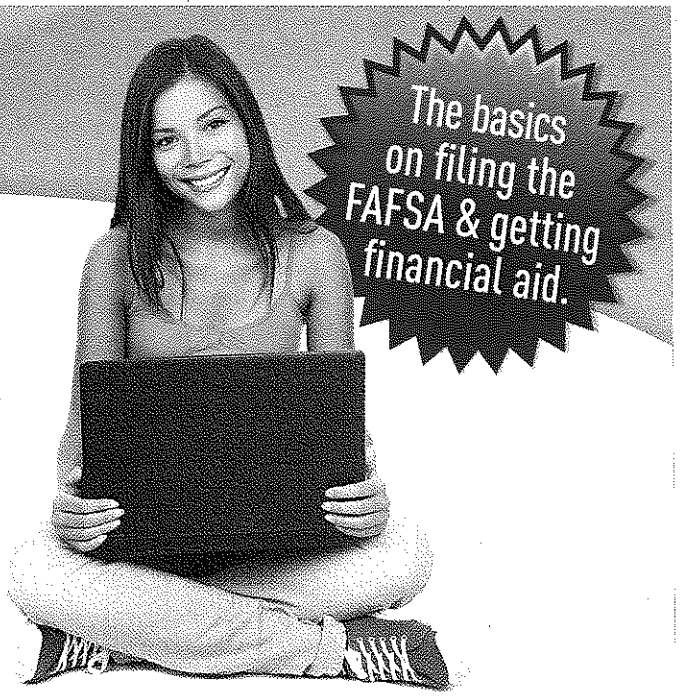
FAFSA

Free Application for Federal Student Aid

Tipsheet



Visit FAFSA.gov to complete & submit your application for financial aid.

WHAT IS THE FAFSA?

The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is the most important form you must complete in order to qualify for almost all types of financial aid including federal, state, local, and private grants and scholarships.

WHY COMPLETE A FAFSA?

The only way to find out if you qualify for "free money" awards (such as 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. In Pennsylvania, the FAFSA is used to determine state grant eligibility. Schools also use FAFSA data to award their own financial aid.

WHAT ARE THE DEADLINES?

Seniors should complete the FAFSA as soon as possible after January 1st. Financial aid deadlines vary by school, state, program of study and more. To ensure that you are considered for all financial aid programs, the FAFSA should be filed by the earliest application deadline date for each school you are considering attending. Check with your school for details.

You must complete a new FAFSA form each year.

FOR PENNSYLVANIA STATE GRANT APPLICANTS, THE FAFSA DEADLINES ARE:

- **MAY 1** – for students attending colleges, universities and college-transferable programs (excluding community colleges) and for all renewal students.
- **AUGUST 1** – for first-time students attending community colleges, business, trade or technical schools, hospital schools of nursing, or two-year, non-transferable degree programs at a community, junior or four-year college.

WHERE CAN I GET A FAFSA?

You can access the FAFSA electronically at **PHEAA.org/FAFSA** or **FAFSA.gov**. You can also download a PDF FAFSA at **FAFSA.gov**. (PDF FAFSAs must be mailed for processing.) If you do not have Internet access, you can get a paper copy of the FAFSA by calling the U.S. Department of Education toll-free at **800.4.FED.AID** (800.433.3243).

WHY SHOULD I FILL OUT THE FAFSA ONLINE?

- **Fast turnaround.** Your application usually takes less than 72 hours to process (versus 3+ weeks for a paper application).
- **Online help.** Simply click in the data field/box for each question and specific instructions will appear.
- **Built-in edits.** Potential errors are detected before you submit your application and gives you the opportunity to correct them.
- **Built-in "skip logic."** You can skip certain questions that do not apply to you.
- **Electronic transmission.** The schools you list on the FAFSA will receive your processed information faster.
- **Easy renewal.** It's easy to renew your FAFSA, since your application will always be prefilled with your existing data from the previous award year.
- **IRS Data Retrieval Tool.** If you complete your FAFSA online, you have the option of automatically retrieving your income and tax data from the Internal Revenue Service and having it automatically transferred into your FAFSA. Please see the reverse side for **IMPORTANT!** information regarding the submitting of financial information.
- **Link to State Grant Form.** Students can connect directly from the FAFSA confirmation page to the Pennsylvania State Grant Form (SGF).

WHAT DO I NEED TO FILL OUT THE FAFSA ONLINE?

- A Federal Student Aid Personal Identification Number (PIN), which enables you to access your federal financial aid information online. You need a PIN to electronically sign your FAFSA and to renew your FAFSA online. To obtain a PIN, go to the U.S. Department of Education's PIN website at **pin.ed.gov.** Be sure to choose a PIN you will remember and keep it in a safe place, as you will need it each year. If you are a dependent student, both you and your parent require PINs.
- Your Social Security Number
- Your driver's license number, if you have one (optional)
- Your alien registration number, if you are not a U.S. citizen
- Your W-2 Forms
- Records of other untaxed income received, including workers' compensation, child support, payments to tax-deferred pension and savings plans, etc.
- Your federal income tax return (1040, 1040A, or 1040EZ). If your taxes are not yet finalized, use the prior year tax return and current W-2 forms to estimate your income. Be sure to update your FAFSA with accurate information once your tax return is final.
- Your current bank statements and records of stocks, bonds and other investments

If you are a dependent student, you will also need:

- Your parent's Social Security Number(s)
- Your parent's income and financial records (as listed above)

IMPORTANT!

Use income records for the calendar year that is prior to the year you plan to attend school. If you have not yet completed your tax return, you can still submit your FAFSA using best estimates. After you submit your tax return, correct any income or tax information that is different from what you initially submitted on your FAFSA. If possible, use the IRS Data Retrieval Tool.

If your taxes are not yet finalized, use the prior year tax return and current W-2 forms to estimate your income.

HOW MUCH AID DO I GET?

Your FAFSA information will be made available to the schools you list on the FAFSA. The schools use your EFC and other information to determine your eligibility for various types of aid – grants, scholarships, loans, or work-study. Your FAFSA information will also be provided to PHEAA in order to be considered for a PA State Grant.

If you or your family has special circumstances that should be taken into account, such as a reduction of income or unusual medical expenses, contact your school's Financial Aid Office to see if special consideration can be given to your situation.

HOW MUCH DOES IT COST TO FILE THE FAFSA?

The FAFSA is FREE for all students. If you are asked to pay to file the FAFSA, you are not on an official government website.

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER THE FAFSA?

The U.S. Department of Education will send you a report called a Student Aid Report (SAR) through the mail or email. The SAR lists the information you reported on your FAFSA, and will list your Expected Family Contribution (EFC). The EFC represents your family's financial strength and is used to determine your eligibility for student aid awards. It is important to review your SAR when you receive it. Make sure all of your information is correct.

WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFO?

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

- **PHEAA.org**
- **EducationPlanner.org**
- **YouCanDealWithIt.com**
- **FAFSA.gov**
- **pin.ed.gov**
- **www.sss.gov**
- Federal Student Aid Information Center (FSAIC): **800.4.FED-AID** (800.433.3243)
- 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.

For the latest financial aid information that you need to know, including student aid tips, upcoming deadlines and free financial aid workshops, join us on Facebook at **Facebook.com/pheaa.aid**.

These materials have been developed and paid for by the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency (PHEAA) for informational purposes. Although the information contained in this document is believed to be accurate at the time of printing, PHEAA does not guarantee its accuracy. You should independently verify that this information is correct.

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