Planning for FAFSA Night and Beyond

FAFSA Tracker

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About this Guide

This guide is meant to serve a printable companion to the FAFSA Tracker School Resources - Planning for FAFSA Night and Beyond page.

FAFSA Tracker

The FAFSA Tracker is a free application created by Data Insight Partners to support the advancement of Nevada students towards college and career readiness.

Data Insight Partners

Data Insight Partners, LLC is a team of dedicated analytic professionals with over a decade of experience in education who believe that transformational change can be supported and accelerated by investigating, monitoring, and reporting on issues of strategic importance. This can be accomplished through purposeful planning, quantitative analysis, and data visualization. These beliefs and this work can directly support and contribute to the mission of your organization.

Planning for a FAFSA Night and Beyond

The plan below offers: (1) strategies and resources for hosting a FAFSA Night at your school; and (2) additional ideas for encouraging FAFSA completion, many of which can be implemented even after FAFSA Night has taken place.

On FAFSA night, students and/or their parents would participate in a guided session that allows them to complete the FAFSA on-site. If possible, FAFSA Night should be facilitated by both school staff members and community volunteers, including a financial aid expert from a local university.

This plan should be considered as a set of guidelines, rather than a script to be followed precisely. You might consider modifying the sequence of events or using alternative resources. Even if you cannot implement all of the strategies we offer, any efforts you make could go a long way!

The plan is designed to support high school seniors graduating in Spring 2018 with FAFSA applications for their Freshman year of college (2018-19). Again, please modify as needed!

For an additional FAFSA Night plan to review, check out this great planning resource offered by the US Department of Education:

https://financialaidtoolkit.ed.gov/resources/how-to-host-a-financial-aid-event-in-your-community.pdf

FAFSA Night Plan

Prior to the First Day of School

1. **Set the date**
   We suggest hosting a FAFSA Night early in the school year, shortly after the first day that FAFSA can be submitted (October 1). Students who submit their FAFSA early will have the best opportunity to correct any processing errors and meet the deadlines for all of the schools and scholarships to which they apply.

   In this example, FAFSA Night will be held on Monday, October 9th, 2017.

   We will assume that the first day of school is Monday, August 14th, 2017, in order to be consistent with the Clark County School District 2017-18 Calendar.

2. Set a target

Target an overall FAFSA completion rate for high school seniors. Your target completion rate should be ambitious yet attainable – certainly, higher than completion rates from previous years.

Review this great presentation by the Road Map Project (2015) to see targets that were set in: (1) Detroit (Slide 20); (2) Memphis (Slide 24); and Kentucky (Slide 28).

3. Prepare to Track Student Progress

Whether you use a spreadsheet or more sophisticated dashboard, keeping track of student progress will help you to focus on student demographics and follow up with individual students as needed. See additional advice from the Road Map Project (2015) on Slides 13, 22, and 24).

4. Create FAFSA Night section on school website

The website should include the following information:

- Initial mention of FAFSA Night (date, time, location, purpose)
- Where students can get help with their FAFSA applications (e.g. counseling office; this information will be specific to your school)

Answers to the frequently asked questions (below); see Financial Aid Toolkit offered by the US Department of Education (USDOE)

- What is financial aid and FAFSA?
- Who is eligible for financial aid?
- What types of financial aid are available?
- What information and documents are required to complete the FAFSA?

5. Create FAFSA Night section on your school Facebook profile

- Mention:
    - Date, time, location, and purpose of FAFSA Night
    - FAFSA Night website and Facebook sites
    - Where students can go to get help with completing their FAFSA
- Be sure to target both students and adults in your communication.

- Additional resources:
  Gear Up TN Planning Resources (pp. 11-12)
  US Department of Education - Helpful Social Media Tools to Promote FAFSA Completion

6. Initial Tweet about FAFSA Night

- Mention:
  - Date, time, location, and purpose of FAFSA Night
  - FAFSA Night website and Facebook sites
  - Where students can go to get help with completing their FAFSA
- Additional resources:
  US Department of Education - Helpful Social Media Tools to Promote FAFSA Completion

7. Assemble student & parent contact info

- Use available information on high school seniors to set up FAFSA Night email listserv and list of recipients for text messaging. You could locate this info in your progress-tracking tool.

8. Recruit volunteers

- Ask your principal for time to discuss FAFSA Night during faculty meetings; recruit colleagues
- If possible, be sure to recruit at least one bilingual volunteer who could communicate with students and families in their home language.
- Send invitation letter to community partners, including local businesses, non-profits, and financial aid offices at local universities

Sample invitation letter: Gear Up TN Planning Resources (See p. 10)

First Week of School (Week of Monday, August 14)

9. Send FAFSA Night letter home

- Send letter via hardcopy and email; consider using school newsletter if available

- Mention in the letter: (1) Date, time, location, and purpose of FAFSA Night; (2) FAFSA Night website and Facebook profile; (3) Where students can go to get help with completing their FAFSA

- Check out some sample parent letters offered by You Can Afford College. Some of these examples pertain specifically to FAFSA Night; others focus more generally on FAFSA-related topics.

