



# STUDENT AMBASSADOR TOOLKIT

## HELLO, DISTRICT AND NONPROFIT PARTNERS

Last year, nearly 5,300 low-income high school seniors in Dallas County didn't file the FAFSA - meaning they had no way of knowing how much college would really cost them and no access to state or federal aid to support them. Since the perceived inability to pay is one of the largest barriers to enrolling for students, it is essential we provide them with accurate and relevant information about FAFSA/TASFA.

To close this information gap, the Commit! Partnership created a Student Ambassador program which called on the power of peer-to-peer communication. Commit! trained high school student leaders on financial aid basics and sought to inspire them to return to their campus and build excitement while debunking myths.

The most successful student ambassadors were on campuses where administrators and counselors embraced the role of the student ambassadors and championed their work. Contained in this guide are all the tools you

would need for you to recreate our program, including nomination instructions, meeting agendas, and more. Think of this as a springboard for engaging student leaders into your campus solutions.

We believe in the power of grassroots movements among students and think it can be an effective way to disseminate consistent and quality information about the financial aid process. Our goal for this year is for all campuses to reach or exceed 48% FAFSA completion or increase by 4 percentage points from their 2016 completion rate by June 30, 2017. With your help, we can make this dream a reality.

Thank you for your commitment and support!

Sincerely,

The Commit! Partnership





# STUDENT AMBASSADOR

## TOOLKIT

### TABLE OF CONTENTS

- I : Overview** p3
- II : Why FAFSA/TASFA?** p3
- III : Why Student Ambassadors?** p4
- IV : Finding Your Ambassadors** p4
- V : Strategies** p5
- VI : Measuring Success** p7
- APPENDIX 1 : Nomination Resources** p8
- APPENDIX 2 : Kickoff Meeting** p10
- APPENDIX 3 : Second Meeting** p16
- APPENDIX 4 : Student Mission** p19



# STUDENT AMBASSADOR TOOLKIT

## OVERVIEW



The Student Ambassador Program is meant to harness the power of peer-to-peer communication to inform and support students to complete the financial aid process. Too often adults create programs to support students and families, but overlook the students' voices themselves. By utilizing students as a "street team" for FAFSA/TASFA completion, students delivered authentic messages in a relevant way.

The ambassador program informs students of the need, equips them with information, and supports them in carrying out their marketing campaigns. When done at the county-level in Dallas from 2014-2016, the program consisted of:

- 1: TWO IN-PERSON MEETINGS
- 2: SCHEDULE OF SAMPLE MISSIONS FOR STUDENTS TO COMPLETE
- 3: INTERACTION BETWEEN HIGH SCHOOL AND CURRENT COLLEGE STUDENTS

## WHY IS THE FAFSA/TASFA IMPORTANT?

The first step in the financial process is filling out the FAFSA, the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, available at [www.FAFSA.gov](http://www.FAFSA.gov). The FAFSA is the most important form students fill out that can get them money for college. Filling out the FAFSA is the first step for almost all financial aid—including from the federal and state government, colleges, and many scholarships.

Many misconceptions surround FAFSA, which explains why only 43% of Dallas County high school seniors completed it in 2016. Students may not think they are eligible for financial aid, do not have enough information about how to complete the FAFSA, or think it's too much work. However, all three reasons boil down to the fact that they do not have the full picture.

Not having the full picture hurts - last year, 5,300 economically

disadvantaged Dallas County seniors left at least \$30 million in federal dollars on the table by not filing the FAFSA (and that's not even including scholarships or grants other than Pell).

Undocumented students have an even more convoluted process of accessing the aid they qualify for. There are no reported completion statistics for the number of Texas Application for State Financial Aid (TASFA) that students without social security numbers complete.

As the sticker price of colleges keeps increasing, so does the perception that college is financially out of reach. Therefore, it is essential students know all the ins and outs of the financial aid process.



# STUDENT AMBASSADOR

## TOOLKIT

### WHY STUDENT AMBASSADORS?

Students listen to students. Real change happens when influential high school and college students are equipped with financial aid facts and inspired to act. The student ambassador program is modeled after the music industry’s “street teams.” Street teams are groups of people who hit the streets to, often, make an unsigned music artist more popular through word-of-mouth and hype. In our case, the student street teams were charged with letting their peers know about how they can afford to go to college. Our intention is that these students:

- 1: BUILD EXCITEMENT FOR AND
- 2: DEBUNK MYTHS SURROUNDING THE FINANCIAL AID PROCESS WITH AN
- 3: AUTHENTIC VOICE.

