

The Application Process: FAFSA to ISIR

The laws governing the Federal Student Aid (FSA) programs require that a person apply for aid with a form provided by the U.S. Department of Education (ED) and that no fee be charged for processing it. This form is the “Free Application for Federal Student Aid” (FAFSA), and its online version is FAFSA on the Web.

To be considered for federal student aid, a student must complete a FAFSA. It collects financial and other information used to calculate the expected family contribution (EFC) and to determine a student’s eligibility through computer matches with other agencies.

The FAFSA is the only form students must fill out to apply for Title IV aid. A school cannot require extra information from students except for verification or resolution of conflicting information. However, a school may require additional information for other purposes, such as packaging private or institutional aid. If the school collects additional information that affects Title IV eligibility, it must take the information into account when awarding Title IV aid.

TYPES OF APPLICATIONS

Most students use *FAFSA on the Web* to apply for federal student aid, but there are other options.

FAFSA on the Web (FOTW)

Students can complete an application online at www.fafsa.gov and send it directly to the Central Processing System (CPS). They can also correct any of their previously submitted data. Help is available for students online or by calling the Federal Student Aid Information Center (FSAIC) at 1-800-4-FED-AID (1-800-433-3243).

FAA Access to CPS Online

You can submit a student’s application data at FAA Access to CPS Online (<https://faaaccess.ed.gov>). You can also connect to the site through EDExpress.

Before submitting the data, print out the signature page/FAFSA summary for the student (and parent) to sign, or have the student fill out and sign a paper FAFSA. As noted at the end of *Chapter 2*, you will need to retain either the signed signature page/summary or signed FAFSA for your records, even if the student doesn’t receive aid or attend your school.

FAFSA on the Web Worksheet

To make using the Web application easier, ED makes available the FAFSA on the Web worksheet. The worksheet can be printed from the website, and schools can order bulk quantities on the Web at www.fsapubs.gov.

Advantages of electronic filing

We strongly recommend electronic applications over the paper FAFSA because of the following benefits:

- Faster processing
- Fewer errors and rejected applications because internal and end-of-entry data edits ensure that required fields are completed and conflicts are resolved prior to submission
- Skip logic, which helps “shorten” the form by allowing applicants to skip over questions that don’t pertain to them
- Availability of online help

Free CPS technical support for schools or their destination points

1-800-330-5947
CPSSAIG@ed.gov

Websites for students

www.fafsa.gov

- FAFSA on the Web
- Make corrections to the application
- Check status of application
- Online SAR
- FAFSA4caster, which allows future college students to estimate what their EFC might be and what kind of federal student aid they might be eligible for when they apply for aid

www.pin.ed.gov

PIN website

www.studentaid.ed.gov

Higher education portal for students

Paper FAFSA

Schools can place limited orders (at www.fsapubs.org) of up to 50 copies of the paper FAFSA. Students can request a copy from the FSAIC by calling 1-800-433-3243. Another paper option is the PDF FAFSA, which students can get at the FOTW site. They can print the PDF and fill it out by hand, or they can type their data on the PDF before printing and mailing it.

FAFSA on the phone

Students who have limited or no Internet access and face pressing deadlines can choose to complete and submit their application by calling 1-800-433-3243, telling a representative they would like to fill out their FAFSA over the phone and providing their information. This typically takes about half an hour. Students will receive a paper student aid report (SAR) 7–10 days later, which they (and their parents, if appropriate) must sign and return. Because this is not the preferred method to apply for aid, it should be used sparingly and only by those students identified above.

The FSA personal identification number (PIN)

The FSA PIN, along with other identifiers, gives students Internet access to their information in FSA systems. Students (and parents) can get a PIN at www.pin.ed.gov or by choosing to apply for a PIN when completing a FAFSA online. The PIN is available to use immediately to sign the FAFSA; once the application passes the Social Security Administration (SSA) match, the PIN becomes fully functional. Applicants can then use the PIN to:

- access and electronically sign a renewal *FAFSA on the Web*;
- correct their FAFSA information online, including using the IRS Data Retrieval tool to populate tax-related fields;
- view their SAR online and print it;
- review their financial aid history as maintained in the National Student Loan Data System (NSLDS);
- access Direct loan information and tools, including entrance counseling at www.studentloans.gov, exit counseling at www.nsls.ed.gov, and the consolidation website at www.loanconsolidation.ed.gov;
- electronically sign master promissory notes at www.studentloans.gov and TEACH grant agreements to serve at www.teach-ats.ed.gov and complete the PLUS request process at www.studentloans.gov.

Students without a PIN will automatically receive one if their application was signed, passed the data match with the SSA, and had a complete postal or e-mail address. They will receive a paper mailer with the PIN or an e-mail (if an e-mail address was given) with a secure link to their PIN online.

