



2018-19 FAFSA Completion Challenge Grant Application Information and Form

The National College Access Network invites 100 U.S. cities to apply for the 2018-19 FAFSA Completion Challenge grant. The project's goal is to strengthen urban postsecondary ecosystems by raising their FAFSA completion rates among high school seniors. With financial support from The Kresge Foundation and Great Lakes Higher Education Corporation & Affiliates, *NCAN is challenging cities with a population of more than 100,000 and a FAFSA completion rate below the national average to raise their FAFSA completion rates among the class of 2019 by at least 5 percentage points, compared to the class of 2018¹.*

Need for the 2018-19 FAFSA Completion Challenge

Millions of students who are eligible for aid fail to file the FAFSA each year, leaving billions of unclaimed dollars that could support their education beyond high school. A recent analysis by the financial media company NerdWallet found that of the U.S. high school graduating class of 2017, an average of 36% of students failed to complete the FAFSA. NerdWallet estimated that half of those FAFSA non-completers would have been eligible for Pell Grants totaling an astounding \$2.3 billion.

FAFSA completion is strongly associated with postsecondary enrollment and good postsecondary student outcomes. In fact, 90% of high school seniors who complete the FAFSA attend college directly from high school, compared to just 55% of FAFSA non-completers. Research also tells us that every additional \$1,000 in grant aid per student increases postsecondary persistence rates by four percentage points. Finally, FAFSA completion is strongly associated with postsecondary completion: 52 percent of FAFSA filers complete a bachelor's degree within six years of enrollment, compared to just 44 percent of FAFSA non-filers.

FAFSA completion is also a good investment because many cities have demonstrated that significant improvement is possible. In 2016-17, school districts and nonprofit organizations took advantage of an earlier start date for the FAFSA and an improvement to the filing process to raise the FAFSA completion rate for high school seniors nationally by 9 percent (from 56 percent of seniors to 61 percent of seniors). Surveys show that the primary reasons students fail to complete the FAFSA are that they believe it is too complicated or that they are not eligible for aid, or that they don't even know that financial aid exists. By deploying information campaigns, collaborating across sectors, increasing training, tracking student data, and providing more strategic FAFSA reminders and assistance, communities provided the support more students needed to get the FAFSA done.

Contributing to this increase were 22 cities that took part in NCAN's [2016-17 FAFSA Completion Challenge](#), funded by The Kresge Foundation. These cities committed to raise FAFSA completion rates by at least 5 percent for the high school senior class of 2017, compared to 2015. By year-end, the participating cities had increased completion by an average of 10 percent. Eighteen of the 22 improved

¹ The national FAFSA completion rate was calculated using the projected number of high school graduates for 2017 from the US Department of Education as the denominator and the total numbers of FAFSAs completed from the FSA FAFSA completion tool as the numerator. This results in a national FAFSA completion rate of 70% which is higher than the 61% obtained by having the total number of seniors enrolled in the denominator.

from the baseline year, and the cities logged an average increase of 4.45 percentage points. These strong results, as well as strong interest from NCAN members, argue for opening the FAFSA Completion Challenge to more cities for the 2018-19 school year. Additional investment in FAFSA completion will leverage billions of federal, state, and institutional financial aid dollars and help thousands more students begin and complete a postsecondary credential. Such an investment will also support the institutionalization of FAFSA completion strategies within cities that will yield benefits year after year. Additionally, FAFSA is a concrete goal to mobilize, support, and strengthen the cross-sector higher education ecosystems developing in many communities, reinforcing a structure within which they can address other postsecondary attainment challenges.

NCAN thanks The Kresge Foundation and Great Lakes Higher Education Corporation & Affiliates for providing the funding for the 2018-19 FAFSA Completion Challenge.

GRANT FUNDING and ADMINISTRATION

Funding: NCAN will award a maximum of 30 grants of up to \$40,000 each to be spent on planning and executing a citywide, cross-sector FAFSA completion effort for the 2018-19 school year.

