2025-26 Utah FAFSA Completion Events

Site Coordinator Manual

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Section 1: Introduction

Welcome, FAFSA Site Coordinators! We're excited to support you in helping your students take the next step toward college and career success. Hosting a FAFSA Completion Event is one of the most impactful ways to support your seniors, especially first-generation and low-income students, as they navigate the financial aid process.

Whether you're a first-time host or a seasoned pro, our 2025-26 FAFSA Event Manual is packed with tools, resources, and tips to help you plan a successful event that can be tailored to your school's unique needs. There's no one-size-fits-all model— each school has its own culture, and we encourage you to make events your own.

Why FAFSA Events Matter:

- They provide a supportive, welcoming environment for students and families.
- They offer free, expert assistance with completing the FAFSA.
- They help open doors to college affordability and opportunity.

Many Utah high schools coordinate FAFSA events with Utah College Application Week (UCAW) in October and November. With the 2026-27 FAFSA expected to launch by October 1, this is a great time to realign your efforts and boost completion rates. We also encourage integrating FAFSA support with other college-going activities, such as Higher Ed Day and Decision Day, throughout the year.

We recommend hosting at least one FAFSA event during the school year, and more if possible! Every event is a chance to help more students access the financial aid they deserve.

You'll find additional resources in our **2025-26 FAFSA Event Resources** Google Drive, including flyers, customizable templates, planning guides, and more. Please review the materials carefully and update them as needed for your school.

If you have any questions or need support, don't hesitate to reach out to the USHE State Aid and FAFSA team at **fafsahelp@ushe.edu**. We're here to help you and your students succeed.

Thank you for all you do to make college more accessible for Utah students!

Section 2:
Site Coordinator Planning

FAFSA Completion Open House Event Checklist

This checklist outlines the steps to ensure a successful FAFSA Completion Open House.

Up to Several Months Prior

☐ Confirm FAFSA Completion Event with USHE: fafsahelp@ushe.edu
☐ Reserve computer lab(s) or a location for the event with access to computers
☐ List events on all internal school calendars

One Month Prior

☐ Post notice of event on all public-facing school websites and calendars
☐ Post notice of the event on the district website and calendar
☐ Hang flyers around your school
☐ Coordinate with teachers to advertise and incentivize event attendance (optional)
☐ Meet with IT to coordinate technological needs during the event
☐ Prepare guest logins for parents attending without students
☐ Ensure access to necessary websites is enabled for students and guests. Check to ensure your school's network can load the necessary sites (fafsa.gov, studentaid.gov, irs.gov, gmail.com, etc.)
  - This is necessary for students and parents to access their StudentAid.Gov accounts, which require authentication sent via email
☐ Confirm there is no scheduled school/district IT maintenance occurring during the time of the event
☐ Distribute details about the USHE FAFSA scholarship for those attending the event on the school scholarship page or website
☐ Coordinate assistance with the school's student council/student body officers to help advertise and assist at the event (e.g., directing guests, passing out materials, ensuring signs are posted and doors are open, etc.)
☐ Confirm any additional volunteer requirements set by your district and make a plan to communicate them to volunteers

Three Weeks Prior

☐ Include the event in any newsletters, social media, or communication to parents of seniors—use universal instructions and resources to encourage attendance (customizable templates can be found [here](#))
☐ Send one email, text message, or phone call to parents of seniors about the event (customizable sample messages can be found [here](#))
☐ Coordinate to ensure that at least one counselor, college access professional, or educator on staff has attended the **USHE 2025-26 FAFSA Bootcamp Series** and will be present for the duration of the school event.
  ● We encourage you to invite several colleagues who can help students and parents during this event
  ● Remember - for the safety of all attendees and volunteers, and in accordance with Utah state law, all volunteers must be constantly supervised by a high school employee within sight at all times during the event. Be sure to communicate any additional volunteer requirements set by their district.