Students should not give their PIN to anyone. No person or entity may request, obtain, or use a student's PIN for submitting a FAFSA on behalf of the student. The unauthorized use of a PIN by anyone but the owner may result in the deactivation of the PIN or the invalidation of signed documents, including FAFSAs and promissory notes.

FAFSA on the Web demo

You can use the FAFSA on the Web demonstration to train financial aid staff or to show students how to use the online application. Go to <http://fafsademo.test.ed.gov> and type in eddemo for the user name and fafsatest for the password.

Renewal FAFSA

When a renewal-eligible student who had a valid application the year before enters his personal identifiers on FOTW, he will be asked if he wants to pre-fill some of the application with data from the prior year. By choosing the FAFSA Renewal option, he can review each pre-filled item, correct any that has changed, and provide new information as needed. If an aid administrator’s school does not appear on the renewal application, she can use the student’s data release number (DRN) to access the application on FAA Access.

In January and February 2013, most students will automatically receive a renewal reminder by e-mail if they provided an e-mail address in the previous application year or by regular mail if they did not. The reminder tells students that they can reapply for aid on the Web and that if they forgot their PIN, they can retrieve it online.

Renewal FAFSA and students from Palau, the Marshall Islands, and Micronesia

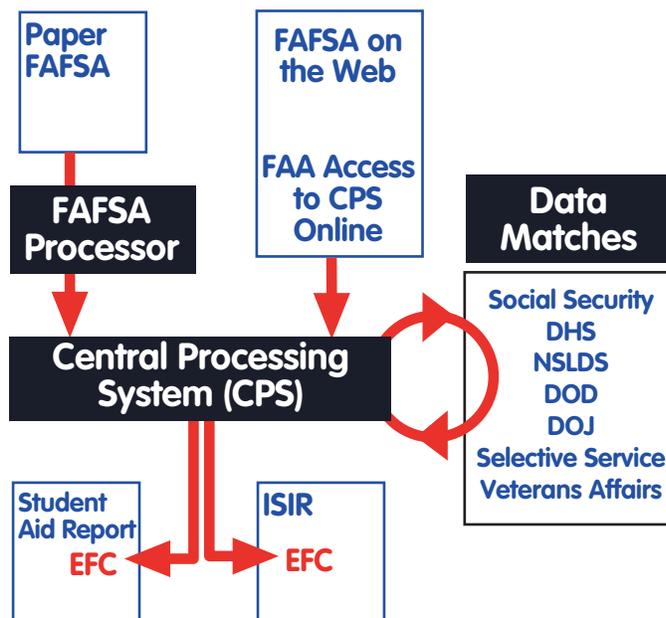
Because students from the above Pacific islands, known collectively as the Freely Associated States, are not eligible for a PIN (for lack of an SSN), they can’t pre-fill data on FAFSA on the Web. But an FAA can use FAA Access to CPS Online to enter and access renewal applications for these students if they meet the renewal application eligibility requirements.

PROCESSING THE FAFSA

Paper FAFSAs go to the FAFSA processor for data entry and then to the CPS. Applications that are signed and submitted on the Web go directly to the CPS. If a Web applicant indicated she would sign electronically later or send a paper signature page, her FAFSA goes to a signature hold file for up to 14 days. If some type of signature is not received in that time, the application will be sent to the CPS but will be rejected; it won’t be processed again until a signature is received.

The CPS uses application data to calculate the EFC and to match against several databases: those of NSLDS, the Department of Defense, the Department of Justice, the Social Security Administration, and the Department of Veterans Affairs, as well as the Department of Homeland Security’s database of noncitizens and the Selective Service System registration database.

The CPS also checks the application for possible inconsistencies and mistakes. For instance, if a dependent student reported the parents’ marital status as married but reported the household size as “2,” the edit checks



From FAFSA to SAR/ISIR

2013–2014 Summary of Changes for the Application Processing System

This is posted each autumn. Go to www.ifap.ed.gov and select Publications > Summary of Changes for the Application Processing System > 2013–2014.

would catch the inconsistency. Even when data is inconsistent, the CPS may be able to calculate an EFC based on assumptions. For applications that your school submits through FAA Access, you can anticipate certain assumptions and correct or override information on the student's FAFSA submission. Students who submit applications using FOTW can also correct or override some of the CPS edits before submitting the application.

OUTPUT DOCUMENTS: THE SAR AND ISIR

After processing is complete, the CPS produces output documents or records that show the information the student originally provided, the EFC, the results of the eligibility matches, and information about any inconsistencies identified through the CPS edits. If the CPS was unable to calculate an EFC, the output record will not show one.

There are two types of output documents: the *Institutional Student Information Record* (ISIR), which is made available electronically to the schools the student listed on the FAFSA (or added later) and their state agency, and the *Student Aid Report* (SAR), which is sent to the student or made available to her online.