Student ambassadors work best when each campus nominates involved and influential students, the ones who are looked to as the “tastemakers.” Student ambassadors do not need to be trained to be financial aid experts. In most cases they are not the ones sitting down with their peers to complete the forms. Instead, they are simply building excitement and general awareness.

Financial aid can appear to students as a long and complicated process, and there are many misconceptions surrounding it. However, we believe that student ambassadors will have the trust of their peers and can create a college-going culture, which includes FAFSA-filing.

### FINDING YOUR AMBASSADORS

For our program, students were nominated by a teacher, advisor, or counselor to participate. Many of you will already have a sense of who the leaders are in your organization or campus. Students will be more motivated if they perceive the ambassador program to be a VIP invitation rather than an assignment.

Look for student leaders on campus who are well-respected by their peers, involved, and creative. Have several student ambassadors to represent the “tastemakers” for several campus groups (i.e. Band,

Dance, Robotics, Football, Track). Alternatively, utilize pre-existing groups such as Student Council, National Honor Society, or the football student spirit group.

For high school campuses, we suggest nominating junior and senior students. Even though juniors will not be filing FAFSA/TASFA this year, it is a good idea for them to have as much information as possible ahead of time. In addition, it would be ideal for them to continue as ambassadors for the following year.



# STUDENT AMBASSADOR

## TOOLKIT

### STRATEGIES

#### I. KICKOFF MEETING

After you have identified your high school and college ambassadors, it's time to meet in person for the first time. Key components of the initial meeting are:

##### 1. Share with students why knowing about financial aid is important

Share financial aid completion and postsecondary enrollment completion statistics for their campuses or districts by posting slides around the room. Have students walk around and write answers on sticky notes to the questions, "What surprises you? What do you think your school is doing to address this data point? What do you personally care about

##### 2. Uncover common misconceptions and teach ambassadors financial aid basic

by reading off statements and asking students to walk to corners of the room based on whether they agree or disagree with the statement.

##### 3. Build relationships between the high school students and current college students.

Use small groups and student panels for current college students to share their financial aid journey. It is important for the students to hear from someone who shared their same fears and who went on to ultimately be successful.

##### 4. Ask for student input on what marketing campaigns they've seen be effective (or not effective) on their campus.

Brainstorm ideas on how they can take FAFSA facts back to campus.

See Appendix 2 on page xx for sample kickoff meeting materials.

#### II. SECOND MEETING

Before students start completing missions, hold a second meeting to check in. The goals for this meeting are

##### 1. Review financial aid information

from the first meeting, but go one step deeper in your presentation.

##### 2. Have students practice reading the financial aid talking points.

After each section pause and ask the students what questions they anticipate their friends having after they hear the information.

##### 3. Have students complete a goal-setting exercise

to review their campus FAFSA data and set a goal for where they want to be at the end of the year.

##### 4. Introduce the sample "missions"

students will complete to promote FAFSA/TASFA on their campus and acknowledge how their feedback from the first meeting helped shape them. Allow for additional brainstorming on other ways they can promote FAFSA/TASFA completion on their campus.

##### 5. Create a game plan for what they'll do upon returning to campus.

See Appendix 3 on page xx for sample kickoff meeting materials.





# STUDENT AMBASSADOR

## TOOLKIT

### STRATEGIES

#### III. AMBASSADOR MISSIONS

Find a way to encourage and motivate the student ambassadors to complete various challenges around their campuses to increase FAFSA completion. Remember that ambassadors do not necessarily sit down with students to complete FAFSA; instead, they are simply spreading the word around campus. The goals for the ambassadors' missions are to:

- Educate the student body about the importance of FAFSA
- Bust “myths” about FAFSA and replace with the facts
- Inspire classmates to complete FAFSA applications

Some “missions” for student ambassadors that have been used in the past include:

- Hanging up posters around the school
- Create a “Dash for FAFSA Cash” thermometer tracking progress toward goal
- Pass out “Save-the-Date” cards promoting workshops
- Take selfies with inspiring senior teachers and ask them to promote workshops
- Make morning announcements about FAFSA/TASFA
- Take pictures with seniors who have completed FAFSA
- Create appropriate memes, Vines, or videos to post on social media

We suggest raffling off gift cards to reward ambassadors for missions completed. For every mission an ambassador completes, they will earn a raffle ticket. The more entries they have, the better chance they have at winning and are thus motivated to complete more missions!

