An **important part of the financial aid process that students often forget about is accepting the financial aid award offer for the school they decide to attend**. **Usually students must accept their award before a certain date or they risk losing the financial aid offered to them.** Learn more below about financial aid awards, including steps needed to receive awarded financial aid.

**What is a financial aid award offer (often called an award letter)?**

* The way a school notifies a student of the amount and types of financial aid the student can receive from that school to pay for post-high school education expenses.

**How does a student know what they have been awarded?**

* Students should receive financial aid awards from every community, technical, career, or four-year college/university they are accepted to and listed on their FAFSA/WASFA.
* Awards are usually sent electronically through a college’s student or financial aid portal but may also be sent via email or regular mail.

**When will a student be told about their award?**

* Usually between January and April, but factors like when a student completed the FAFSA/WASFA and whether they applied for early acceptance can impact when a student will receive awards.
* After they have been accepted, a student can ask the financial aid office to find out when they might expect an award notification.

**What should a student do with their award letters?**

* Compare award offers from different schools to determine which may be the best financial fit. Remember that there are many factors to consider, including cost, when selecting a school.
* **Once a student decides which school they want to attend, they should accept all or parts of their award offer and make updates or corrections to the award if asked to do so. Students should complete these steps to accept the financial aid they want before the listed deadline.**
* Students do not need to do anything with the awards from the schools they are not going to attend.

**What if a student does not think their award is enough to cover their cost of attendance?**

* Awards are supposed to reflect a student’s “fair share” of available financial aid based on the information in their FAFSA/WASFA. While this does not always meet the needs of the student, it may be the best offer the school can make.
* If a student or their family has special circumstances that impact what their “fair share” may be, they can request to revise or appeal their award. **Special circumstances may include** a significant change in family income, large medical bills, homelessness, or unusually high childcare costs.
* **Contact the financial aid office as soon as possible to discuss your situation if this applies to you.**

**Where can students and families get help understanding and comparing award offers?**

* High school counselor or college and career staff or the financial aid office at the college/university
* College Financing Plan allows students to compare awards at different schools: <https://collegecost.ed.gov/shopping_sheet.pdf>