



CHCI Guide to Applying for Financial Aid & Scholarships

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Additional Helpful Websites:

www.studentjobs.gov/e-scholar.asp — A list of federally funded scholarships, fellowships, grants and internships geared to high school, undergraduate and graduate students.

www.fafsa.ed.gov — The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) website. This is where you start when you are ready to apply for financial aid.

www.eCampusTours.com/payingforcollege/default.htm — Features a free scholarship search as well as information on grants, scholarships, savings programs, and loans.

www.act.org/fane — A financial aid need estimator.

www.studentaidalliance.org — Student success stories and descriptions of need-based financial aid programs.

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Financial Aid Glossary

Grants are funds that you do not have to repay. They may be based on financial need and come from a variety of sources. The most common types of grants come from federal and state agencies and colleges.

» **Federal Pell Grant** provides need-based grants to low-income undergraduate and certain post baccalaureate students to promote access to postsecondary education.

Scholarships are awarded through private donors and, as with grants, you do not have to repay them; most are based on merit or financial need (i.e.: CHCI Scholarship award).

Work-study allows you to earn money in college to help meet your college expenses by working at a part-time job. It is an excellent opportunity to get some experience while helping you pay for your education.

Loans are debts that must be repaid. In most cases, payment begins after you have graduated or left college. Your eligibility for loans is determined by the results of the FAFSA. Loans can be a helpful source of financial aid, but be sure you understand the terms of the loan before you sign on the line. Seek loans only after pursuing other forms of aid.

Financial Aid: The FAFSA-Step One Process

Applying for financial aid is easier than you think. Your first step: the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). For many schools, this is the only form you need. Read on to learn more about the FAFSA.

Fill out the FAFSA

Who? You and your parents

What? The FAFSA is the form the federal government uses to determine your eligibility for federal assistance (loans, grants, work-study appointments and some scholarships). You must complete this form to be considered for federal aid and some state and institutional aid. And, as the name implies, the FAFSA is completely free.

When? Complete the form as soon as you can after January 1 of your senior year or before the school's priority deadline. Your school may require additional forms besides the FAFSA or an earlier submission deadline so check with your school's financial aid office to learn about requirements for your school.

Where? The FAFSA can be completed online at www.fafsa.ed.gov. A paper application is also available and can be located at your school counselor and college financial aid offices.

How? You and your parents will need to gather all of your most recent federal tax returns (including W-2 forms), as well as current bank account and investment statements.

The information you supply on the FAFSA will determine your Expected Family Contribution (EFC) — the amount of money you and your parents can be expected to contribute to your college costs. Your school then applies a simple equation to decide how much financial aid you will need. Starting with the school's "Cost of Attendance," they subtract your "Expected Family Contribution" (EFC) to arrive at your "Financial Need":

COA – EFC = \$\$\$		
COA	Cost of Attendance	Tuition, fees, room and board, books and supplies, travel and incidental expenses
EFC	Expected Family Contribution	Amount of money your parents can be expected to contribute
\$\$\$	Financial Need	Amount you will need to go to school

The school tries to meet your need through a financial aid package made up of funds from federal, state, school and private sources, as well as loans and student employment.

You should submit a FAFSA every year you need aid — even if you think you do not qualify for financial aid. Your eligibility can change from year to year, especially if there are changes in your family's circumstances or if you change your status to single and do not have your parents listed as dependents. Also, being rejected for federal aid is sometimes a prerequisite for receiving private awards.

If you have any questions about the FAFSA or federal student assistance programs, call the Federal Student Aid Information Center at 1-800-4-FED-AID (1-800-433-3243, TTY 1-800-730-8913) from 8:00 am to 8:00 p.m. Eastern Time, Monday through Friday. You can also submit questions through the web site at www.fafsa.ed.gov/contact.htm.

What happens next?

Four to six weeks after you submit a paper FAFSA, you will receive your Student Aid Report (SAR). If you submitted a FAFSA online or included your email address on your paper FAFSA, you should receive your SAR within two weeks. The SAR is your official record that the federal processor received your FAFSA, as well as a summary of the financial aid you can expect to receive.

The federal processor will also send a copy of your SAR to each of the schools you listed on the FAFSA. If you need additional copies of the SAR, call the federal processor at 1-800-433-3243.

Important Student Aid Report (SAR) Information:

The Student Aid Report (SAR), is generated by the U.S. Department of Education. After the FAFSA has been processed, it is sent electronically to the schools you have listed on the form. This process takes about four weeks from the time of submission, and is intended to officially notify you that the process has been completed. If you provide an e-mail address on your FAFSA, a message will be sent prompting you to access the SAR online. If you do not, a SAR will be mailed to the address that you listed on the application.

