

MEFA's Guide to Financial Aid

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There's a lot to know about college financial aid. The information in this guide will get you started. Financial aid is money that can help students pay for college, and it can come from federal and state governments, colleges and universities, and private organizations. In this guide you'll learn about grants and scholarships, federal work-study, student loans, financial aid applications such as the FAFSA® and CSS Profile™, scholarships, and financial aid in Massachusetts.

Resource Guide



Blog Post



Webinar



Web Page



Video



Tool



Podcast Episode

Financial Aid Overview

Get an overview of financial aid.

[Different Types of Student Financial Aid](#)

Learn about the three main types of financial aid: grants and scholarships, federal work-study, and student loans.

[Financial Aid 101](#)

Receive clarity on the entire college financial aid application process, including financial aid applications and types of financial aid, the factors that determine your aid eligibility, how colleges determine the amount of aid to offer, and more.

[Financial Aid 101 presented in Spanish](#)

[Applying for Financial Aid Checklist](#)

Research each school's financial aid requirements and deadlines, submit the FAFSA and other required applications, such as the CSS Profile or institutional form, and complete Verification if selected.

[Should I Apply for Financial Aid?](#)

Learn why to apply for financial aid even if you think you make too much money.

[Do You Know These Financial Aid Acronyms?](#)

Learn the meaning of FAFSA, SAI, COA, FWS, FSS, ED, CSS, FAA, PLUS, and MEFA.

[Why You Should Visit These Federal Financial Aid Websites](#)

Websites include StudentAid.gov, fafsa.gov, StudentAid.gov/fsa-id, and MyEDDebt.ed.gov.

[How to Maximize Financial Aid](#)

Tips include apply on time, submit the correct applications, update your colleges with changes, comply with Verification, and submit separate applications for merit aid.

[Estimate College Costs with Net Price Calculators](#)

Use the Net Price Calculator to estimate which colleges you can afford.

[What You Need to Know About Merit-Based Financial Aid](#)

Answers to merit-based aid questions include: What is it? Does every school offer it? Will I receive it every year? How do I apply for it? What else should I know about it?

[Will Applying for Financial Aid Affect My Chances for Admission?](#)

Some colleges are need-blind, while others only consider financial need when filling the last spots or pulling from the waitlist.



FAFSA

The FAFSA is the main application for college financial aid.



[Understanding the FAFSA](#)

This webinar provides a detailed overview of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).



[What is the FAFSA?](#)

Learn when the FAFSA opens, how to get an FSA ID, what information you must list on the FAFSA, and how to submit it to schools.



[A FAFSA Roadmap: Tips to Keep in Mind](#)

Tips include utilizing the information icons, reporting a 0 rather than leaving an answer blank, not using nicknames, and using an email address you check frequently.



[Do You Know These Key FAFSA Terms?](#)

Terms include FSA ID, Federal School Code, Student Aid Index, FAFSA Submission Summary, and FUTURE Act Direct Data Exchange.



[Free FAFSA Help](#)

Resources include the FAFSA Festival, Mass.gov/financialaid, MassEdCO, MEFA's Understanding the FAFSA webinar, and Federal Student Aid's videos.



[FAFSA Simplification](#)

Learn about the modifications to the FASFA, including reducing the number of questions, modifying the treatment of families with more than one child in college, and changing the name of the Expected Family Contribution (EFC) to the Student Aid Index (SAI).



[The FAFSA Has Been Sent! Now What?](#)

Learn how to download your FAFSA Submission Summary, calculate your SAI, and complete Verification.



