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## Hosting FAFSA Completion Events

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Hosting your own financial aid, college preparation, or FAFSA completion event is a good way to inform a larger audience.

### **Set Goals for the Event**

What message do you want to convey to adults, students and parents? What actions do you want them to take? What outcomes do you want for them? The answers to these questions can determine the agenda, structure, and length of your event.

For instance, if you simply want your clients or students to be aware of the many options in postsecondary education in your area, you might want to host a college fair at which schools can set up information tables. Allow potential students to visit the information tables at their convenience.

If your goal is for adults or students to file a FAFSA form, decide whether you will lead the entire group of attendees through the application one question at a time or let them work at their own pace with experts standing by.

### **Choose Location, Date and Time**

Think about your audience—but also about your own needs and resources—as you plan the time and place for your event.

Is the location convenient (and inexpensive) for the audience to get to? Will you have to pay a fee to access the location? If so, can you pool funds with another school or organization to save money? Or can you find an alternate location free of charge? Ask local colleges and churches whether they have space available for your event.

Is there a date when many of your audience members would be unable to attend due to a competing event? Is there a time of day that is particularly ideal for your audience? Will you be serving refreshments? If not, don't hold your event too close to lunch or dinnertime; your attendance will drop.

As you consider the pros and cons of different locations and times, talk to colleagues; they might think of obstacles or opportunities that you haven't.

Host a virtual event! Now is the time to get those creative juices flowing. Here are a few ideas:

- Use cool backgrounds (like this Zoom background we've created) to help reinforce the campaign
- Create virtual #IApplied walls—[PhotoCircle](#) sets up “circles” for schools and students can share a picture of themselves in an outfit that represents their postsecondary path (e.g., college shirt, military uniform, or employer uniform).

- Open a virtual room for small group/1-1 assistance, volunteers/professionals help students answer questions

Some challenge considerations to think about regarding your audience are- do they have access to WIFI that is reliable? Are they in an environment that is distracting? Is there a better time of day to hold a workshop? Is it an environment for them to raise questions? Are you knowledgeable on topic?

Some PRO Considerations to think about regarding your audience are-Virtual workshops can offer flexibility for a less distracted environment, workshop can be recorded and delivered at a more convenient time if missed, tools and resources available immediately, engagement allowing for hands on learning, shorter modules available over a period of time offering time to apply what is learned.

### Choose Presenters

If you want to have one or more presentations at your event, you'll need presenters. Try the following:

- Depending on your level of comfort with the topic and with public speaking, you can be the presenter. [Get tips on making a presentation about financial aid](#) or use this [MCJ Financial Aid 101 PowerPoint template](#).
- Ask the admissions or financial aid staff at a local college if someone is available to speak.
- Find out if there's a college access organization near you that can provide an expert in the topic you want to feature. (Invite them to bring their students to your event so they can benefit as well.)
- Email [FSAOutreach@ed.gov](mailto:FSAOutreach@ed.gov) to see whether someone from the Federal Student Aid Outreach Team will be in your area around the time of your event and can speak to your audience about financial aid. Please note that the Outreach Team is small, with a limited budget, and cannot fulfill all requests for speakers. In order to respond to your email, the Outreach Team will require the following information:
  - Contact name
  - Phone number
  - Email address
  - Organization name
  - Date of event
  - Name of event
  - Complete event location address
  - Audience size expected
  - Audience type: high school students, adult learners, counselors, etc.

- Type of request: panel participant, presenter, exhibit booth, etc.

### **Spread the Word**

Start advertising your event as early as possible and advertise it in a variety of ways to reach the largest number of people. Remember the adage that someone has to see or hear a message seven times before they take action? Here are seven ways you can advertise your event:

- Email students and parents.
- Put up posters around the community.
- Share the details on your school's or organization's website.
- Put ads in your local paper and school paper.
- Tweet about it.
- Put an ad on local radio.
- Spread the word via your Facebook page.

### **Gather Handouts**

At your event, you can print out this MCJ handout in [English](#) and [Spanish](#) and use [videos, tools and resources from the U.S. Department of Education collection](#).

A number of publications are available to [order in bulk from the Federal Student Aid Publications Ordering System](#).

### **Get Help Carrying Out the Event**

Besides planning early, one of the best things you can do to ensure the success of your event is to get help. Ask colleagues to collaborate in the organization and preparation. Ask subject experts to share their knowledge in mini workshops. Ask students to serve as the set-up and clean-up crews, welcome people at the door, hand out materials, and serve refreshments. Don't go it alone!

### **Assess the Event's Success**

If appropriate, provide an evaluation form for your event, and review any feedback you get. Hold a "lessons learned" meeting after the event and take notes so you'll have a record of what worked and what didn't work. That way, you'll be even better prepared when it's time to organize your next event.

*Adapted from [financialaidtoolkit.ed.gov/tk/outreach/host-event.jsp](http://financialaidtoolkit.ed.gov/tk/outreach/host-event.jsp)*