The SAR is a summary of all the information you submitted on your FAFSA. Once you receive your SAR, check it for mistakes. If it is accurate, keep the form for your records. If there are errors, go back to the FAFSA Web site and use your PIN to make corrections.

You may receive a request for additional documentation. One out of every three applications is selected for verification by the government. If this happens to you, do not be alarmed. The college will ask you for a copy of signed tax returns and additional documentation. Respond promptly to avoid delaying the processing of your financial aid. A college cannot officially award financial aid until verification is complete.

If you do not receive your SAR within four to six weeks, call the federal processor at 1-800-433-3243. Be ready to provide your Social Security Number and date of birth for verification. Filling out your FAFSA is the first step toward receiving financial aid. Start early, follow these steps and you may find that financing your college education is easier than you thought!

Review the Award Letter

» **The award letter is generated once the college receives your FAFSA results.**

The letter is part of the financial aid package, which also includes loan documents. The award letter will outline the specific awards you are eligible for if you attend the college.

» **Remember that the award letter is an estimate and is subject to change, especially if you have estimated figures on your FAFSA.**

Read the award letter thoroughly and make sure you understand each type of aid being offered to you.

» **Aid may consist of a combination of funds**

which may include free aid you will not have to pay back, along with loans that need to be repaid.

» **Read the instructions carefully** and check to see if anything needs to be signed and returned to the school by a certain deadline. Some colleges will ask you to sign and return the letter. This does not commit you to attend, it merely reserves the funds.

Loans: If you Must Borrow, Do it Wisely!

Loans are a form of financial aid that must be repaid. Loans can be a helpful source — and sometimes necessary — to help fund your college education.

Find out if interest will accrue while you are in school, and if your payments can be deferred until after you graduate. Keep in mind that you may have to continue to borrow each year you are in school.

Source: 2007–2008 College Planning Guide for Juniors and Seniors. Iowa Student Loan- College Access Network

The following is a summary of the U.S. Department of Education's Federal Student Aid (FSA) programs that will help you pay for school. Check with your school to find out which programs your school participates in.

Federal Student Program	Type of Aid	Program Details	Annual Amount
Federal Pell Grant	Grant: does not have to be repaid	Available almost exclusively to undergraduates	\$5,350 for 2009–2010; Amount will depend on program funding
Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (FSEOG)	Grant: does not have to be repaid	For undergraduates with exceptional financial need; priority is given to federal Pell Grant recipients; funds depend on availability at school	\$100–\$4,000
Academic Competitiveness Grant (ACG)	Grant: does not have to be repaid	For Pell-eligible students enrolled at least half-time in their first or second year of study or in a certificate program of at least one year at a degree-granting school	
		First year: must have completed a rigorous high school program of study; graduated from high school after Jan. 1, 2006; not have been enrolled in an ACG-eligible program while at or below age of compulsory school attendance	1 st year: Up to \$750
		Second year: must have completed a rigorous high school program of study; graduated from high school after Jan. 1, 2005; have at least 3.0 cumulative GPA at the end of first year of postsecondary study	2 nd year: Up to \$1,300
National Science and Mathematics Access to Retain Talent Grant (National SMART Grant)	Grant: does not have to be repaid	For Pell-eligible students enrolled at least half-time in third or fourth year (or fifth year of a five-year program) majoring in science and mathematics areas with at least a 3.0 cumulative GPA	Up to \$4,000 a year
Federal Work-Study	Money is earned while attending school; does not have to be repaid	For undergraduate and graduate students; jobs can be on campus or off campus; students are paid at least federal minimum wage	Award amount varies depending on institution
Federal Perkins Loan	Loan: must be repaid	For undergraduate and graduate students; must be repaid to school that made the loan; interest 5 percent	Undergraduate students: up to \$5,500; graduate and professional students: up to \$8,000
Subsidized Direct* Or FFEL** Stafford Loan	Loan: must be repaid	Subsidized: The U.S. Department of Education pays interest while the borrower is in school during grace deferment periods; student must be attending at least half-time and have financial need; fixed rate is set annually for new borrowers	\$3,500–\$8,500, on year in college
Unsubsidized Direct* Or FFEL** Stafford Loan	Loan: must be repaid	Unsubsidized: Borrower is responsible for all interest; must be enrolled at least half-time; financial need not required; fixed rate is set annually for new borrowers	\$5,500–\$20,500 (less any subsidized amounts received for same period), depending on grade level and dependency status
Direct* of FFEL** PLUS Loan	Loan: must be repaid	For parents of dependent undergraduate students and for graduate and professional students; students must be enrolled at least half-time; financial need not required	Maximum amount is cost of attendance minus any other financial aid student receives; no minimum amount
		Borrower must not have adverse credit history	
		PLUS Loans are unsubsidized, the borrower is responsible for all interest	

*This type of loan is from the William D. Ford Federal Direct Loan Program. The loan is known as a Federal Direct Stafford (or PLUS) Loan.

