**Financial Aid Process and Key Steps**

**Teacher Preparation:** Cut out each term and definition. This activity can be done independently, in pairs or in a small group.

**Student Instructions:** Place the different steps in order to your best knowledge. There are a few items that may be placed throughout the timeline (i.e. read your snail mail and email).

**Key Steps and Talking Points:**

**Talk with your family members, teachers or mentors about post your high school plans and paying for college**

* It’s never too early or too late to talk with your family members, teachers or mentors about your plans and interests after high school. They can also help if you’re undecided or unsure about going to college.

**Determine if you will file FAFSA or WASFA**

* US Citizens and US permanent legal residents will file FAFSA, eligible undocumented students will file WASFA, and we can support all other students with finding money for college in other ways. Both are financial aid applications available to students in Washington. Students will only do one of these.

**Learn the FAFSA and WASFA deadlines for schools you will apply to**

* Look on the college’s financial aid websites to find out the deadlines for the schools you are applying to. Some schools have priority deadlines that are earlier than their final financial aid completion deadline. In order to maximize the financial aid, you are eligible for, make sure to complete your FAFSA or WASFA as soon as October 1st or by the earliest deadline of any of your schools.
* It is best to submit your FAFSA/WASFA at least two-four weeks before any deadline to give you time to respond to verification requests (requests for additional documentation) or navigate any other issues that may come up with your application.

**Find out if your school has a supplemental financial aid form they require you to complete:**

* Some schools have additional forms they ask you to complete in order for your financial aid application to be considered complete. Tacoma Community College is one example of a school that requires a supplemental financial aid form.

**Get a Federal Student Aid ID Number (FSA ID) if you will complete the FAFSA**

* This is how you (and your parent) will sign electronically if you are filing FAFSA (similar to a password or PIN number). You can get one (<https://fsaid.ed.gov>) as early as your junior year.
* FSA IDs are not part of the WASFA application, but students and parents need to have an email account (each must have their own).

**File FAFSA (fafsa.gov) or WASFA (readysetgrad.org/wasfa)**

* FAFSA application is [here](https://fafsa.ed.gov/FAFSA/app/fafsa?locale=en_US) **(**fafsa.gov)
* WASFA application is [here](http://readysetgrad.org/wasfa) (readysetgrad.org/wasfa)

**Check that your Student Aid Report (SAR) is correct**

* Within two weeks of submitting your FAFSA, you should receive a Student Aid Report (SAR). Read it carefully and respond to any items that must be resolved; be sure the information on the SAR is accurate. If you do not receive your SAR, call the Department of Education at 1.800.4FEDAID to check your status.

**Check with colleges to ensure they have received your FAFSA or WASFA**

* It’s a good idea to follow up by phone or email once you have received and review your SAR and make sure that all your colleges received your financial aid application.

**Keep an eye on the mail/email and return all requested documents immediately**

* This is important! About one third of financial aid applications (FAFSAs and WASFAs) are selected for verification, which means you will be asked for additional documentation to confirm details provided in your FAFSA or WASFA application. If you do not respond promptly, your application for financial aid will not be considered complete, which will delay your financial aid award. If you do receive additional requests from the financial aid office, contact the financial aid office with any questions or reach out to your school counselor/college and career readiness staff.

**Call and ask if you have not received a financial aid award letter from schools you have been accepted to**

* Always be proactive and get the information! Once you’ve been accepted to a school, you should receive you award letter shortly after or before/around April. If by around April, you have not received an award letter and have been admitted to a school, you should contact the school. You should always feel free to contact the financial aid office whenever you have questions or concerns – you do not need to wait for a specific time or time of year to do it.

**Ask questions about your financial aid award letter**

* Ask your counselor or advisor for help and call the college to ask questions about anything that isn’t clear. If your financial aid award is an important part of your decision about which college to attend, be sure to ask for assistance comparing awards.

**Decide what parts of your financial aid award you will accept and what you will decline, if anything for the school you ultimately decide to attend**

* You don’t have to accept all of your financial aid award, but you must affirmatively accept any of the awarded aid that you want to receive and return that information to your selected school. Schools have different processes for viewing and returning award letters (online through student portals, by mail, etc.), and so be sure to know where and how you will need to return your award letter
* Also, make sure you are aware of the deadline to respond to your award letter offer. The deadline to accept aid should be on the award letter or with communication sent with the award letter.

**Make a budget and a plan for all plans after high school**

* Creating a budget and a plan around your finances can help you to stay organized and ensure you don’t run out of money during the school year.

**Find out your school’s process for financial aid refunds**

* Students who have financial aid money remaining after all tuition and billed fees are paid may receive a financial aid refund. Schools have several different ways they issue this money/refunds to students, including direct deposit (requires you to have a bank account/checking account), mailed checks (checks will typically be mailed to the address you have on file with the college/university, so make sure it is up to date), or through programs like BankMobile. Students should receive information about how to receive refunds and can always call the financial aid office for this information. Make sure you know what you need to do to get this refund, if applicable.

**Reapply for financial aid (Complete the FAFSA or WASFA again):**

* Students must reapply for financial aid every year they are enrolled in college in order to receive financial aid. The process is typically not as difficult the second time around!
* The FAFSA/WASFA applications still open October 1 for returning college students, but school’s may have filing deadlines that are different than they were for entering first-year students (usually they are earlier than first-year student deadlines).

THROUGHOUT THE ENTIRE PROCESS:

**Read your snail mail and email**

* Colleges still often use the physical mail (USPS, UPS, FedEx, for example) to communicate with you about important things. Read and respond promptly (especially if they request additional information regarding your income. This is a normal and expected part of the process.
* Make sure to check your email 2-3 times a week! Colleges use email to communicate with you about important things. Read and respond promptly (especially if they request additional information regarding your income. This is a normal and expected part of the process.) It takes less than 5 minutes to make a professional email that includes your name and a number if you don’t have one already.

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