Two Weeks Prior

☐ Send a second [email](#), text message, or phone call to parents of seniors about the event
☐ Include the "**StudentAid.Gov Account Setup**" [Handout](#)
  • The handout explains how to set up a StudentAid.Gov account, which is necessary to complete the FAFSA form on the event night. **We strongly encourage students and parents to complete this step before the event**

One Week Prior

☐ Connect with volunteers provided by USHE via email. Provide a welcome with information about your event
☐ Send a third email, text message, or phone call to parents of seniors about the event
☐ Include the "[Checklist to Complete the 2026-27 FAFSA](#)" Handout
☐ Share [posts about the event](#) on your school or district's social media accounts
☐ Remind teachers about the event and coordinate extra credit opportunities (optional)
☐ Include the event in your school announcements throughout the school day
☐ Confirm that the student council/SBOs and colleagues will be available to assist at the event
☐ Post the event to the school's electronic or static marquee
☐ Confirm that the entrances to the school and the computer lab will be unlocked
☐ Confirm that the lab will be available one hour before the start of the event for setting up (ensure that other classes, adult ed., or any scheduled maintenance will not overlap with your event)
☐ Print copies of "**FAFSA Night in 3 Easy Steps**" and additional handouts to distribute to families attending the event

Day Before

- ☐ Confirm the lab will be ready for setup one hour before the start of the event
- ☐ Confirm the technology is available and working (computers, guest logins, internet access, etc.)
- ☐ Double-check that at least one counselor, college access professional, or another educator will be present for the duration of the event
- ☐ Print out a **25-26 FAFSA NIGHT ATTENDANCE SHEET** to document attendance and track whom to follow up with (sample available here)

Day of the Event

- ☐ Arrive at the school at least one hour before the event to **check that doors are unlocked** and the computer lab is accessible
- ☐ Put handouts in the entry area for parents and students to have access to them at the start
- ☐ Post signage through the school directing families to the computer lab
- ☐ Welcome volunteers and provide instructions for how you anticipate the event will run

Online FAFSA Resources

- [FSA Eligibility for Non-U.S. Citizens](#)
- [FSA Financial Aid and Students Without an SSN Q&A](#)
- FAFSA Walkthrough Videos: [Utah College Awareness & Financial Aid YouTube](#)
- Paying for College Toolkit with the basic FAFSA presentation, handout, and video (scroll down to the "+Paying for College Toolkit" dropdown): [ushe.edu/utah-college-application-week](#)
- Financial Aid Webinars: [Utah College Awareness & Financial Aid YouTube Playlist: Webinars for Counselors & Educators](#)

Videos from Federal Student Aid:
- [Preparing for the FAFSA Form](#)
- [Completing the FAFSA Form](#)
- [Next Steps After Submitting Your FAFSA](#)

Handouts from Federal Student Aid:
- The Financial Aid Process ([English](#)/[Español](#))
- Types of Aid ([English](#)/[Español](#))
- Eligibility for Federal Student Aid ([English](#)/[Español](#))
- Who counts as my parent ([English](#))

[College Facts at a Glance](#)

Section 3:
During Your Event

Common FAFSA Event Issues and Resolutions

Below are common issues and resolutions to prepare for during FAFSA Completion Events.

Sensitive situations: The combination of college stress, financial information, students or parents without a Social Security number, and other sensitive topics may cause people to experience various emotions.

Tips for handling sensitive situations:
- As a best practice, have a separate room available for one-on-one consultations with families, if needed. (Reminder, all volunteers must be constantly under supervision, within eyesight of a high school employee at all times during the event.)
- Pay attention to the tone and volume of your voice when discussing sensitive situations with families.
- Always ask permission before touching, viewing documents, or requesting personal or financial information details.