You could also raffle off dress down days, prom tickets, a special lunch, or any number of items that may be easier to obtain than donated gift cards.

See Appendix 3 on page xx for sample kickoff meeting materials.

#### IV. IN-BETWEEN MEETINGS

Successful ambassador programs have regular check-ins with the students outside of the formal meetings. Use emails, texts, or informal in-person meetings to:

- Motivate the ambassadors to take action on their campuses
- Update students where their campus is at with its FAFSA completion rate
- Discuss which strategies have been working for the ambassadors
- Troubleshoot challenges the ambassadors have been having

#### IV. END-OF-YEAR CELEBRATION

If possible, hold an end-of-year celebration to reward ambassadors for their hard work throughout the year and celebrate their successes.



# STUDENT AMBASSADOR TOOLKIT

## MEASURING SUCCESS

To evaluate your ambassador program's effectiveness toward this year's goal, we suggest tracking:

- Ambassador attendance at meetings
- Student engagement with the missions
- FAFSA/TASFA completion rate before and after implementation of the program

## THANK YOU

Thank you for your desire to see increased financial aid completion! We cannot emphasize enough how important FAFSA/TASFA is in increasing postsecondary enrollment and completion for our students, and with your help, all students will be able to achieve success!

For more information or to share your own creative ways of using student leaders, please reach out to:

[Sarah.Jensen@commit2dallas.org](mailto:Sarah.Jensen@commit2dallas.org)



# STUDENT AMBASSADOR TOOLKIT

## APPENDIX I : NOMINATION RESOURCES

### A. SAMPLE NOMINATION INSTRUCTIONS FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

Inspired by programs harnessing the power of peer-to-peer communication, we are seeking your nominations for two to four high school students (juniors and seniors) to serve as 2015-2016 College Affordability Student Ambassadors on your campus. These students will be your “street team” to build excitement and debunk myths around financial aid. Student ambassadors will be eligible to earn gift cards and other raffle items based on their engagement and participation.

#### Key Dates:

Wed, October 28 at 5:00pm: Deadline for students to accept nominations

- Sat, November 7 from 2:30-5:30pm: Ambassador Kickoff Meeting at UNT-Dallas
- Sat, January 9 from 11:30-2:30pm: Ambassador Mission Launch Meeting at University Crossroads
- Fri, March 11: Campus Missions End
- Sat, April 2: Wrap-Up Celebration

#### Benefits to Campus:

- Free campaign materials to promote financial aid awareness and completion
- Student input on how best to build excitement
- Well-informed students who can spark conversations about college affordability

Participation in the ambassador program is open to all high schools; however priority will go to campuses with less than 50% FAFSA completion in 2015.

#### Benefits to Students:

- Network with current college students
  - Unique opportunity to develop leadership and communication skills
  - Be eligible to win gift cards for their hard work promoting FAFSA and TASFA completion
  - Opportunity to gain valuable financial aid knowledge
- Who should I nominate?

We ask that you consider fun, charismatic, hard-working, and influential students who are involved on your campus. Students may be involved in football, cheer, debate, ROTC, band or other influential organizations at your campus.

#### What to Do:

Print and deliver the nomination cards below to no more than four students (juniors and seniors) you would like to nominate to be student ambassadors. Let them know they will need to go online to [www.surveymonkey.com/r/CountyAmbassador](http://www.surveymonkey.com/r/CountyAmbassador) (also listed on their card) to accept their nomination by October 28.

We are also seeking nominations of current college underclassmen that graduated from Dallas County high schools to share their experiences and serve as coaches alongside the high school students. If you are in touch with alumni from your high school that would be available to attend the November 7 and January 9 ambassador meetings, please nominate them using the college student form. They will go online to [www.surveymonkey.com/r/CountyCollegeAmbassador](http://www.surveymonkey.com/r/CountyCollegeAmbassador) to accept your nomination.





