student club leaders. They will be most useful in helping promote the event beforehand.
- Jobs for America's Graduates (JAG) Specialists, Coordinators and student leaders.
- PTA or PTO members or other parents.

At a **college**, the following people should be involved in a FAFSA Friday event:

- Financial Aid Office staff.
- 21st Century Scholars Office staff and ScholarCorps members, if applicable. Visit Scholars.IN.gov/partners to find staff and ScholarCorps members in your area.
- Student government leaders.
- Office of Student Scholarships staff.

At a **community organization**, make sure to include:

- Organization staff.
- Community leaders and volunteers.
- School counselors at high schools in your area.
- Parents and families.

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All FAFSA Friday events benefit from volunteers! Consider reaching out to:

- Local school and education leaders.
- College financial aid officers at local colleges. Contact them directly, or connect with the Indiana Student Financial Aid Association (ISFAA; isfaa.org) or the Indiana Association for College Admission Counseling (IACAC; iacac.net) to find regional representatives.
- At a college, resident hall associations.
- Parents, either through organizations like a PTA/PTO or via a letter, phone call or email home.
- The faith-based community.
- Non-profit organizations such as the YMCA, 4H, Boys and Girls Club, etc.
- Local business leaders, Chambers of Commerce or service associations (Kiwanis, Lion's Club, Rotary Club, etc.).

The school team will make a plan for:

- Advertising the event.
- Preparing students to complete the FAFSA. All students should complete the FAFSA worksheet prior to attending a FAFSA Friday event, and receive an FSA ID (previously the PIN) for themselves and their parents or guardians.
- Communicating with parents, including sending home or emailing the FAFSA worksheet and coversheet.
- Recruiting volunteers.
- Logistics for the day of the event (computer space, printing handouts for students, Zoom rooms, etc.).
- Thanking volunteers for their time.
- Following up with students and families.

Timeline

This suggested timeline will help your team implement successful and rewarding FAFSA Fridays.

Right Away

- Convene your FAFSA event team.
- Pick a date for your FAFSA Friday(s). Keep in mind that College Goal Sunday is March 7, so you may want to schedule your FAFSA Friday(s) prior to that so students will have an additional resource to ensure a completed FAFSA.
- Reserve computer room(s) or online rooms – through Zoom or another platform – for the day.

Six to Five Weeks before the Event

- Recruit volunteers. If your school or organization has a criminal background check requirement, be sure to follow any required volunteer guidelines.
- Start advertising the event to students. Student groups may be able to make announcements, social media graphics or posters.

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Four Weeks before the Event

- Remind students and families of the event via social media, announcements and emails.
- Continue recruiting volunteers.

Three Weeks before the Event

- Send home the **FAFSA Worksheet** and **Coversheet** (available online at LearnMoreIndiana.org/classroom-materials).
- Remind students of the event via social media, announcements and emails.
- Continue recruiting volunteers.

Two Weeks before the Event

- Send home a reminder about the event. Provide additional copies of the **FAFSA Worksheet** and **Coversheet** for those who have misplaced their copies.
- Arrange a schedule for your event. If applicable, include which groups or classes of students will participate at what time.
- Create a schedule for volunteers, taking into account the availability of your volunteers, as well as breaks and lunch. Local businesses may want to donate lunch or promotional items (like a coupon for a slice of pizza) in support of students who are taking an important step to enter and complete college.

One Week before the Event

- Remind teachers, counselors and administrators of the event schedule and ensure all students will have the opportunity to participate.
- Train volunteers using the FAFSA tool at nerdwallet.com/blog/fafsa-guide/. This can be virtual (emailing the link to all volunteers) or in-person. Remind volunteers that the FAFSA may look slightly different. You may also want to show a FAFSA YouTube video clip.
- Remind volunteers of their commitment. Send parking information [if applicable], directions and the time slot when they will be volunteering.
- If your event is virtual, you may want to provide volunteers a mini demo on how the virtual platform (like Zoom, Google Meet or Teams) works.
- Print all materials that you will use on the day of the event. All items are available at LearnMoreIndiana.org/classroom-materials. Suggested handouts include:
 - Extra copies of **FAFSA Worksheet** and **Coversheet**.
 - **Next Steps** handout.
 - **Volunteer Tasks** (edit with specific tasks for your volunteers).
 - **Sign-out Sheet** (be sure to have plenty of pages, along with pens and clipboards).
- Make an announcement to remind students that the event is next week, and remind them that they will need to complete and bring their **FAFSA Worksheets** and **Coversheets**.
- Place a reminder about the event on your home page and on social media.
- Encourage staff and volunteers to wear college gear for the event.