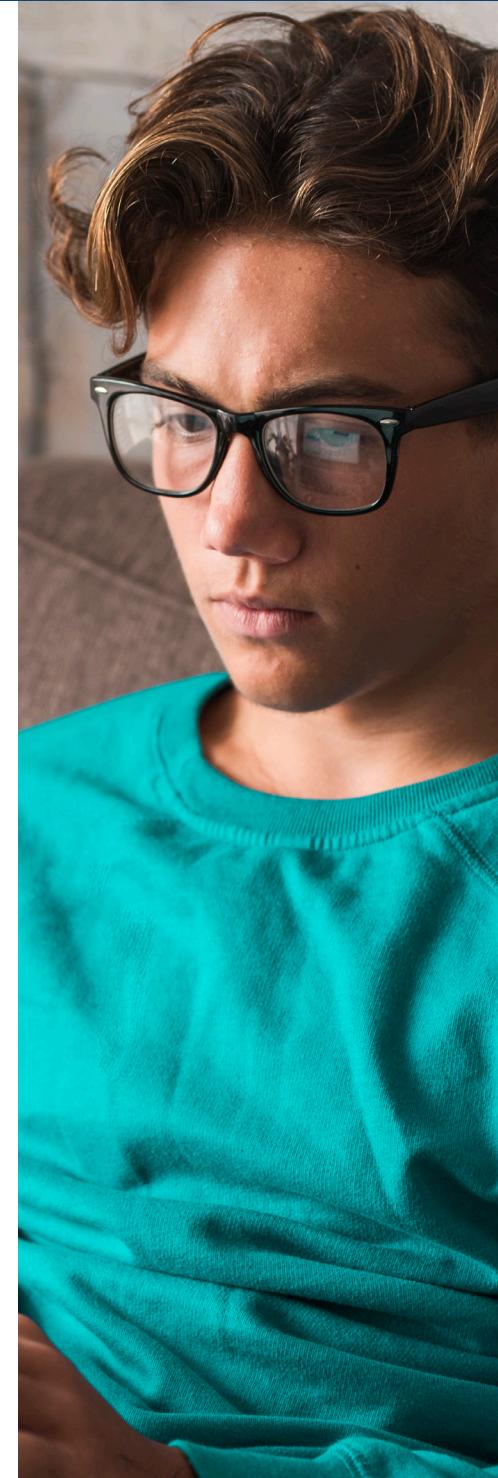
[In What Order Should I List Colleges on the FAFSA?](#)

Learn how to list schools on your FAFSA, if colleges can see the other schools you have listed, and how the order may affect your MassGrant.



[Do I Include This on the FAFSA?](#)

Learn if you report these items on the FAFSA, including a multi-family unit, unemployment, cars, boats, credit card debt, life insurance, Roth IRA contributions and withdrawals, and more.



CSS Profile

In addition to the FAFSA, some schools also require families to complete an additional application, the CSS Profile.



[What to Know About the CSS Profile](#)

This webinar introduces the nuts and bolts of the CSS Profile, a financial aid application required by roughly 200 colleges, universities, and scholarship agencies across the country.



[Tips for Completing the CSS Profile](#)

Tips include preparing, knowing your deadlines, understanding what's different, sharing your special circumstances, and knowing when to get help.



[Questions Parents Asked About the CSS Profile](#)

Learn all about the CSS Profile including what the CBFInAid ID is, how to add schools after submitting, how to correct mistakes, how to report 529 accounts, and more.



[Completing the CSS Profile](#)

Learn the differences between the CSS Profile and the FAFSA, how noncustodial parents file the CSS Profile, and why it's in families' best interest to provide financial aid offices with as much information as possible.



[Using IDOC in the Financial Aid Process](#)

Learn about IDOC, a service used by colleges and universities across the country to collect financial forms, including tax returns, W-2s, and 1099s.



[Are You Required to Use IDOC for Financial Aid?](#)

Learn how to upload documents to IDOC, which documents should be uploaded, and where to find more information on IDOC.



Completing Financial Aid Forms

Learn tips and helpful information on completing these forms and knowing what to report.

