

Federal Student Aid

How to Host a Financial Aid Event in Your Community

Hosting a financial aid night can be a fun and rewarding undertaking! Here is an easy-to-follow 60-day outline that will assist you in throwing a successful financial aid event in your community.

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I. 60 Days Out

The first three steps in hosting a financial aid event are selecting a location, a date, and a time.

a. Selecting a Location

We recommend securing a location at least 60 days prior to the event. The following should be considered when selecting a location:

- Is the location/room available for the date(s) you have in mind?
- Is there a charge for the room? Is it within your budget?
- Is the location convenient to your attendees? (Can families who depend on public transportation attend easily?)
- Is there adequate parking? (parking lot, street parking, parking garage)
- Is there a cost for parking?
- Is the room large enough to seat the number of people you expect to attend?
- Is the location/room accessible to participants with disabilities?
- Are extra chairs available in case there is an overflow crowd?
- Will tables be available if needed?
- Is there enough space for participants to spread out their materials and have room to take notes?
- Is the temperature of the room adjustable?

- Is there a podium?
- Is the room well lit?
- Can the room's lighting be adjusted when using audiovisual equipment?
- Are microphones needed?
- Are microphones available on site?
- What are your audiovisual needs? (laptop computer, TV, DVD player)
- Is there a projector screen that's at least 8' x 8' (preferably 10' x 10')?
- Is high-speed Internet access available? (Is there a fee?)
- Does the location's Internet access block social media sites? (Can these sites be unblocked for the event if necessary?)
- Are video materials captioned for any hearing-impaired attendees?
- Do you need any bilingual materials? What about a translator?
- Is child care available for parents who need it?

b. Selecting a Date

You'll want to consider dates that ensure the largest possible attendance for your financial aid event.

You don't want to have the event so early in the fall that the participants forget what they learned before they actually complete the *Free Application for Federal Student Aid* (FAFSASM). The FAFSA is available every January 1.

You don't want to hold the event so late in the winter that many schools' financial aid deadlines have passed. (Many school deadlines are in February.)

Proposed dates should be reviewed carefully for any potential conflicts that would prevent people from attending. For example, planning a financial aid event on the same night as your school's basketball season opener or during the community's winter jazz festival means you probably won't get the large attendance you were looking for.

You should consider the following:

- Does the date conflict with any holidays, religious observances, or planned school closings?
- Are there any major community-wide events occurring on that date?
- Is the date far enough in the future that you have time to publicize the event and attendees have enough time to make plans to come?

You probably won't be able to avoid every possible conflict, but if you find a date when there are no major events affecting your potential audience, you are more likely to draw a crowd to your financial aid event.

Tip: If you are located in a part of the country that has cold winters, it would be wise also to schedule a "snow date."

c. Selecting a Time

Once you have a place and date, you need to set times for the event to begin and end.

Remember to consider whether school or local sporting events or other extracurricular activities are being held that day. If so, what times do these school or local events begin and end? How much of your potential audience would be involved in these events?

Tip: If you plan to hold the event in the evening, remember to allow time for attendees to get home from work and have some dinner before going to the event.

Setting a time for the event to end lets people know in advance how long they need to stay. The amount of time you schedule for the event will depend on what activities you have planned. Try to stick to the times you publicize.

Typically, starting at 7:00 p.m. or 7:30 p.m. works well. Be sure, however, to consider any special patterns and needs in your area. For instance, in some areas, a weekend event or an afternoon event might be more effective than an evening event.

II. 30 Days Out

Now that you've decided on the basic logistics, it's time to select a presenter for your event.

a. Selecting a Presenter

You can be the presenter! Federal Student Aid, an office of the U.S. Department of Education, provides a variety of financial-aid-related PowerPoint presentations. Together with other materials, those PowerPoint presentations will give you the resources you need to conduct a workshop on federal student aid.

If you want the presenter to be someone other than yourself, brainstorm about possible speakers who have the knowledge and experience to present financial aid information accurately. Also, look for good public speakers who can hold an audience's attention.

You might consider asking a financial aid administrator from a postsecondary institution near the facility where you'll be having the program.

As an alternative approach, you could have two or more speakers take a tag-team approach or a panel approach. This can provide some variety in financial aid experience. Be careful, however, not to have so many speakers that you'll run out of time to cover all the necessary information. If you have two or more speakers, make sure they coordinate their presentations to avoid duplicating topics.

In some cases, you might choose to ask the prospective presenters to give you copies of their presentations before making the final selection of presenters. You will need to determine whether the materials to be presented are appropriate for your anticipated audience.

You might also consider turning your event into a sort of college fair in order to attract more students. Invite postsecondary institutions in your state or region to set up booths for attendees to visit before and after the formal presentation of financial aid information.

Some schools will send admissions counselors, student advisors, and financial aid personnel representing the school. The admissions counselors sometimes admit the student on the spot; the student advisors will then assist the student with class schedules. The financial aid personnel may work with the student to determine the student's unofficial EFC (Expected Family Contribution) and tentatively award the student aid on the spot. The school must use a disclaimer to let the student know that the award is not "official" until the student's EFC is returned from the FAFSA processor. Not all institutions use this process, but for the institutions that do, this process gives the student a better perspective on the types of aid and amounts of aid he or she will receive if the student decides to attend that particular institution.

b. Gathering Publications and Handouts

You will probably want to have informational materials available for your participants to take home and read later. The U.S. Department of Education's office of Federal Student Aid is a good source for free materials. You may use the Federal Student Aid Publications Ordering System (FSAPubs) to order bulk quantities of our publications about financial aid.