StudentAid.Gov account problems: Mismatches in personal identification data are the biggest culprit for StudentAid.Gov account issues. This might include a mistyped birthdate or using a preferred name instead of a full legal first name. The student and parent (as a required contributor) must create their own StudentAid.Gov account. The Social Security Number (or mailing address for those without an SSN), name, and date of birth must **match exactly** on both the StudentAid.Gov account and when inviting a parent/student to the FAFSA form. Be sure to have the student and parents use a permanent email address and register their mobile phone and email for password recovery. If online troubleshooting is unsuccessful, call Federal Student Aid for assistance **(1-800-433-3243).**

Computer problems: It is helpful to have someone from your IT department on-site or on call in case computer or network issues arise.

Missing documents: Please anticipate that students or parents may bring incorrect tax information, forget to bring taxes, do not know their Social Security number, lack specific financial documentation, or do not have parental information available. In such instances, have an action plan and adjust the instructions accordingly to meet their needs. This will allow them to either work on the FAFSA or receive guidance on the next steps. Scheduling a follow-up meeting can be highly beneficial in these cases.

Using the wrong website: If you notice a student using any website other than studentaid.gov, stop them as soon as you catch it and have them file on the correct website (studentaid.gov or fafsa.gov).

Filing for the wrong application year: If students start college in the fall of 2026, they should complete the 2026-27 FAFSA. The 2025-26 FAFSA form will also be available and can be completed for students enrolling during the summer 2026 semester. Be sure to direct students to the most accurate form for their needs.

Misinformation: Many people are eager to help at the FAFSA Completion Event but may not be properly trained. Be vigilant for incorrect advice being given to parents and students. If you're unsure, don't hesitate to ask financial aid representatives for clarification or follow up with the USHE state aid and FAFSA team (fafsahelp@ushe.edu). Please note that a response from the USHE team will typically be received the following business day.

Sophomores and juniors: The FAFSA is for students attending college (**NOT** for AP classes or Concurrent Enrollment) within the next financial aid year. Only **seniors** should attend the FAFSA Event. We encourage schools to provide resources to students before their senior year, like hosting a "paying for college night" or using the Paying for College Toolkit as a resource.

Answering the Question: Why Should I File the FAFSA?

Here are some tips for answering the common question from students and parents: Why should I file the FAFSA? Effectively informing students about the benefits of filing the FAFSA can help them make the best decision for them.

FAFSA is a gateway to ALL federal aid, most state financial aid resources, and some institutional and private aid/scholarships.
Federal aid includes Pell grants, work-study programs, and federal student loans. Most state grants and scholarships also require FAFSA completion. Some institutional aid/scholarships and private scholarships also require the FAFSA to be completed.

What if the student has a full-ride scholarship or savings prepared to pay for college?
Filing the FAFSA is a good backup plan to cover unexpected expenses. Many scholarships, including the Utah Opportunity Scholarship, require students to file the FAFSA, if eligible, as part of the application process. Please note that students who are not eligible to complete the FAFSA can still apply for the Utah Opportunity Scholarship; however, they will need to complete an alternative form.

Students often do not know what financial aid they may receive.
Many students file the FAFSA and are surprised to find that they qualify for aid.

It's not as difficult as many students may think.
Students can access the FAFSA at fafsa.gov or studentaid.gov. The FAFSA provides tips in every section, as well as online chat, phone help, and a frequently asked questions section. Students can also attend a USHE-sponsored FAFSA completion open house or get help from a school counselor, college advisor, or FAFSA coordinator. Let students know that it's easy to contact the financial aid office at the college or university they may want to attend and ask for specific financial aid information.

Students aren't required to accept loans.
The FAFSA is just an application; students can always decline any aid they are offered (such as federal student loans).
There's no reason not to file the FAFSA every year students are in college . . . It's FREE!

FAFSA Encouragement Strategies

Ways to alleviate parent and student concerns for FAFSA

Parents

Concern: "My parent doesn't have a social security number."

Solution: A parent's immigration status does not impact a student's eligibility for Title IV aid if the student is a U.S. citizen. The Department of Education does not share any information with immigration authorities.

Concern: "We make too much money."