Second Week of School (Week of Monday, August 21)

10. Send introductory FAFSA Night text message to parents and students

- Mention: (1) Date, time, location, and purpose of FAFSA Night; (2) FAFSA Night website and Facebook profile; (3) Where students can go to get help with completing their FAFSA

- Sample text message: Gear Up TN Planning Resources (p. 13)

- Additions ideas for texting: Education Week blogs (2016)

Third Through Fifth Weeks of School (Monday, August 28 – Friday, September 15)

11. Give brief classroom presentations on financial aid and FAFSA Night

- Consider recruiting your colleagues, local volunteers, or and student leaders to assist you.
- Presentation resources:
  Financial Aid Toolkit Handouts
  Federal Student Aid Videos

Sixth Week of School (Week of Monday, September 18)

12. FAFSA Night reminders and signage

- Reminder email and text message to: (1) Parents and (2) Students
  Mention:
  - FAFSA Night now only 3 weeks away!
  - Date, time, location of FAFSA Night
  - Links to school website and additional resources

- Reminder email to community volunteers
- Post signs on FAFSA Night in school hallways (electronic and/or paper signs)

  Sample signs and promotions:

  - Financial Aid Toolkit - Infographics
  - Financial Aid Toolkit - You Tube Videos
  - Financial Aid Toolkit - Other Resources
  - Financial Aid Toolkit - Poster Template
  - Gear Up TN Planning Resources (p. 15)

- Advertise FAFSA Night on school marquee

Sample marquee message: Gear Up TN Planning Resources (p. 13)

Seventh Week of School (Week of Monday, September 25)

13. FAFSA Night morning announcements

Have faculty and student leaders promote FAFSA Night in the morning announcements

- Announcement scripts used by Baltimore City Public Schools

Eighth Week of School (Week of Monday, October 2)

14. Final reminders and preparation

- Final emails and text messages to students and parents
  Mention:

  - FAFSA Night now only 1 week away!
  - Date, time, location of FAFSA Night
  - Links to school website and additional resources

- Make sure that all necessary equipment (e.g. computers) is available and in working condition
- See checklist below for additional ideas:

  Gear Up TN Planning Resources (p. 17)

Ninth Week of School (Monday, October 9)

15. Host FAFSA Night!

- Be sure to use a sign-in sheet: Gear Up TN Planning Resources (p. 20)

- Take pictures and post online! (Be sure to obtain consent: Gear Up TN Planning Resources (p. 16).

Beyond FAFSA Night

Tenth Week of School (Week of Monday, October 16)

16. FAFSA Night follow-up

- Send thank you emails to parents, students, and community volunteers
- Provide families with an option for asking follow-up questions (phone, email, office hours, etc.)

Additional Strategies You Could Use Throughout the Year

17. Student Recognition & Rewards

Road Map Project (2015) discusses the following strategies for recognizing and rewarding students who complete the FAFSA:

- Instagram Campaign – counselors verify student completed the FAFSA; students post hashtag to Instagram (used in Dallas Road Map Project (2015); Slide 14)
- Raffle – conduct a raffle for students who complete the FAFSA; offer a prize for students whose names are randomly drawn (used in Detroit Road Map Project (2015); Slide 21)
- Discount prom tickets for students who complete the FAFSA (used in Detroit Road Map Project (2015); Slide 21)
- Offer a reward to the senior homeroom/advisory with the highest FAFSA completion rate (used in Detroit Road Map Project (2015); Slide 21)

18. Student Leadership

- After students complete the FAFSA, recruit them to serve as FAFSA mentors for other students; get students involved in peer-to-peer text messaging (used in Dallas; Slide 14)
  Establish a Student Ambassador Team to assist with leading promotions and events; for a Student Ambassador Toolkit, see You Can Afford College

19. Year-Round Advertising

- Use a screen saver image to encourage FAFSA completion year-round (Road Map Project (2015) Slide 15)
- Ask faculty members or students to wear FAFSA tee-shirts to school on designated days, or whenever they want (used in Houston Road Map Project (2015); Slide 22)

20. Year-Round Info Sessions

- Designate particular days of the week for students to discuss financial literacy with local volunteers or adults at school. For example: "Tuition Tuesdays" (used in Dallas Road Map Project (2015); Slide 14) or "Lunch and Learn" (used in Detroit Road Map Project (2015); Slide 20).
- Ask community centers and faith-based organizations to get involved by distributing resources (used in Memphis Road Map Project (2015); Slide 26)

21. Make it mandatory

- Consider making FAFSA completion a graduation requirement (used in Detroit Road Map Project (2015); Slide 21)
- Make FAFSA completion an official assignment for an academic course (used in Detroit Road Map Project (2015); Slide

22. Extended text messaging campaign

- Partner with local colleges and universities to set up a texting tool that allows high school seniors who have been accepted to college to communicate with college counselors regarding key deadlines and related information.

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