-  [What You Need to Complete Your Financial Aid Applications](#)
Items needed include an FSA ID, a College Board username and password, a list of colleges where the student is applying, Social Security numbers, W-2 form(s), and untaxed income records.
-  [90 Seconds with MEFA: Creating an FSA ID](#)
Learn how to create your FSA ID, who needs to create an FSA ID, and what your FSA ID will be used for even after college.
-  [Reporting Income on Financial Aid Applications](#)
We speak with a Director of Student Financial Services to learn what income gets reported, what happens if income changes due to a job loss, how to report income if you're self-employed, and what happens if you withdraw funds from a retirement account.
-  [Defining Assets on Financial Aid Applications](#)
Learn what assets you don't have to report on the FAFSA (primary home, retirement savings, life insurance) as well as what assets you do have to report (savings and checking accounts, investments, other property owned), as well as details on what to report on the CSS Profile.
-  [When Life Situations Change, How Do You Complete the FAFSA?](#)
Instructions are provided for how to complete the FAFSA if you've experienced a marital status change or a drop in income.
-  [How Do I Add Schools to the FAFSA?](#)
To add schools to your FAFSA, log in to the application, navigate to the School Selection section, add new colleges to your list while making sure to remove any existing schools if necessary, and submit the application again.
-  [Making Changes to Your FAFSA](#)
Learn how to correct mistakes, how to resubmit your FAFSA, and what to do about corrections on the CSS Profile.



Financial Aid Offers

Learn what you can expect to see on a financial aid offer and how to compare them to each other.



[Sample Financial Aid Offer](#)

It's important that you know the types of aid being offered, understand how to read a financial aid offer, and are aware of information that may not be included in the offer.



[What's Included in a Financial Aid Offer?](#)

Financial aid offers may include costs, grants and scholarships, work-study, college loans, private scholarships, and factors that determined your financial aid eligibility.



[What Can You Expect to See in a Financial Aid Offer?](#)

Learn what Grade 12 students and their families can expect to see on financial aid offers, including grants, scholarships, and work-study, and what the difference is between each type of loan that may be listed on a financial aid offer.



[Answering Your Top Questions about Financial Aid Offers](#)

Learn about work-study, the John and Abigail Adams Scholarship, how scholarships affect financial aid, subsidized vs unsubsidized loans, Federal Direct Loan limits and interest rates, MA state aid, and how to use your college savings funds.



[Making Sense of Financial Aid Offers: Our Top Ten FAQs](#)

Learn what to do if you haven't yet received your financial aid offer, why the offers may differ at each college, how work-study works, how to communicate special circumstances, and more.



[College Cost Calculator](#)

Use the College Cost Calculator when you receive financial aid offers to compare the aid you receive and determine your estimated college costs and balance due at each prospective college.



Financial Aid Appeals

If you need more money from a college, you may consider appealing your financial aid offer.

[What to Know About Financial Aid Appeals](#)

Learn the steps to take to appeal, if you can ask for a larger merit scholarship, if you can appeal your offer each year, the recommended time to appeal, and more.

[Questions and Answers about Financial Aid Appeals](#)

We answer common questions about appealing, including if you need a specific reason to appeal, how the process works, if it ever hurts to appeal, if you can submit multiple appeals, and more.

[90 Seconds with MEFA: Appealing Financial Aid Offers](#)

Learn five tips to use as you navigate the appeals process and try to secure more financial aid than was originally offered.

[Financial Aid Appeals and Paying for College](#)

Learn the steps to appeal a financial aid offer, timelines for the college decision and bill, and the cost differences associated with student housing

[Communicating Special Circumstances to the Financial Aid Office](#)

Learn what qualifies as a special or extenuating circumstance, what you need to submit to your college, and when to submit it.

[Can I Ask a Financial Aid Office for More Money?](#)

We asked financial aid administrators at three different Massachusetts colleges how they would respond if a perspective student appealed for more financial aid.



Paying for College in Massachusetts

Massachusetts offers many opportunities to reduce college costs as you earn your degree.

[Paying for College in Massachusetts](#)

Learn about key scholarship facts, how to use online search engines to find scholarships, and plenty of helpful tips to use in your search.

[5 Ways to Save on New England College Costs](#)

Options include MassTransfer/Commonwealth Commitment, Tuition Break, University of Maine Flagship Match Scholarship Program, UMass Lowell Accelerated Degrees, and Clark University Accelerated BA/Master's.

