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# FAFSA & Financial Aid Guide

A step-by-step overview to help your family navigate financial aid with clarity and confidence.

## Step 1 — Understand the Financial Aid Landscape

- Financial aid may include federal, state, institutional, and private funding
- Most families will need to complete the FAFSA
- Some colleges also require the CSS Profile for institutional aid

## Step 2 — Create Your FSA ID

- Both the student and parent must create an FSA ID
- This serves as your legal signature for the FAFSA
- You can create your FSA ID and complete the FAFSA on the same day
- Do not delay completing the FAFSA — timing matters for financial aid eligibility
- Financial aid is often awarded on a first-come, first-served basis at many institutions

## Step 3 — Gather Required Documents

- Social Security Numbers (if applicable)
- Federal tax returns (parent and student, if applicable)
- W-2 forms and records of income
- Records of untaxed income (if applicable)
- Bank statements and asset information
- Have a clear understanding of your assets, including savings, investments, and other financial resources, as this information directly impacts financial aid eligibility

## Step 4 — Complete the FAFSA

- Submit the FAFSA as early as possible
- List all colleges you are considering
- Use the IRS data transfer tool when available
- Review your FAFSA Submission Summary carefully

## Step 5 — Determine Whether the CSS Profile Is Required

- Some colleges, especially private institutions, require the CSS Profile

- Used to award institutional aid
- Review each college's financial aid requirements carefully

### **Step 6 — Complete the CSS Profile (If Required)**

- Gather detailed financial information
- Be prepared for more in-depth questions than FAFSA
- Submit by each college's deadline
- Check for additional documentation requirements

### **Step 7 — Compare Financial Aid Offers**

- Understand grants, scholarships, work-study, and loans
- Evaluate total cost — not just tuition
- Compare offers side-by-side

### **Step 8 — Continue Applying for Scholarships**

- Do not stop after submitting financial aid forms
- Apply for local, institutional, and national scholarships
- Track deadlines carefully

### **Common Mistakes to Avoid**

- Waiting too long to submit FAFSA or CSS Profile
- Assuming every college only requires FAFSA
- Missing financial aid deadlines
- Not reviewing aid offers carefully
- Stopping scholarship search too early
- Failing to complete the college's internal scholarship portal or application after being accepted (this is often where the largest institutional awards are offered)

**Financial aid is not just about completing forms — it's about understanding your options, meeting deadlines, and making informed decisions.**