



April 23, 2012

Dear Colleague:

The U.S. Department of Education, Office of Federal Student Aid (ED/FSA) invites your organization, as a state student aid grant agency, to partner with us to provide financial aid applicants from your state the ability to leverage data provided through the online Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) – FAFSA on the Web (FOTW). A partnership between your state and FSA will streamline the collection of information your state needs to determine applicants' eligibility for your state grant program(s).

The Department of Education is working to position the nation to reach President Obama's 2020 goal of having the highest proportion of adults with postsecondary degrees and certificates in the world. As a part of those efforts FSA wants to do everything possible to simplify and streamline the process by which students apply for and receive federal and state student financial aid.

Over the past several years FSA has greatly simplified the FOTW completion and submission process. If eligible, both students and parents have the ability to retrieve their tax information directly from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and may choose to automatically transfer that information into FOTW.

FSA wants to further simplify the aid application process by creating a more streamlined experience for students who, in addition to providing information used to determine eligibility for Federal Student Aid using the FAFSA, also need to provide information that states use to determine eligibility for their aid programs. To that end FSA wants to expand the current FOTW State Application Programming Interface (API) with state grant agencies.

The API process allows an applicant, upon completion and submission of the FOTW application, to link over to the student's state grant agency where the recently submitted FOTW information will be automatically transferred to the state agency's online application. The student can then provide any additional information needed by the state agency.

Currently, FOTW collects a core set of data from all applicants to determine eligibility for federal aid. Under the federal methodology many students are permitted to skip some questions because they are eligible to have their federal aid eligibility determined under either the Auto-Zero EFC or Simplified Needs Test formula. However, in many instances, FSA requires students and families to answer those questions because a state indicated to us that it needs that information to determine eligibility for state aid programs. Because the API functionality encourages the use of technology to address state data needs while simplifying the overall financial aid application process FSA hopes to expand the API capability to enable more students and their families to complete a further-simplified FAFSA.

States interested in participating in the API process should review the following information.

Participation Requirements

The following provides the basic conditions of participation in the API for the 2013-2014 FAFSA processing year and the steps necessary for implementation -

830 First St. N.E., Washington, DC 20202
www.FederalStudentAid.ed.gov
1-800-4-FED-AID

- 1) The state agency *must* have a Web-based version of the state application applicants are required to complete in order to determine eligibility for state based student aid.
- 2) The state agency must develop the capability to electronically interface with FAFSA on the Web's current API functionality.
- 3) The state agency must have a signed and approved Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with ED/FSA on file at the time of implementation.
- 4) Costs incurred by the state agency to develop and/or maintain the application programming interface with ED/FSA will be solely at the expense of the state agency.

Briefing Session

Agencies interested in learning more about this opportunity must attend the briefing session scheduled for May 30, 2012 from 2:00pm-3:00pm EST. Please contact Andrea Bell at ED/FSA at Andrea.Bell@ed.gov by May 18, 2012 indicating you will be participating in the briefing session. The briefing session will provide state agencies with additional information on the design, functionality and technical specifications of the application programming interface. State agencies are encouraged to seek clarification on any questions pertaining to the implementation of the application programming interface solution.

Required documentation

After attending the briefing session states must send a Notification of Interest, a signed Service Agreement, and provide screenshots or a PDF version of your state application. Interested state agencies are asked to submit this information no later than June 6, 2012 to Andrea Bell at ED/FSA via e-mail at Andrea.Bell@ed.gov. The targeted implementation date is January 1, 2013 and the submission of the required documentation does not obligate the agency to participate for the 2013-2014 year. Also, states that choose not to participate in 2013-2014 will not be precluded from participating in future years.

Contact Us

FSA is interested in working with any state to enable the API functionality to simplify the application experience for students. Please contact the API workgroup, if you have questions about the API solution or the process involved in participating.

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- Andrea Bell, State API Project Lead
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- Valerie Lefor, State API Project Lead
Valerie.Lefor@ed.gov

Sincerely,
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