[The Inside Scoop on the Commonwealth Commitment](#)

The manager the Commonwealth Commitment program explains her role at the Department of Higher Education, how Reverse Transfer Pathway helps students, the benefits of the Commonwealth Commitment program, and how it compares to programs in other states.

[MassTransfer](#)

Learn how MassTransfer guarantees transfer admission from an associate to a bachelor's degree program and the powerful savings it offers for students and their families.

[Save on the Cost of College](#)

Wendy Lindsay from the New England Board of Higher Education breaks down the resources available to students in Massachusetts to help save on the cost of college, including Tuition Break, New England State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA), and Open Educational Resources (OER).

[What to Know About the John & Abigail Adams Scholarship](#)

Learn what scores students must receive on their MCAS in order to qualify, what the scholarship covers, how to apply the award, how to maintain it, and how much it's worth at each school.

[What is the Stanley Z. Koplik Certificate of Mastery Award?](#)

Learn about this tuition credit awarded to Massachusetts students who receive high scores on the MCAS.

[How to Receive a Discount on Out-of-State Tuition in New England](#)

Jonathan Gowin, Director of Tuition Break, discusses how the program allows New England residents to receive a discount on an out-of-state New England public college or university.



Student Aid Index (SAI)

Your SAI is intended to represent your family's financial strength and ability to pay for college.



[What is the Student Aid Index \(SAI\)?](#)

Learn about the SAI, a calculated number based on the data that a family inputs into the FAFSA designed to represent the family's financial strength and their ability to pay for college.



[Facts about the Student Aid Index \(SAI\)](#)

Learn about the SAI, a calculated amount reflecting the family's financial strength and their ability to pay for college.



[Here's How Colleges Calculate Your SAI](#)

We break down the SAI formula, including how to determine both your Parent Contribution and Student Contribution based on income and assets.



[Using Our Student Aid Index \(SAI\) Calculator](#)

Calculate your SAI by entering your state of residence, the number of people in your household, information about the finances of the student's parents, and financial information for the student.



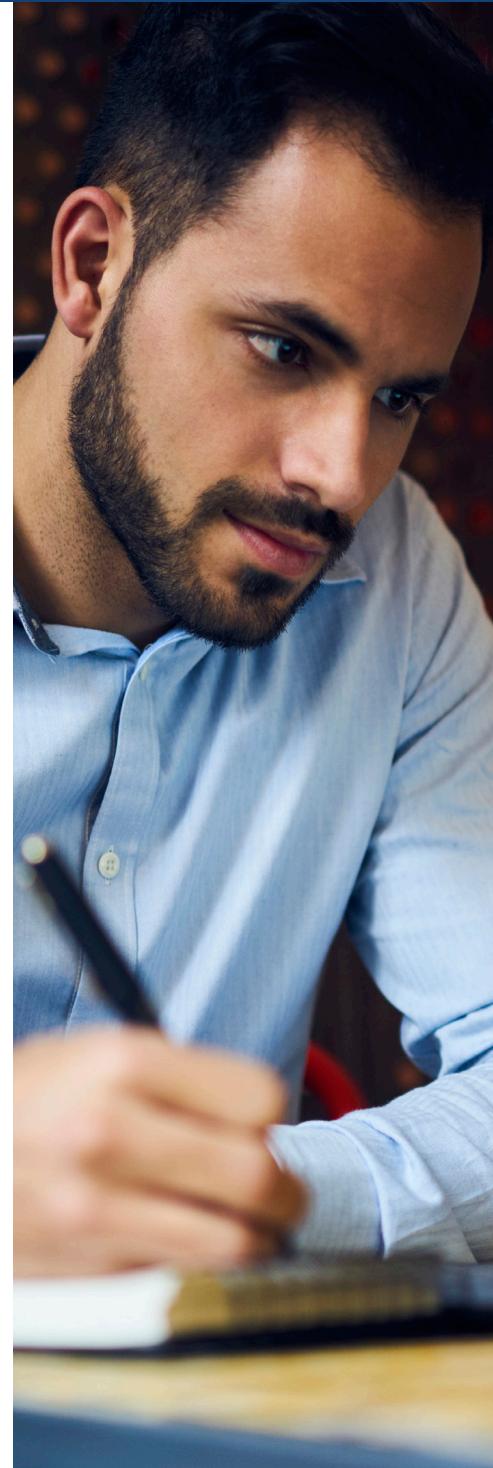
[Understanding Your Student Aid Index \(SAI\)](#)