# STUDENT AMBASSADOR TOOLKIT

## APPENDIX I : NOMINATION RESOURCES

### B. SAMPLE NOMINATION INSTRUCTIONS FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS

Congratulations! As a student leader on our campus, you have been nominated to represent your high school as a Dallas County Student Ambassador with the nonprofit, Commit! Partnership. The ambassadors are a select group of creative, passionate high school juniors, seniors, and college students that are a 'street team' working together to inform area students about paying for college. Ambassadors will have the opportunity to earn incentives based on their engagement and success in spreading the word. October 28 is the deadline to accept your nomination! To accept, please visit: [www.surveymonkey.com/r/CountyAmbassador](http://www.surveymonkey.com/r/CountyAmbassador)

Becoming a Student Ambassador is one of the BEST things you can do! Not only will you have the chance to really understand the college financial aid process, you will build many valuable skills, such as:

- Leadership
- One-one-one Communications
- Marketing and promotion
- Organization

We know your junior and senior years are crazy, so the time commitment is 1-2 hours a month from November to April.

#### Meeting Dates & Locations

- Saturday, November 7 from 11:30-2:30 at UNT-Dallas
- Saturday, January 9 from 11:30-2:30 at University Crossroads
- Saturday, April 2 for a wrap-up celebration!

Questions? Email [Sarah.Jensen@commit2dallas.org](mailto:Sarah.Jensen@commit2dallas.org)

### C. SAMPLE EMAIL INVITATION FOR NOMINATED COLLEGE STUDENTS

Congratulations! As a student leader on our campus, you have been nominated to represent your college as a Dallas County Student Ambassador with nonprofit, the Commit! Partnership. If you are getting this message it is because someone believes you have an inspiring story to share with high school students!

We need your help planning and carrying out "missions" for this program and empowering high school students to start conversations about financial aid on their campuses. If you choose to participate, you will be paired with a group of high school students and asked to pass along to them your personal experience with financial aid and college.

The high school ambassadors are a select group of creative, passionate high school seniors and college students that are a 'street team' working together to inform area students about paying for college. Ambassadors will have the opportunity to earn incentives based on their engagement and success in spreading the word.

The time commitment is 1-2 hours a month from November to April.

#### In-Person Meetings:

- Saturday, November 7 from 11:30-2:30 at UNT-Dallas
- Saturday, January 9 from 11:30-2:30 at University Crossroads
- Saturday, April 2 for a wrap-up celebration!

To accept your nomination, please visit:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/CountyCollegeAmbassador>



# STUDENT AMBASSADOR TOOLKIT

## APPENDIX II : KICKOFF MEETING

### A. SAMPLE KICKOFF AGENDA

Dallas County Student Ambassadors | November 7, 2015

**Goal:** To raise FAFSA/TASFA completion in Dallas County to 46% and increase college affordability awareness

- 2:30p** • Sign-in / Registration
- Receive name tag and folder
- Hand in photo release form and texting permission
- 2:45p** • Introduction
- 3:00p** • College and Financial Aid Conversations
- 3:45p** • Snack Break & Student Panel
- Panel with current college students – think of good questions!
- 4:15p** • Marketing Brainstorming
- How to share what you learned today with others
- 5:15p** • Closing, Next Steps, and Survey
- Final thoughts
- Survey

### B. SAMPLE KICKOFF ACTIVITIES

#### FINANCIAL AID BASICS: FOUR CORNERS

Post signs in corners of the room labeled, Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. Tell students for each statement read, they should walk to the corner of the room corresponding to their answer. You cannot remain indecisive; although it sometimes may be hard pick one of the four options. After each question, have the group discuss.