In September 2019, NCAN will also award a \$100,000 grand prize to one city based on a holistic review of the percentage growth in completions, adoption of effective strategies, barriers overcome, and likelihood of sustainability.

Technical Assistance: NCAN will coordinate technical assistance to the 30 awarded cities regarding effective best practices in FAFSA completion via a mandatory two-day workshop in June 2018 (location and specific dates to be determined), webinars, one-on-one phone-based advice and support, expert presentations, blogs, peer learning opportunities, and newsletter articles.

Eligible Cities: You have been identified as an eligible city with a population greater than 100,000 that has FAFSA completion below the national average. This list was developed using [WICHE's enrollment projections](#) and the [Office of Federal Student Aid's FAFSA completion data](#). Only cities on the list on [this page](#) may apply.

Eligible Applicants: NCAN will accept grant proposals from *one* of the [listed organizations](#) in each city. Because NCAN will accept only one proposal per city, we encourage the listed organizations to work together to determine which among them is best positioned to serve as the applicant.

In each city, NCAN has included the following entities in the list of eligible applicants:

- NCAN-member organizations
- School districts
- Higher education institutions
- Local government agencies
- Community foundations
- Selected other organizations that lead citywide college access and success initiatives

All applicants must have access to weekly student-level FAFSA completion data provided by the Office of Federal Student Aid's [FAFSA Completion](#) website, and the ability to match that with student-level demographic data from the district's student information system.

If you believe NCAN has overlooked a relevant organization that should be on the list of eligible applicants, please contact [Sara Melnick](mailto:melnicks@collegeaccess.org) at melnicks@collegeaccess.org. NCAN will consider whether to add the organization to the list.

Applicants must be a 501(c)3 nonprofit, K-12 district, higher education institution, local government agency, or community foundation. Applicants selected for grants that are *not* currently NCAN members may use grant funds to join NCAN during 2018-19; all grantees must be NCAN members by July 1, 2018.

The 22 cities that participated in NCAN's original 2016-17 FAFSA Completion Challenge are not eligible to apply for this grant.

Selection Criteria: NCAN will evaluate grant applications using the following criteria and information:

- Collaboration among multiple stakeholders including, at a minimum, nonprofits, K-12 schools, and higher education institutions as well as possible participation from local government, the business community, faith-based organizations, the media, or other groups
- Strength of a city's FAFSA completion strategy and initial plans
- Experience to date on FAFSA completion efforts
- Understanding of relevant FAFSA completion data and ability to access and use data
- Geographic distribution and student demographics
- Integration of the invitational priorities listed below

Invitational Priorities: The 2016-17 FAFSA Completion Challenge yielded a set of evidence-informed effective practices that increase FAFSA completion in cities. Therefore we are issuing a set of invitational priorities that reflect those practices in an effort to scale the lessons learned from round one. Preference will be given to applicants that draw from among these practices for their proposed work plan (see Part II – Application and Support below). For examples of effective FAFSA completion practices, please see [this report](#) or listen to [this webinar](#) summarizing the findings from the 2016-17 FAFSA Completion Challenge.

- **Cross-sector Partnerships** including:
 - confirmed partnership that includes a clear and strong commitment from the school district (if the school district is not the lead grant applicant)
 - commitment to leverage and coordinate partner resources
 - a “conductor” to manage, direct, and track the partnership’s FAFSA completion strategies/activities
- **Strategic Outreach and FAFSA Completion Assistance Efforts** including:
 - social and “traditional” media/communications vehicles including texting²
 - awareness-raising campaigns
 - student-led and -designed FAFSA completion efforts
 - leveraging access to partners and their constituents
 - targeting communities and students most in need of FAFSA completion assistance

² Please note that you will not be permitted to use grant funds to develop new media/communications materials. However you are welcome to adapt existing materials, including those available through NCAN's [FormYourFuture@](#) campaign.