Topics include defining the SAI, the SAI formula, where to find your SAI, and multiple SAIs.



[Financial Aid Tips from a MEFA Presenter](#)

A MEFA Financial Aid 101 presenter explains how the SAI works.



Scholarships

Scholarships can help with college costs. Learn how to find scholarships and tips on applying.



[Private Scholarships for Students](#)

Learn about private scholarships, where to look for them, and tips on applying.



[Applying for College Scholarships](#)

Learn key scholarship facts, how to use online search engines to find scholarships, and helpful tips.



[MEFA Scholarship Blog Posts](#)

Review our scholarship blog posts and apply to any that may be a good fit for you.



[90 Seconds with MEFA: Scholarships](#)

Learn where to find both local and national scholarships and helpful tips to use in your search.



[Misconceptions About Scholarships](#)

Scholarships can be an important part of the college financing puzzle, but it's important to be realistic about how much they will cover and how competitive they can be to earn.



[How to Search for College Scholarships Online](#)

Tips include creating a spreadsheet, starting local then expanding, searching scholarship databases, and creating an account.



[Finding Scholarships with MEFA Pathway](#)

Learn what MEFA Pathway is, what sets it apart from other online scholarship platforms, what kind of scholarships you can search for, and how to get started.



[8 Scholarship Tips](#)

Tips include starting early, being organized, writing an essay, being patient, and understanding terms.



[6 Tips for Earning College Scholarships](#)

Tips include starting with your guidance office, not paying for a search tool, trying for scholarships that require an essay, and seeking out professional associations.



[Will This Scholarship Affect My Financial Aid?](#)

Learn how to report scholarships to a college and how to fit scholarships into your financial aid.



Financial Aid for Students with Special Circumstances

Learn what financial aid is available for students with special circumstances and how to apply for it.

[The College Process for Undocumented Students](#)

Learn about immigration policies and statuses eligible and ineligible for Federal Student Aid.

[The College Process for Undocumented Students presented in Spanish](#)

[Undocumented Students and the Quest for a College Education](#)

Learn about college opportunities, including scholarships and financial aid, for undocumented students.

[Financial Aid for Undocumented Students or Parents](#)

Get tips on how you should file the FAFSA, who you should contact at the colleges you are applying to, and which loans you can borrow.

[Financial Aid for International Students](#)

Learn how international students can complete the FAFSA and CSS Profile, where they can search for scholarships, which loan options are available to them, and what type of schools can provide the most financial aid for them.

[Applying for Financial Aid with International Parents](#)

International parents will need to convert their income and they will complete the financial aid applications differently depending on their citizenship status.

[Applying for Financial Aid as an Independent Student](#)

Learn what classifies a college student as independent, including being married, older than 23, a Veteran, or an emancipated minor, as well as how students can apply for a dependency override.

[Applying for Financial Aid When Parents Are Divorced](#)

Learn how to file the FAFSA and the CSS Profile, and what to do if the noncustodial parent is not available.

[College Resources for Veterans](#)

Nick Charrette, Assistant Director of Veterans Upward Bound, explains the different types of GI Bills and how veterans can maximize their education benefits.

[Using Veterans' Education Benefits to Finance a College Education](#)

Learn about different GI Bill types, Chapters 30, 31, and 33, VR&E benefits, in-state tuition waivers, and how to complete the FAFSA.



The logo for MEFA, featuring the word "mefa" in a large, lowercase, blue serif font. A registered trademark symbol (®) is positioned at the top right of the letter "a".

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