- Practice statement: Drake is the best rapper alive
- College is necessary to get a good job
- If a student thinks they won't qualify for financial aid, they shouldn't bother filing a FAFSA
- Low-income students should go to college for free
- The college with the lowest sticker price will be the most affordable.
- Financial Aid forms are too complicated. Just skip FAFSA and apply for scholarships instead
- It's ok to put off filing the FAFSA until you decide where you're going to school
- It's ok to guess on the tough questions on the FAFSA

#### FINANCIAL AID BASICS: SCENARIO QUESTIONS

have students return to their seats and present the following scenarios. This exercise can be done with the full group, or with students in small groups

- Maria - My family and I came to Houston when I was 8 years old. I went to school in Houston until the 9th grade. We then moved to Austin and I started high school there in the 10th grade. I will graduate in May 2014. **“Does Maria qualify for in-state tuition and certain state aid?” (Y)**
- Ricardo - I have lived in Texas since April 2012. I was not able to graduate from high school, but I plan to get my GED in May 2014. **“Do I qualify for in-state tuition and certain state aid?” (N)**
- Jacob - I have lived in Texas since I was 5 years old. I will graduate from high school in May 2016. After I graduate, I plan to live with my aunt in Florida so I can save some money for college. I intend to return after a year so I can start college in 2017. **“Will I qualify for in-state tuition and certain state aid?” (N)**
- McKenna - I had a baby my junior year of high school, and I'm able to live at home with my parents since I don't work and I'm still going to school. **Do I qualify to file my FAFSA as an independent? (N)**
- Erica - I don't get along with my parents and have been living with my grandma since 10th grade but she hasn't legally adopted me. **Whose information do I put on the FAFSA? (A: Parents unless special circumstance can be documented.)**
- John - For the last six months, I've been living with a friend to escape my parents who are physically abusive. **Do I still need their information for the FAFSA? (A: Depends - will need to file special circumstance and provide documentation.)**
- Michael - My parents don't see the point in me going to college and want me to start working right away for the family restaurant. They are refusing to give me their tax information for me to fill out the FAFSA. **Can I get a dependency override? (A: Not likely)**
- If my parents don't file taxes and they get paid in cash, how do I report their income on the TASFA? (A: Request documentation from employer)
- **Do my parents or I need to file taxes if neither of us has a SSN? (Y if you meet income thresholds)**
- **One of my parents lives out of the country. Whose income do I report on the TASFA? (Both)**



# STUDENT AMBASSADOR

## TOOLKIT

### APPENDIX II : KICKOFF MEETING

#### FINANCIAL AID BASICS: TRUE OR FALSE

have students return to their seats and present the following scenarios. This exercise can be done with the full group, or with students in small groups

- Students that don't have good grades aren't eligible for financial aid. (F)
- I have to wait until I (or my parents) file taxes to do the FAFSA (F)
- I support myself, so I don't have to include my parents info on the FAFSA (T/F)

Tricky question - homeless students or at-risk of homeless different guidelines, foster care alumni. Can't be because parents refuse to help. Different if you have no contact/ left home due to abusive situation.

Look at StudentAid.gov for more information on which parent's info to use if they are divorced or not married. Don't be afraid to call financial aid office or your college advisor!

- I completed my FAFSA my freshman year, so I don't have to do it again (F)
- Undocumented students can receive financial aid for college (T)  
Note: DACA students still file TASFA.
- The FAFSA is required by all colleges (T)
- Your Expected Family Contribution (EFC) is the same at every school (T)
- If your EFC is 0, you don't have to pay anything for college (F)
- Completing verification is optional. (F)
- The CSS Profile is required by all schools (F)
- Some scholarships and grants require a certain GPA to renew it (T)
- You can receive a Pell Grant without doing the FAFSA (F)
- Grants do not have to be paid back (T)
- If your parents apply for a Parent PLUS loan and are denied, you also qualify for an additional amount in unsubsidized loans (T)
- I must accept all financial aid listed on my financial aid award letter (including loans) (F)
- If I drop out of college, I don't have to pay back my student loans (F)
- The deadline for FAFSA is March 15 (T & F)

#### COLLEGE STUDENT PANEL

- Your name, college, major, and year in college.
- By show of hands, how many are the first in your family to go to college?
- Did you always know that you were going to college? If not, when did you realize you could go?
- Did you have a plan on how you were going to pay for college?
- Did you have anyone helping you throughout the process? If so, who?
- What obstacles did you have to deal with when applying for financial aid?
- What was the hardest part about the FAFSA? How did you deal with it?
- Did many of your friends from high school go to college? If not, were there some who didn't go because of cost? Know of people that didn't file the FAFSA?
- If you could give advice to high school seniors, what would it be?
- Knowing what you know now, what is something that you wish you could have told your parents about financial aid back in high school?