- **Capacity Building** including:
 - training for counselors, teachers, school personnel, volunteers, and students on the importance of FAFSA completion and how to complete the FAFSA
- **Data Access and Use** including³:
 - access to weekly student-level FAFSA completion data from the Office of Federal Student Aid
 - capacity and willingness to distribute these data to grant personnel
 - ability to match the student-level FAFSA completion data with the district's student information system to target and improve outreach to students
 - ability to disaggregate by demographic factors such as gender, race, eligibility for FARMs (Free and Reduced Price Meals), etc.

FAFSA Completion Data: Each city's FAFSA completion rate will be measured as follows:

Total FAFSAs completed by high school seniors ÷ Number of high school seniors

Applicants do not need to submit FAFSA completion data at this time; however, if selected for funding, each grantee will need to submit FAFSA completion data for the high school graduating class of 2018. Data must be submitted for each public and charter high school located within the city's school district, as reported by the U.S. Department of Education's [FAFSA Completion By High School](#) tool, for October 2017 through June 2018. These data will represent the "baseline" against which FAFSA completion from October 2018 through June 2019 will be measured. To calculate a completion rate, each city must also submit its verified 12th-grade enrollment as of fall 2017. Grant winners will submit the same data set for the Class of 2019 for the purposes of prize determination. If selected, grantees will receive specific instructions regarding where to access enrollment and FAFSA completion data to establish the 2018 baseline FAFSA completion rates.

In cities where there are multiple school districts within the city's geographic boundaries, applicants must include data for the largest of those districts. Data become property of NCAN and are subject to verification by NCAN.

Grant Advisory Board: To guide the FAFSA Completion Challenge grant, NCAN will assemble an advisory committee of individuals with expertise in FAFSA completion strategies and data. The committee will review grant applications and confirm winners of the grand prize described above.

Grant Application Materials: For grant application materials, visit www.collegeaccess.org/FAFSACHallenge.

Application Timeline

- Prospective Applicant Webinar: Wednesday, March 21, 2018. [Here is a link](#) to that recording.
- Application Deadline: Friday, May 11, 2018, 11:59 p.m. Eastern
- Award Notification: June 1, 2018
- Grant Funding Start Date: June 1, 2018
- FAFSA Summer Strategies Institute: a week of June 18, 2018 (specific date and location TBD) (attendance required)
- Baseline FAFSA completion data for the class of 2018 due to NCAN: July 31, 2018

³ Data Access and Use is a **requirement**, not simply an invitational priority.

- Grant Funding End Date: June 30, 2019
- Grantee Final Report Deadline: July 31, 2019
- Prize Announcement: September 2019 at the annual NCAN conference in Indianapolis

Questions: Contact [Sara Melnick](mailto:melnicks@collegeaccess), NCAN's Deputy Director, at melnicks@collegeaccess. After the March 21 webinar, NCAN will post a continuously updated list of FAQs for the grant competition at www.collegeaccess.org/FAFSACHallenge.



2018-19 FAFSA COMPLETION CHALLENGE APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS

Applicants will save Parts I, II, and III as one single PDF. We are unable to review applications that do not adhere to the grant submission instructions.

Please email the grant application as attachments to [Sara Melnick](mailto:melnicks@collegeaccess.org) at melnicks@collegeaccess.org with the subject line: [Organization Name] – 2018-19 FAFSA Completion Challenge Application. Hard copies will not be accepted.

APPLICATION CHECKLIST

- PDF including**
 - Part I – Applicant Information
 - Part II – Application Narrative & Support
 - Part III - Budget

PART I - APPLICANT INFORMATION

Name of Organization: _____

Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

EIN: _____

Executive Director Name: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

Project Contact Name: _____

Title: _____

Phone: _____ E-mail: _____

Amount Requested, up to \$40,000 (please round request to the nearest \$1,000):

Total Project Budget: _____

Authorized Signature: _____

PART II - APPLICATION NARRATIVE & SUPPORT

Application narrative must be no more than 8 pages, single spaced, and 12-point font with 1-inch margins.

