

Better FAFSA Talking Points

For NCAN Members' Partners and Stakeholders

1. **Late opening date.** The Better FAFSA opened on **December 31, 2023**, instead of the traditional October 1 date. The new form has been plagued by numerous issues that the Office of Federal Student Aid (FSA) is working to resolve. This delay means that students will have less time to complete the form, meaning they may miss financial aid deadlines unless states and institutions [move their deadlines](#). The FAFSA opening date will revert to October 1 again in 2024.
2. **More financial aid:** The data tables used in Student Aid Index (SAI) calculations were [updated](#), giving students access to an **additional \$1.8 billion** in federal student aid. This means more Pell Grant funding, money that doesn't have to be paid back! However, the update will likely cause additional delays for institutions preparing and sending financial aid award letters.
3. **Changes are comprehensive:** The changes accompanying the Better FAFSA are the biggest since 1997, when the paper form went online. They also required a total redevelopment of the technology platform on which the FAFSA resides.
4. **Changes are numerous:** As expected, the Better FAFSA brings with it plenty of changes as outlined in this [article](#). Highlights include:
 - All FAFSA contributors will need an FSA ID and multifactor authentication will be required when logging in to complete the FAFSA.
 - The number of questions on the new form has been significantly reduced.
 - Students will be able to list up to 20 colleges on the FAFSA.
 - The form is role-based, and each person will only be able to see the questions assigned to them based on their role (e.g., student, parent, or spouse).
 - Families with an adjusted gross income of \$60,000 and higher will be required to answer questions about their assets. This is more favorable to families than the previous income threshold, which was \$50,000 and only applied to families that filed the 1040 EZ or 1040 A.
5. **Simplification brings benefits:** Despite the delayed opening date, there are numerous improvements the new form brings which we've outlined [here](#). These include:
 - Expansion and increased transparency around Pell Grant eligibility.
 - Individuals without Social Security Numbers (SSNs) will be able to obtain an FSA ID.
 - Data sharing with the IRS will reduce the need for verification.
 - Achieving provisional independence will be easier.

6. **Institutions and states need to act now:** Students and families need enough time to complete the form. Although many states and some institutions have already acted, institutional financial aid deadlines should be pushed back to at least **May 1**. [Read more](#).
7. **Make a plan:** How are you communicating the challenges (and workarounds) accompanying the new form to students and families? How do you plan to meet or exceed your FAFSA submission targets for this year? If you don't already have a plan, now is the time to make one.
8. **Financial aid estimator released:** FSA's [Federal Student Aid Estimator](#) provides an estimate of how much federal student aid the student may be eligible to receive. These estimates are based on the Student Aid Index (SAI), an index to determine federal student aid eligibility. This is in addition to the 2024-25 Pell Grant have been released as of May 19. This essential early-awareness tool can be used to determine if students are eligible for the minimum or maximum grant. Learn more about how to use this tool [here](#).
[Tables](#), which were released last May.
9. **NCAN has a suite of Better FAFSA resources and tools:** NCAN is here to guide our members and the students they serve through the rollout of the new form. All our Better FAFSA-related content can be found on this [page](#) which is updated regularly. Resources and tools include:
 - [Challenges and Workarounds](#)
 - [Frequently Asked Questions](#)
 - [State Policy and Advocacy Toolkit](#)
 - [Training Toolkit](#)
 - [Awareness Toolkit](#)
 - A [list](#) of upcoming training opportunities.
 - A compilation of Better FAFSA-related news.
10. **"Better FAFSA" is FSA's branding:** Whether or not the Better FAFSA will indeed be better is subjective. However, there are many [improvements](#) coming as mentioned above.
11. **Improvements for individuals experiencing homelessness and foster care youth:** The Better FAFSA contains important new policies on youth homelessness and foster care that remove barriers and streamline assistance. Read more about this [here](#).