

What is the FAFSA?

The *Free Application for Federal Student Aid*, or **FAFSA**, is used to apply for federal student financial aid, including grants, loans, and work-study. In addition, it is used by most states and schools to award non-federal student financial aid.

How does it work?

Completing the FAFSA is the first step in the financial aid process. Once you submit it, your information is processed. Then an electronic copy of your information is sent to all of the schools you listed in Step Six. Then a paper report, called a *Student Aid Report*, or **SAR**, is mailed to you. It is important to review your SAR when you receive it to make sure all of your information is correct and to provide any necessary corrections or additional information.

Then your information is entered into a formula from the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended, and the result is your Expected Family Contribution, or **EFC**. This represents the amount your family is expected to contribute towards the cost of your education (although this amount may not exactly match the amount you and your family end up contributing). If your information is complete, your SAR will contain your EFC.

The schools you list on Step Six receive your EFC along with the rest of your information. They use the EFC to prepare a financial aid package to help you meet your financial need. **Financial need** is the difference between your EFC and your school's **cost of attendance** (which can include living expenses), as determined by the school. If you believe that you have special circumstances that should be taken into account, such as unusual medical or dental expenses or a significant change in income from one year to the next, contact the financial aid administrator at the schools to which you are applying.

Any financial aid you are eligible to receive will be paid to you through your school. Typically, your school will first use the aid to pay tuition, fees, and room and board (if provided by the school). Any remaining need is paid to you for your other expenses.

Where can I get more information?

The best place for information about student financial aid is the financial aid office at the school you plan to attend. The financial aid administrator can tell you about student aid available from your state, the school itself, and other sources.

The Internet is an incredible resource for financial aid information. Many schools have information about financial aid on their websites. You can also get free information from the US Department of Education's website at www.ed.gov/studentaid, including access to free publications such as *Funding Your Education* and *The Student Guide*, or from www.students.gov.

You can call Federal Student Information Center for Information at 1-800-4FED-AID (1-800-433-3243) seven days a week, from 8:00 a.m. through midnight Eastern Time.

You can also find free information about federal, state, institutional, and private student aid in your local library's reference section (usually listed under "student aid" or "financial aid"). There may be information available from foundations, religious organizations, community organizations, and civic groups, as well as organizations related to your field of interest, such as the American Medical Association or American Bar Association. Check with your parents' employers or unions to see if they award scholarships or have tuition payment plans.