Describe how your city intends to raise FAFSA completion rates among high school seniors by at least 5 percentage points for the high school graduating class of 2019 during the period of Oct. 1, 2018, through June 30, 2019, compared to the class of 2018, including your overall goals, strategy, circumstances, and past experience. Provide a narrative that fully addresses the following topics and any other relevant information. Please address each of the seven topics below. You can use these questions to guide your narrative but are not required to respond to each question individually.

- **Goals:** What are your goals for FAFSA completion for the class of 2019 and beyond? Be specific about intended outcomes (i.e., “We want to increase FAFSA completion among high school seniors by X percent for the class of 2019 and by Y percent within Z number of years”).
- **Strategy:** What strategies and tactics will you undertake to achieve your stated goals? **In detail**, describe how the applicant organization intends to increase awareness of and participation in FAFSA completion among high school students. Consider addressing topics such as planning, target audiences, implementation activities, general timeline, FAFSA completion assistance, marketing and promotion (e.g., with materials from FormYourFuture.org), use of technology, and media engagement. Please reference and address the Invitational Priorities described above.
- **Cross-Sector Collaboration:** Please identify all collaborating organizations (new and pre-existing) in your local urban higher education ecosystem and explain their role in your city’s FAFSA completion initiative. *At a minimum, partnerships must include nonprofit organizations, K-12 schools, and local higher education institutions.* Other partners may include local government, the business community, faith-based organizations, the media, or other groups.
- **Experience:** Please describe any previous FAFSA completion effort and discuss how you will use FAFSA Completion Challenge grant funds to build momentum on prior efforts.
- **Use of Data:** How does your city currently use data to understand how many students are completing the FAFSA? How will you use it in real time during October 2018 through June 2019 to guide your FAFSA completion work?
- **Sustainability:** Although this project has not yet started, it is critical that you start thinking about how you will sustain this work from the onset. Please describe the steps you plan to take along the way to sustain and/or institutionalize your proposed strategies, including additional and in-kind resources that your cross-sector partners will contribute.
- **Local Student and High School Characteristics:** Please describe the characteristics of your city’s students (e.g., race/ethnicity, poverty, English language learners, high school dropout rates) and their relevance to your FAFSA completion strategy. How many high schools are in your city and how many students do they serve? What is the overall breakdown of public, charter, parochial and private schools in your city?

Letter of Commitment: Please include a letter from the public school district superintendent or district director of school counseling confirming the district’s intent to be a major partner in the FAFSA Completion Challenge. This letter must explicitly state that the grantee will have access to student-level FAFSA completion and demographic data for the 2018-2019 academic year.

Other Documents: You have the option of attaching up to 5 pages of additional documents that will help NCAN better understand your FAFSA Completion Challenge narrative, if needed, including endorsement letters from your cross-sector partners.

PART III – BUDGET

Grant funds should be spent primarily on planning and executing a citywide, cross-sector FAFSA completion effort. NCAN encourages applicants to use grant funding to cover staff time for planning and coordination. Matching funds are encouraged but not required. Please complete the budget form below or attach a similar budget form. Keep in mind that you are not obligated to request the maximum amount of \$40,000 – only request the amount you need and reasonably expect to spend during the 2018-2019 year. Any funds not expended by June 30, 2019 must be returned to NCAN.

	Requested Grant Funding	Matching Funds (Cash)	Matching Funds (In-Kind)	Project Totals
Salaries				
Benefits				
Travel (may include up to \$10,000 for travel to the June 2018 Summer Strategies Institute and registration for and travel to the 2019 NCAN conference in Indianapolis).*				
Materials & Supplies (limit to \$10,000)				
Contractual Services				
NCAN Membership, 2018-19 ⁴				
Other Direct Costs				
Indirect Costs (no more than 15% of total direct costs)				
TOTALS				

For information about the 2018 NCAN national conference, visit <http://www.collegeaccess.org/2018Conference>.

For information about NCAN member benefits, visit http://www.collegeaccess.org/Join_NCAN

For annual membership rates, visit http://www.collegeaccess.org/Member_Categories

⁴ Required for those not already NCAN members.