

Key Terms & Financial Aid 101 for Adult Learners

Grants: typically student aid that does not require repayment (unless you withdraw from your program)

- **Federal Pell Grant:** This is a grant available to part-time and full-time students with financial need. If you take fewer than 6 credits in a traditional semester, you are considered less than part-time, and you will not be eligible for grants.
- **Other Federal Grants:** There are a few other grant options for teachers, veterans, and other specific populations. Learn more at <http://studentaid.ed.gov>.
- **State Grants:** Your state may have a grant program. Pennsylvania's need-based grant program is managed by PHEAA (Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency).

Loans: borrowed funds that need to be repaid with interest **once you stop attending school** (whether by graduating or not continuing by "stopping out")

- **Federal student loans:** Offered by the federal government, these loans offer low, fixed interest rates as well as numerous repayment options including loan deferment for those who return to college, experience financial hardship, or enroll in a national service program.
- **Private student loans:** Offered by banks and private lenders, interest rates on these loans fluctuate, depending on the market rates. You should carefully review and consider your need for private loans, taking them only as a last resort.
- **REMEMBER:** Borrow only what you need. Every penny you borrow will need to be repaid with interest when you graduate. **Also be cautious of scams.**

Employer Tuition Assistance: Some employers offer you financial resources to attend an approved program and/or to complete a degree. Information about this benefit and the amount available to you is usually outlined in the company's policy information or by contacting human resources. Find out if your employer has tuition assistance or reimbursement, and make sure to learn about the application process and guidelines to receive this benefit.

Scholarships: Scholarships are available through colleges and through local and national foundations. Start by asking your college about their scholarships, and then also research additional scholarships. Ask your Graduate Philadelphia Navigator for scholarship resources that may be aligned to your program of study or eligibility.

Savings: If you determine the out-of-pocket cost of attendance for your college program per semester, you can begin to budget accordingly. Try to set a realistic goal for the amount of your tuition and fees you can afford to pay upfront, even if it is a small amount. Learn more and benefit from the financial literacy and empowerment resources and partners that Graduate Philadelphia offers.

Community College: For in-state students, community colleges are sometimes the most affordable option, but you must also consider time to degree completion in your calculation. If you plan to go on

for your Bachelor's degree, you can often save money by getting your Associate's degree at a community college and then transferring to another college or university when you graduate.

How do I apply for financial aid?

To be considered for federal student aid, both grants and loans, you must file a FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid). Learn more and file online at https://studentaid.gov/help-center/answers/topic/completing_the_fafsa/articles

Note: **There is no cost to file your FAFSA.**

When should I file my FAFSA?

Changes were made to the FAFSA filing process in Fall 2023. To be considered for both federal and state grants, plan to file your FAFSA before the noted deadline. For more information visit <https://studentaid.gov/apply-for-aid/fafsa/filling-out> Once you are in college, your school may have its own institutional deadline, so pay attention to communications from your college's financial aid office.

How can I use federal student aid?

Federal student aid can be used on tuition, fees, books, transportation, dependent care, and school-related technology like a computer.

What if my student loans are in default?

If you have loans in delinquency or default, visit <https://studentaid.gov/manage-loans/default> for more information. Beware of predatory lenders who offer to "fix" your debt or credit score quickly with no payments.

What if I owe money to a previously-attended college and they won't release my transcript?

If you owe money to a college (tuition you had agreed to pay out-of-pocket), the institution will not release your transcript until you pay your "**back balance.**" To **address institutional back balances**, you will need to begin negotiating a payment arrangement by learning if the debt is still with the college or if it has been passed on to a collections agency. Then, you should contact the appropriate party to attempt to negotiate a payment arrangement.

What else do I need to do to get started?

Plan, research, and ask for guidance. Work with your Graduate Philadelphia Navigator and college advisors. Use <https://studentaid.gov/> to learn all about college costs and your aid eligibility.

With careful planning and hard work, you can get *to* and *through* college!