# STUDENT AMBASSADOR TOOLKIT

## APPENDIX II : KICKOFF MEETING

### C. MARKETING BRAINSTORM ACTIVITY

Hello, ambassadors! Your big responsibility this spring will be to make sure the seniors on your campus know about the financial aid process and fill out the FAFSA/TASFA.

The rest of today will be getting your ideas for a marketing campaign. What will help build awareness of the process and get students/parents to act? Commit! will help produce any marketing materials and campaigns you all come up with, but we need your expertise to make them effective.

In your group, please identify someone to play the role of:

- **Facilitator:** this person will make sure everyone's voices are heard and that the group gets through the questions within 30 minutes
- **Notetaker:** this person will write down everyone's ideas – no thought is too small!
- **Reporter:** this person will summarize the big themes of the discussion and will report out to the large group

#### A. Effective Marketing

What are some effective ways that you've seen a company or organization get you or your friends to rally behind a cause, buy something, or know about something?

#### B. Financial Aid Information

What's something about the financial aid process that you learned today that you didn't know before you came?

#### C. Brainstorm This Year's Campaign

1. Where would you go to learn more about the financial aid process? The more specific the better!
2. How would you communicate facts and myths about the financial aid process with your friends? With your parents? With your school? With your neighborhood?

### D. Feedback on Last Year's Materials

1. Take a look at the materials that were created last year to encourage students like you to complete the FAFSA. Do you remember seeing them?
2. Are the materials effective? Why/why not? If not, what would be more effective?
3. Would you say this (posters, stickers, etc.) are the best way to inform and educate students on FAFSA? Are they the best way to educate parents about the financial aid process? Why/why not?
4. Draw or describe what you would you want this year's materials/strategies to include (messages or the ways the messages are delivered).
5. Seniors can sign up text back and forth with high school counselors and college admissions/financial aid representatives to have reminders about the college and financial aid process. Do seniors at your campus know about this program? What would make a student want to sign up for them? How can you as an ambassador help spread the word?
6. Last year ambassadors had missions to complete in order to promote the financial aid process and be entered to win gift cards. What type of missions would you be excited about doing this year?



# STUDENT AMBASSADOR TOOLKIT

## APPENDIX II : KICKOFF MEETING

### C. POST KICKOFF SURVEY

The rest of today will be getting your ideas for a marketing campaign. What will help build awareness of the process and get students/parents to act? Commit! will help produce any marketing materials and campaigns you all come up with, but we need your expertise to make them effective.

1. Do you understand the purpose of the Dallas County Student Ambassador program?

Unclear      1      2      3      4      5      Very Clear  
If you answered 3 or lower, please explain what was unclear.

2. Do you understand the next steps ambassadors will take and how you can engage?

Unclear      1      2      3      4      5      Very Clear  
If you answered 3 or lower, please explain what was unclear.

1. Do you understand the purpose of the Dallas County Student Ambassador program?

Unclear      1      2      3      4      5      Very Clear  
If you answered 3 or lower, please explain what was unclear.

4. What future college access/ affordability help would be useful to you?

5. What part of today's program did you find MOST useful or informative?

6. What part of today's program did you find LEAST useful or informative?

Write your contact information on the back of this page if you would like a reply from a Commit! staff member or have additional feedback. Thanks!





# STUDENT AMBASSADOR TOOLKIT

## APPENDIX II : KICKOFF MEETING

### E. EMAILS TO AMBASSADORS PRE- AND POST- KICKOFF

#### Pre-Kickoff Email to High School Students

Hi [name]!

Congratulations on your nomination to be a 2016-17 Dallas County Student Ambassador! We are so excited about your participation in this program, and I can't wait to meet you at our kickoff meeting at UNT Dallas on Saturday, November 7 from 2:30-5:30pm in the \_\_\_\_ room. Please reply with any dietary restrictions or special accommodations you may require. Please RSVP so we can order enough food.

At this meeting, we will begin an ongoing conversation on Financial Aid, answer any questions you may have on this topic, and brainstorm on ideas to raise awareness on your campus.

UNT Dallas is DART accessible from the \_\_\_\_ station and parking is available. We will reimburse you \$5 for parking, but carpooling is encouraged! Look for an email from me next week with maps and more info! In the meantime, please feel free to email or call me with any questions. If you are planning on attending the kickoff, and do not see your name on the list below please let me know. We would like to have at least one student representative from each HS attend the kickoff.