Solution: Income is only one factor in determining eligibility for federal aid. It's important to emphasize that the FAFSA isn't just for need-based federal aid; it's also required to access state, institutional, and private scholarships and grants.

Concern: "The application is too difficult."

Solution: Offer to schedule an appointment for personalized FAFSA assistance or direct them to helpful resources like your school's FAFSA Night.

Concern: "I don't want to share my private information."

Solution: Reassure parents that the federal government already has access to much of the information requested on the FAFSA, such as Social Security numbers and tax details. Additionally, the FAFSA form uses federally approved encryption to safeguard their data.

Students

Concern: "My parents don't want to be responsible for my debt."

Solution: Clarify that the FAFSA asks for parent information only to assess financial need. Federal student loans don't have cosigners.

Concern: "I already have a full-ride scholarship."

Solution: Encourage the student to utilize all free aid available to them. Federal student aid may help cover costs of college attendance that their scholarship may not, such as transportation.

Concern: "I probably won't qualify for a grant, and I don't want to take out a loan."

Solution: The FAFSA is just an application. Students don't have to accept federal student loans if they don't want or need to.

Concern: "My parents aren't part of my life."

Solution: Ask questions to see if the student fits the FAFSA's definition of an "independent student" or explain that they can appeal their dependency status at the financial aid office.

Section 4:
Event Handouts for Students and Families

Please visit our Utah College Application and Financial Aid Resources webpage for updated resources, handouts, and translations. For FAFSA Resources, scroll down to the dropdown listing "FAFSA Resources" at ushe.edu/utah-college-application-week. You can also visit the 2025-26 FAFSA Event Resources Google Drive.

Deferment and the FAFSA

Some students defer college to complete a humanitarian, religious, or military service after high school. Here are some options if you do not plan to start college immediately after high school graduation.

We recommend:
File the FAFSA during the students' senior year of high school, even if they aren't planning to attend college right away.

Why we recommend it:
- Filing the FAFSA as a senior makes the renewal process much easier when they decide to enroll in college.
- If students have time to fit a semester of college before leaving for a religious mission, military service, or humanitarian service, they may be eligible for financial aid.
- If students' plans change suddenly, they will be prepared to attend college.
- Because of the important role the FAFSA can play in some scholarships (especially the Utah Opportunity Scholarship), file early to be considered for those awards. It may be possible to defer awarded scholarships.

When students return from deferment:
If students complete the FAFSA (or create a StudentAid.Gov account), they can record their information below and save it in a safe place for future reference. When they return, this can help avoid the complications of forgotten passwords, usernames, emails, and other information. We also recommend writing down parents' account information.

StudentAid.gov Username:_____

StudentAid.gov Password:_____

Email Associated with Account:_____

Phone Number Associated with Account:_____

Challenge Question Answer 1:_____

Challenge Question Answer 2:_____

Challenge Question Answer 3:_____

Challenge Question Answer 4:_____

Aplazamiento y FAFSA

Algunos estudiantes aplazan la universidad para completar un servicio humanitario, religioso o militar después de la escuela secundaria. Aquí hay algunas opciones si no planea comenzar la universidad inmediatamente después de la graduación de la escuela secundaria.

Lo que recomendamos:
Presente la FAFSA el otoño de su último año de secundaria incluso si no está planeando asistir a la universidad de inmediato.

Por qué lo recomendamos:
- La presentación de su FAFSA como un estudiante mayor hace que el proceso de renovación sea mucho más fácil cuando decide inscribirse en la universidad.
- Si tiene tiempo para un semestre de la universidad antes de su misión religiosa, servicio militar, o servicio humanitario, puede ser elegible para la ayuda financiera.
- Si sus planes cambian repentinamente (por ejemplo, debido a una lesión inesperada) estará listo para asistir a la universidad.
- Debido al importante papel que la FAFSA puede desempeñar en algunas becas (especialmente la beca Utah Opportunity Scholarship), debe presentar su solicitud temprano para ser considerado para esos premios. Tiene posibilidad de aplazar o diferir sus becas.