**This type of loan is from the Federal Family Education Loan (FFEL) Program. The loan is known as a FFEL (or Federal) Stafford (or PLUS) Loan.

Source: Funding Education Beyond High School: The Guide to Federal Student Aid: 2009–2010, U.S. Department of Education

Nine Important Steps for Successful Scholarship Searches

1. Start early in your junior year of high school and continue searching for scholarships through your senior year of college. You will find that some scholarships will be general and open to all majors and class levels. Others will be very specific for example: some scholarships are intended for college juniors, seniors or students in a declared field of study. New scholarships are always being created and you may not be eligible for some of them until you get into college and declare a major. Be aware of deadlines! You could miss out on a great opportunity if you wait too long to apply.

2. Before you begin looking, know what you are looking for. For example: If you are going to be an undergraduate student, do not complete research on a listing of financial aid for graduate students.

3. Search everywhere and dig for all sources of funding for your education. Some resources can aid your search are the following: Your high school counselor, community organizations, school clubs, the workplace, college financial aid and admission offices, libraries, and most importantly, the internet.

4. Be sure you understand the mission and purpose of the organization offering the scholarship. Spend time researching about the organization. Why are they providing the scholarship money? What is their focus? Who is on the selection committee?

5. Learn the requirements scholarship programs consider, such as academic achievements, hobbies, leadership accomplishments, and community involvement. Many programs look for students who are well rounded-not just those with good academic standing.

6. Follow the directions and pay attention to even the smallest details. This may seem logical, but it is important to be careful when you begin completing scholarship applications. For example:

- » Put the materials in the order requested
- » Do not include things that are not requested
- » Do not use a special folder, unless instructed to do so.

7. Be professional. Use a formal e-mail address. Do not use something that could be considered offensive.

8. Demonstrate confidence but remain polite and courteous. It is important to project a self-image that is confident and outgoing. It is also very important to demonstrate interest in the assistance, but always with respect and courtesy.

9. Do not pay for scholarship searches. There is a strong possibility you will receive offers in the mail or by phone to help find scholarship money for a fee. There is no need to pay for a service that you can do yourself.

Top 10 Tips for Winning Scholarship Application

1. Apply only if you are eligible. Read all the scholarship requirements and directions carefully. Make sure you are eligible before you send in your application.

2. Complete the application in full. If a question does not apply to you, note that on the application. Do not leave a question blank. Be sure to supply all additional supporting materials, including transcripts, letters of recommendation, and essays.

3. Follow directions. Provide everything that is required. However, do not supply things that are not requested — *you could be disqualified*.

4. Neatness counts. Always type your application, or if you must write by hand do so neatly and legibly. Make a couple of photocopies of all the forms before you fill them out. Use the copies as working drafts as you develop your application packet. If filling out an application online, make sure everything is typed properly.

5. Write an essay that makes a strong impression. The key to writing a strong essay is to be personal and specific. Include concrete details to make your experience come alive: the who, what, when, and where of your topic. The simplest experience can be monumental if you honestly present how you were affected.

6. Watch all deadlines. To help keep yourself on track, impose your own deadline that is at least two weeks prior to the official deadline. Use the buffer time to make sure everything is ready on time. Do not rely on extensions—very few scholarship providers allow them at all.

7. Make sure your application gets where it needs to go. Put your name (and Social Security number, if applicable) on all pages of the application. Pieces of your application may get lost unless they are clearly identified.

8. Keep a back-up file in case anything goes wrong. Before sending the application, make a copy of the entire packet. If your application goes astray, you will be able to reproduce it quickly.

9. Give it a final ‘once-over.’ Proofread the entire application carefully. Be on the lookout for misspelled words or grammatical errors. Ask a friend, teacher, or parent to proofread it as well.

10. Ask for help if you need it. If you have problems with the application, do not hesitate to call the funding organization.

¹ Source: Kay Peterson, Ph.D., Fastweb.com

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