Best,

Sarah Jensen

#### Post-Kickoff Email to High School Students

Hi Ambassadors!

You all are so awesome! Thanks again for spending your Saturday with us and really getting into great conversations about college affordability. Our next meeting is January 9 from 11:30am to 2:30pm at the University Crossroads office 1111 W. Mockingbird, Suite 1150 • Dallas, TX 75247.

Here are the key things to remember from what we talked about:

1. The only way to know how much college will really cost is to file the FAFSA. It's free to file and find out. You've got nothing to lose.
2. Most financial aid is awarded on a first come, first served basis. The closer to October 1 you file the FAFSA or TASFA the better. Don't forget the deli line analogy: the earlier you get in line at the deli, the faster you'll get your lunch meat. Once the meat is gone, it's gone. Pull that number early and don't miss out!
3. There are lots of people that want to help! Go talk to your counselor/college advisor. Attend one of the community-wide FAFSA/TASFA workshops and get one-on-one help from college financial aid staff and trained volunteers: [www.YouCanAffordCollege.org](http://www.YouCanAffordCollege.org). Search on [www.StudentAid.gov](http://www.StudentAid.gov) or [www.aie.org](http://www.aie.org).

Don't forget the Dollars for College packet you received Saturday has tons of great info too (it's also available in Spanish online). <http://gradnation.org/learn/dollars-college-toolkit>

Attached is the attendance sheet and who we are missing permission forms/photo releases from. You can take a picture of the signed forms and send them back to me that way!

More to come!

Best,  
Sarah Jensen



# STUDENT AMBASSADOR TOOLKIT

## APPENDIX II : KICKOFF MEETING

### Post-Kickoff Email to College Students

Hi -

Thank you so much for spending a good part of your Saturday at UNT-Dallas to help with the Dallas County Student Ambassador kickoff. You all really made college come to life for these students, and I'm very grateful for your insight and expertise. And a special thank you to the UNT-Dallas students for hosting us on your campus!

Here's how you can continue to be involved:

- Attend the next ambassador meeting (Jan 9 from 11:30am-2:30pm at University Crossroads).
- Adopt a school team to help them brainstorm on how to bring the messages back to their campus/inspire more students to apply to college/file FAFSA.
- Participate in the GoogleGroup to continue to offer ideas and expertise.
- Tag financial aid related info with #FAFSA2016 on Instagram and Twitter. (Especially if there are financial aid related events/info you see on your college campuses.)
- Just reach out to one or more of the students who may have traded contact info with you to let them know you believe in them and support them!

Please respond back and let me know how/if you'd like to continue to be involved!

In looking through the student bio sheets, the things they mentioned being most worried about for college were: paying for it, moving away from home, and potentially not making good grades/picking the right major. I'm sure many of you shared the same worries as well (I know I did!), so we will make sure to incorporate these topics into upcoming online and in-person discussions.

And again, thank you!

Best,

Sarah Jensen



# STUDENT AMBASSADOR TOOLKIT

## APPENDIX III : SECOND MEETING

### A. SAMPLE SECOND MEETING AGENDA

- 11:30a** • Sign-in / Registration
- 11:45a** • Introduction Introduction & Icebreakers
- Welcome!
  - Icebreaker
- 12:00p** • Financial Aid Q&A
- The most important things to share
  - Goal setting from last year's numbers
  - FAFSA checklist
- 12:30p** • Lunch
- 1:00p** • Brainstorming
- Break out into groups and come up with ideas on how to best use resources provided today
- 2:15p** • Closing, Next Steps, and Survey

#### Speaker's Notes: Meeting Two Intro

**Dallas County Student Ambassadors** | January 9, 2016

**Goal:** To raise college affordability awareness and FAFSA/ TASFA completion in Dallas County

At our last meeting on November 7 we...

- Set our ground rules for how we wanted our meetings to be run
- Had large group discussion about FAFSA/TASFA and paying for college
- Heard from the college students about their experience - learned about reminding parents about what needed to be done and how much help is out there to support you
- Looked at last year's marketing materials and brainstormed ways to improve for this year

Today we will...

