

FAFSA Campaigns for Foster Youth Promising Practices for Success

Sharing Data from WebGrants

- **Provide *monthly reports*** via WebGrants to districts on which foster youth have completed a FAFSA/CADAA and who are matched or unmatched with a GPA, beginning in October.
- **Create a system for sharing data with districts**, such as a Google Doc that allow districts to have access to the data and make changes or notes as needed in real time.
- **Utilize data to increase *submissions* by identifying and assisting students without FAFSA/CADAA and increase *completions*** by resolving errors on student's FAFSA/CADAA applications and troubleshooting issues when students are not matched with a GPA. Engage district and community partners to support troubleshooting efforts.
- **Utilize data as a tool** to strategically target technical assistance to districts with low completion rates and determine where additional resources and supports are needed for students.

Leveraging Resources through Collaboration

- **Collaborate with community partners** to ensure that every youth receives support with their financial aid applications. Not every high school counselor will have the capacity to provide individualized assistance to foster youth students, and it is critical to leverage additional resources. Examples of partnerships can include, but are not limited to:
 - **Independent Living Programs (ILP)** can work one-on-one with students on FAFSA/CADAA completion as well as provide assistance with outreach for workshops (i.e. mailers to caregivers, calls to youth, etc.), transportation to events, assistance with determining students' social security numbers, and support during workshops or other events with FAFSA/CADAA completion.
 - **Child welfare agencies** can engage social workers in ensuring that all students have an identified point person to assist students with financial aid applications, as required by State law.
 - **Local community colleges** can provide financial aid expertise and support on-site at their local feeder high schools. Each community college has a Foster Youth Success Initiative, and many have comprehensive foster youth support programs that can provide assistance.
- **Leverage existing youth-facing events** as opportunities to include financial aid workshops, e.g. life skills workshops, resource fairs, and graduation events. Appoint youth "FAFSA Ambassadors" to design and conduct outreach to students.

Engaging District and Community Partners

- **Develop support from the bottom-up and top-down.** Present to your local County Board of Education to gain support, as well as the County Board of Supervisors to secure a Board Motion to increase collaboration and participation from Child Welfare and Probation.
- **Publicize any relevant support from you COE Superintendent or Board** to your local districts to emphasize the importance of this issue and available resources.
- **Collaborate with counselors and liaisons by offering support and resources.** Utilize a "How can I help?" approach. Provide copies of the *Financial Aid Guide for CA Foster Youth*, tips on how to reach foster youth, status updates, publicity materials, and more.
- **Leverage existing regional meetings to set this as a priority across the county.** For example, San Luis Obispo sets this as an agenda item at general counselor meetings, San Bernardino has higher education and transitions to college as a standing agenda item on all monthly regional meetings, and Kern County promotes it at all relevant meetings such as their Group home coalition, FFA coalition, AB 490 Liaison meetings, district LCAP Technical Assistance meetings, ILP staff meetings, and AB 12 staff meetings.
- **Help connect FAFSA and college transition efforts** with districts LCFF report, funding and outcomes.

Providing Technical Assistance and Training

- **Provide technical assistance and training** to AB 490 liaisons and district counselors to educate them about the unique considerations for foster youth when completing financial aid applications and the importance of targeted strategies to address their specific needs and barriers. Provide simple checklist handouts targeted to counselors, Such as the one provided on the JBAY website, [HERE](#).
- **Use outcome data as an opportunity to initiate a conversation** and offer support on how to solve a problem. Consider matching FAFSA data to other relevant data to help identify how to best target resources.
- **Provide toolkits** to district staff with relevant resources and materials. This can include the *Financial Aid Guide for California Foster Youth* and companion *Visual Guide*, links to JBAY training webinars, foster youth supports at California colleges and universities, COE FYSCP contracts, “FAFSA Myth Busting Financial Aid for Foster Youth”, “FAFSA Completion Tips”, and “FAFSA Password Keeper and Key Reminders” templates.
- **Distribute promotional materials**, such as posters and FAFSA completion stickers, to districts and partners to encourage and motivate youth.

Providing High-Touch assistance to Foster Youth with the Financial Aid Process

- **Reinforce that filling out a financial aid application is a three-part process:** 1) completing the FAFSA or CA Dream Act Application, 2) completing the Chafee Grant application and 3) creating a WebGrants Student Account. This can take students 1-2 hours depending on any issues that may arise, and it’s important that appropriate time is allocated.
- **Connect foster youth to individualized 1:1 support** through their school counselor or another identified adult supporter. Students benefit from high-touch support.
- **Provide assistance to foster youth during school hours**, whenever possible. Assistance during school hours can be 1:1, small group or larger group workshops, given appropriate staffing. FAFSA workshops can be hosted at a centralized school location during school hours with other students being bused in from other neighboring districts.
- **Remember that filling out the FAFSA is a conversation about their future** and is more than just filling out an application. Use this as an opportunity to help students hone their career goals, inspire and provide hope!
- **Be aware of the challenges with using workshops as a primary strategy.** FYSCPs have found that workshops provided outside of school hours often require intensive outreach and have low-turnout due to challenges with transportation, scheduling conflicts, and more. Workshops are most effective with multiple outreach strategies, intensive follow-up, snacks, student-friendly hours, and adequate computer and Internet access so that students can complete the FAFSA/CADAA live during the workshop.
- **Educate students that filling out the financial aid application is just the first step.** It is important that students are aware that they need to check their status on their WebGrants account and their email regularly as they may need to provide additional verification or receive important follow-up information via email or mail. They also may need to provide foster care verification to the college if not verified through the automated WebGrants data match.