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Day of Event

- Double check that your computer room(s) are well stocked with paper and ink cartridges for printing confirmation pages or other necessary information if your event will be in person.
- Ensure all your virtual rooms are open for students and families if your event will be virtual.
- Set out **FAFSA Fridays Sign-Out Sheets** with clipboards and pens.
- Set at least one computer to the FAFSA FAQs page: <https://fafsa.ed.gov/help.htm>. Make sure volunteers know this is available.
- Greet and thank volunteers as they arrive. Distribute **Volunteer Tasks**.
- Depending upon the timing of your event, instruct volunteers to help students either *save* or *submit* the FAFSA. If a student submits the FAFSA, they will be locked out of the system for several days. If your event is close to April 15, a student should submit to make sure something—even if it needs to be corrected later—is submitted. If a student is planning to attend College Goal Sunday or otherwise finishing the FAFSA later with a parent/guardian, it may be wiser to save rather than submit so that they are not locked out of the FAFSA on College Goal Sunday or the date they choose to make updates.
- Check that volunteers are using a **Next Steps** handout with each student and filling it out appropriately so that the student will be able to access the FAFSA later.
- Ensure students receive their **Next Steps** handouts as they leave, and sign the **Sign-Out Sheet**.

Note about Parent FSA IDs

When a parent or guardian registers for an FSA ID, they agree not to share it with anyone—not even their student. This means most students will be able to complete 99% of the FAFSA at your event, but will need to submit it with a parent/guardian FSA ID later. One way to address this is to encourage parents to attend.

After Your Event

- Send students an email or hardcopy to remind them of the next steps to take. Use the **Next Steps Email Template** and make sure your reminder is at least one week prior to Indiana's April 15 FAFSA deadline.
- Thank your volunteers! A hand-written note from student leaders is a great way to do this. Use the **Thank You Note Template** to make this process easier.
- Remind students to register for and use ScholarTrack (ScholarTrack.IN.gov) to ensure that their financial aid status is correct. This status must be correct to receive any state financial aid awards, such as the 21st Century Scholarship, the Mitch Daniels Early Graduation Scholarship, the Frank O'Bannon Grant, etc.
- Communicate your success! Make sure students, parents, volunteers, your school team and local media know about your success!

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Additional Resources

Your one-stop shop for FAFSA Fridays resources is LearnMoreIndiana.org/classroom-materials. These links, resources and much more are available on the website!

Cash for College

Indiana's annual Cash for College campaign can help connect students to smart advice when it comes to paying for college. Learn how to borrow wisely, find scholarships and more at LearnMoreIndiana.org/cost.

College Goal Sunday

Indiana's College Goal Sunday provides one-on-one, free assistance to families as they complete the FAFSA. Held March 7, 2020, College Goal Sunday will include more than 40 sites across the state. Learn more at CollegeGoalSunday.org.

Data

Wondering how many students completed the FAFSA from your school or college—or which specific students have yet to file? If your corporation has completed a FAFSA data sharing agreement, you will receive FAFSA reports with student-by-student data from the State of Indiana. Questions about the FAFSA data on-demand can be directed to Barbie Martin at bmartin@che.IN.gov.

Otherwise, check the FAFSA and Learn More Indiana websites for data.

- FAFSA Website: <https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/about/data-center/student/application-volume>
- Learn More Indiana Website: LearnMoreIndiana.org/educators/fafsa-completion-rankings

ScholarTrack

The Commission has upgraded the eStudent system to the new-and-improved ScholarTrack at ScholarTrack.IN.gov. ScholarTrack is the one-stop shop for Hoosiers' state financial aid needs.

FAFSA FAQs

Compiled by the US Office of Federal Student Aid, this set of Frequently Asked Questions has the official answer on everything from which parent to use on the FAFSA to how to use the IRS Data Retrieval Tool. Explore the FAQs at <https://fafsa.ed.gov/help.htm>.

<https://www.nerdwallet.com/blog/fafsa-guide/>

Walk through the FAFSA requirements and find answers to common questions.

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