Cuando regrese del aplazamiento:
Si completa la FAFSA (o crea una cuenta en StudentAid.Gov) anote su información a continuación y guárdela en un lugar seguro para cuando regrese. Esto puede ayudarlo a evitar las complicaciones de contraseñas olvidadas, nombres de usuario, correos electrónicos y otra información cuando regrese. También le recomendamos que escriba la información de la cuenta de sus padres.

ID de FSA Nombre de usuario:_____

ID de FSA Contraseña:_____

Correo electrónico asociado con la cuenta: _____

Número de teléfono asociado con la cuenta:_____

Pregunta de desafío Respuesta 1:_____

Pregunta de desafío Respuesta 2:_____

Pregunta de desafío Respuesta 3:_____

Pregunta de desafío Respuesta 4:_____

Section 5:
Post-Event & Follow-Up

Following Up After Filing the FAFSA

After the FAFSA event, we advise teams to review their attendance sheets and follow up with any students who didn't complete their FAFSA. Students who did finish their FAFSA can still be contacted about next steps for financial aid.

Things to note:

1. **Processing times and next steps**

   After students submit their FAFSA, instruct them to follow up with their college(s) to ensure ALL the required paperwork is submitted. Timing is an important factor when students contact the college. Digitally signed FAFSA applications take three to five business days to process. Paper FAFSA applications take significantly longer to process, typically ranging from five to ten weeks or more. Because of this, students with paper applications may not be able to follow up with colleges for several weeks. After processing the FAFSA, some colleges may not contact students directly, so we recommend that students follow up.

2. **Access to information**

   When students complete the FAFSA, they have access to their submission date and can view processing times to see when info is sent to colleges. They can also see their FAFSA Submission Summary. This is a helpful tool that provides a big-picture overview of their potential financial aid. Counselors can use this document as a guide to review the FAFSA submission, eligibility, and next steps with students and families.

   There are four tabs included in this document:
   - First, **Eligibility Overview**, which reviews Pell Grant, Student Loans, Work-Study eligibility, and the Student Aid Index (SAI).
     - The SAI can go as low as -1,500. Remind students that this is an estimate for eligibility. Students will receive a financial aid offer from the institution(s) that includes exact amounts and types of aid being offered.
   - Second, **FAFSA Form Answers** is where students can review their responses for accuracy and make corrections.
   - Third, **School Information**, where students can review the college(s) they selected on their FAFSA.
   - Last, **Next Steps,** where students can resolve errors and check if they've been selected for verification or view other important actions.

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FAFSA® FORM 2024–25   FAFSA Submission Summary

| Student 👤 Raya Tran | Application Received Sept. 10, 2024 | Application Processed Sept. 12, 2024 | Data Release Number ⓘ 2572 | Viewing: **Submission 1** ⓘ |

Eligibility Overview   FAFSA Form Answers   School Information   🛑 Next Steps

3. Celebrate Your Success—But Keep the Momentum Going!

Congratulations on successfully completing the event and helping students take an important step toward securing financial aid! While the event may be over, your efforts don't have to stop here. We encourage all FAFSA Site Coordinators to continue supporting students by scheduling FAFSA completion meetings, organizing additional FAFSA events, and regularly monitoring your school's FAFSA data. Remember, FAFSA completion is not a one-time event but a year-long commitment.

To help sustain your efforts, be sure to explore our website for additional resources and check out the FAFSA data information below.

Tracking FAFSA Completion Data

There are several resources available to college access professionals to track FAFSA completion at your school, in the state, and across the country:

- **NCAN's FAFSA Tracker** is a common source for FAFSA completion information. View the national data trends on the home page or see state-level information on the "state profile" tab. View the FAFSA completion percentage at your high school on the "high school lookup" tab.

- **Federal Student Aid** also provides FAFSA completion data by state and high school. These reports inform the NCAN tracker.