You will receive an ISIR for the student only if she includes your school on her FAFSA. If your school is not listed, you can request an ISIR for her through FAA Access by adding your federal school code if you have her DRN. The DRN appears in the upper right corner of the first page of the SAR and at the top of some of the correctable pages. The DRN and PIN are different: the DRN authorizes your access to the student's application information; the PIN is the student's personal code, which she should give to no one. A school may ask for the student's DRN, but it should never request the PIN.

You are required to receive ISIRs and to accept SARs from students, but you cannot require them to submit SARs in order to receive aid. If you don't have an ISIR for a student, your federal school code must be added to her record so an ISIR is sent to you. We recommend making corrections electronically via FOTW (the student) or FAA Access (the school); however, you can require students to use a SAR to make corrections. If you don't have an ISIR for a student who provided a SAR or SAR Acknowledgement, you must use the SAR or the acknowledgement to award and disburse the student aid. Again, you must also ensure that your school code is added to the CPS record for the student (see page 87).

The SAR arrives in one of three ways. (1) Students who give an e-mail address, whether on a paper FAFSA or an electronic application (FOTW or FAA Access), will receive an e-mail with a link to an online SAR they can access by providing their SSN, date of birth, and first two letters of their last name. (2) Students who don't give an e-mail address and who apply with a paper application will receive a paper SAR. (3) Students who apply electronically and don't provide an e-mail address will receive a SAR Acknowledgement, which has fewer and less detailed comments than the SAR and which can't be used for corrections as the SAR can. If a student or parent signature is missing, students will receive a paper SAR, which they must sign and return for processing to continue.

The SARs and ISIRs include comment codes and text explaining any questionable results from the matches and edits described here. For some of these there will also be a C code, which you must resolve before paying the student aid. For instance, if a student has defaulted on a federal student loan, the SAR and ISIR will note this in several places, including comments to the student and the NSLDS financial aid history page.

For other problems, the SAR and ISIR will show that the student's application has been rejected and no EFC has been calculated. The SAR will tell the student how to remove the reject by providing signatures or more information or by correcting errors. Reject codes are given in the FAA Information section, and a complete list of reject codes is in *The ISIR Guide 2013–2014* at www.ifap.ed.gov.

DEADLINES

The application processing cycle lasts 18 months. For the 2013–2014 award year, applications are accepted beginning January 1, 2013, and will be accepted through June 30, 2014.

The CPS must receive a student's electronic FAFSA by June 30, 2014. A paper FAFSA must be legible, and it must be mailed to the Federal Student Aid Programs address listed on the FAFSA in time for the processor to receive it by June 30, 2014. There are no exceptions to these deadlines. An electronic application cannot be received before January 1, 2013, and if it is received after June 30, 2014, it will not be processed. A paper application received before January 1, 2013, or after June 30, 2014, will be returned unprocessed with a letter of explanation. If it is signed before and received after January 1, 2013, it will be accepted, but the student will receive a rejected SAR asking him to date and re-sign the SAR and return it for processing.

In addition to the above dates, the following are **anticipated** (see the margin note) deadlines for the 2013–2014 award year:

- Corrections on a paper SAR must be received by September 22, 2014.
- Corrections through FOTW or FAA Access to CPS Online must be received and accepted by the CPS before midnight (central time) on September 22, 2014.
- Address and school changes through the Federal Student Aid Information Center can be made through September 22, 2014.
- A school must pay or offer to pay any disbursements (except for parent PLUS loans) for a student if it receives a SAR or ISIR with an official EFC while she is enrolled and eligible, but not later than September 29, 2014.
- To give subsidized Title IV aid to a student, a school must have a valid output document while the student is still enrolled for the award year or in the timeframe the student qualifies for a late disbursement under 34 CFR 668.164(g)(4)(i) and (iv) but no later than September 29, 2014.

Resources for aid administrators

For questions about EDconnect, EDEExpress, and Renewal FAFSAs, call CPS customer service:
1-800-330-5947
TDD/TTY 1-800-511-5806

For technical systems publications, go to www.fsadownload.ed.gov and click on "Technical References and Guides."

Deadline Date Notice

Every year the Department publishes in the *Federal Register* a deadline notice that provides all the processing deadline dates. When the official deadline notice for the 2013–2014 award year is published, it will be available on the IFAP website under "Federal Registers."

Valid SAR or ISIR

A SAR or ISIR on which all the information reported on a student's FAFSA is accurate and complete as of the date the application is signed.
34 CFR 668.2

- For students selected (by ED or the school) for verification, the school must have verification documents and a valid output document no later than 120 days after the last day of enrollment or September 29, 2014, whichever is earlier. Schools may set earlier deadlines for the Campus-Based and loan programs.

For the deadlines described here, the date the CPS processed the ISIR transaction is considered to be the date the institution received the ISIR. On the SAR, SAR Acknowledgement, and ISIR printout, the processed date is above the EFC on the first page.