Here's how to use FSAPubs:

Step One: Join our mailing list.

If you do not have a mailing list (ML) number or you're not sure whether you do, call FSAPubs at 1-800-394-7084. ML numbers are available to high schools, TRIO and GEAR UP programs, libraries, and organizations such as school districts, associations, tribal governments, etc.

Step Two: Order free forms and publications.

Using your ML number as identification, you can order the following free items (and more) at www.FSAPubs.gov or by e-mailing orders@fsapubs.gov:

- *College Preparation Checklist* and Spanish version: *Lista de preparación para los estudios universitarios*
- *Do You Need Money for College?* and Spanish version: *¿Necesita dinero para la universidad?*
- Bookmark (English on one side, Spanish on the other) advertising StudentAid.gov, Federal Student Aid's informational site for students
- *FAFSA on the Web Worksheet* and Spanish version: *Planilla de preparación para FAFSA en la Web*

Order publications as early as possible; shipping takes 3–7 days depending upon your location. A good rule of thumb is to add a few days to the shipping timeframe in case of delays caused by weather or other unforeseen events.

Multimedia and Social Media Resources Available

Did you know that Federal Student Aid is on YouTube? We offer a wide variety of videos that can be easily downloaded or embedded into your presentation.

Visit us at www.YouTube.com/FederalStudentAid

Besides YouTube, Federal Student Aid is also active on Facebook and Twitter. Visit our social media sites to take advantage of our infographics and additional resources.

Visit us at www.Facebook.com/FederalStudentAid and www.twitter.com/FAFSA

c. Announce Your Event

You've worked hard locating a facility, setting a date and time, and scheduling a presenter. Now it's time to publicize your financial aid event! Get the word out as early as possible and in as many ways as possible.

Consider the following:

- Facebook announcements
- Twitter announcements
- E-mails or postal mail to potential attendees
- Advertisements and/or articles in local newspaper(s)

Consider the following for middle school or high school students and parents:

- Flyers and/or posters in the school
- Announcements on the school's public address system
- Notices in the parent/teacher/student association (PTSA) newsletter
- Announcements at PTSA meetings
- Flyers or posters within the community (for example, at grocery stores, libraries, gas stations, recreation centers, convenience stores, places of worship, and community centers)
- Notices to social service agencies
- Public service announcements on local TV and radio

Think of other publicity sources that might work well in your area.

Every announcement should include at least

- the key topics that will be covered in the program, such as giving instructions on how to complete the FAFSA;
- the date (and the "snow date");
- the location, including the address and room;
- the time and program length; and

- a telephone number, URL, or e-mail address for more information.

You might also include the presenter's name and affiliation, parking instructions, child care information, and other details regarding the event.

III. 1 week out

a. Organize for Success

It helps to be organized if you want to produce a useful financial aid event. Consider creating a checklist itemizing the tasks you need to complete.

- Finalize the agenda and have it printed
- Verify details with the venue; confirm audiovisual needs and any special instructions
- Conduct a site walk-through
- Continue sending out announcements
- Touch base with the speaker to make sure he or she has the correct date and location of the event as well as the time he or she is expected to speak
- Assemble publications for distribution to participants or send them to the venue
- Print name tags, if applicable

Remember, with good planning, your financial aid event is sure to be a success.

IV. Day of the Event

The big day has come for the financial aid event! We recommend arriving in plenty of time to ensure the following have been completed before the attendees begin to arrive:

- Set up a sign-in sheet (if applicable)
- Set up a table and/or an assertive volunteer to distribute handouts (including the event agenda, speaker bios, informational materials, etc.)
- Check that microphones, speakers, computer, projector, Internet, and lights work
- Make sure the people designated to work the audio and visual during the event have arrived and know how to work the equipment in the room
- Check that any backdrops, banners, placards, or other materials are hung up or otherwise put in place
- Place water where the speaker(s) can access it
- Know your speakers' arrival time and have someone ready to greet them
- Post signs at the location with arrows directing attendees to the event and the restrooms
- Assign timekeepers to keep the event on schedule

During the event, keep the following in mind:

- Be alert to the needs of your speaker
- Watch your audience: make sure that they are comfortable and can hear everything
- Keep an eye on time
- Have fun!

After the event, be sure to clean up. The location's owner/manager will appreciate this!

V. After the Event

Now that you have hosted a successful financial aid event, the next step is to evaluate the event:

- Prepare a written summary and evaluation of the event
- Conduct wrap-up meetings
- Contact organizations that attended the event to discuss future collaborations
- Take time to say “thank you” and celebrate your success with your partners

For more information on conducting outreach to raise student’s awareness of financial aid, visit FinancialAidToolkit.ed.gov. For information on federal student aid, visit StudentAid.gov or call 1-800-4-FED-AID (1-800-433-3243).

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