- Keep the conversation going about FAFSA/TASFA
- Look at your campus' FAFSA completion rates
- Share the 2016 marketing materials you helped shape
- Talk through the process for completing missions to earn raffle entries
- Break out and brainstorm additional ways to use the materials and network with college students.

### B. SAMPLE STUDENT TALKING POINTS

#### What is the FAFSA?

The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is the most important form students fill out that can get them money for college. Filling out the FAFSA form is the first step for almost all financial aid—including from the federal and state government, colleges and many scholarships.

#### The four-bullet point FAFSA application talk:

1. Application: FAFSA is the main application to find out how much money you can receive for college. It is available at [www.FAFSA.gov](http://www.FAFSA.gov)
2. Taxes & Income: It requires parent and student tax and income information
3. March Priority: A lot of financial aid is "first come, first served" - so you should submit your FAFSA as soon as you can. File by early March to maximize the amount of aid you will receive. Deadlines vary by college.
4. Doesn't Hurt to Apply: Last year Dallas County students left \$30 million on the table by not applying. It doesn't hurt to apply (or force you to take out loans), but it could hurt you NOT to apply. Best part, NO ESSAYS!

#### Other FAFSA Facts:

- It's required by all colleges
- Students can fill it out as early as January 1 of their senior year. (Starting next year FAFSA will open in Oct.)
- Filling it out determines how much need-based aid\* the student and their family can receive (grants/scholarships; aka free money!) and the student's eligibility is for loans and work-study.
- Unless you are able to write a check and pay for college completely out of pocket, you should file the FAFSA/TASFA. Everyone that applies is eligible for at least a government loan, which has a lower interest rate and better repayment plans than going through a bank or putting it on a credit card. It's important to know filing the FAFSA doesn't obligate you to taking out loans.
- To complete the FAFSA, the student must be a U.S. citizen or eligible non-citizen as defined on the FAFSA website. If the student is NOT a U.S. citizen, then you fill out the paper FAFSA or the Texas Application for State Financial Aid (TASFA) form to apply for state-based aid. Some exclusions apply. Check with the individual colleges to see if you should file the paper FAFSA or TASFA.



# STUDENT AMBASSADOR TOOLKIT

## APPENDIX III : SECOND MEETING

### B. SAMPLE STUDENT TALKING POINTS CONT...

**\*NEED-BASED AID** = money awarded to a student based on how much they need to pay for college. A family that makes less money than another family would most likely qualify for more need-based aid because they have fewer resources. Need-based aid is not awarded based on a student's grades.

#### The five-bullet point after the FAFSA talk:

1. Submitting ≠ Completing: Monitor your email carefully. The FAFSA website will send an important document called the Student Aid Report. Look it over carefully. Make sure you and your parents sign the FAFSA and submit any documents requested by your colleges for verification. If you filed FAFSA using estimated taxes, go back in and update your FAFSA.

2. Check your college's online portal: Colleges will send a notification to the email you listed on your FAFSA on how to set up an account for receiving messages and documents, called a portal. If you are missing documents, this is where they will tell you. Once colleges get your FAFSA information, they may have more forms to fill out or questions about your application. This is common. Be sure to provide the information as quickly as possible.

3. Special circumstances: If your family's income changes drastically, or something catastrophic happens – let colleges know! You may be able to do a special circumstance form to allow them to take this into consideration.

4. Accept/decline financial aid: Your financial aid award letter will be available through the online portal for each college. This letter will tell you how much that college will cost – and what the college can offer you to help you pay to go there. This will probably be a mix of grants and scholarships (money that is given to you), loans (which you must pay back), and work-study (an on-campus job – not money you get up front). You won't receive the money in your account until you manually accept/decline. Don't forget you can decline the loans offered to you, or only accept a portion of the loan. Visit [www.finaid.org](http://www.finaid.org) for more help understanding benefits and risks of loans.

5. Complete loan counseling: If you decided to take out loans, you'll need to go through a short class online called "loan counseling." Information will be sent to you through your portal.

#### What information will the FAFSA ask for?

- 2015 (or most recent) federal income tax returns and W-2s
- Records of untaxed income if applicable (ex. Social Security benefits, welfare benefits, or veteran benefits)
- Most recent bank statement and records of investment (if applicable)
- Social Security Number (if applicable)
- Driver's License (if applicable)
- Alien Registration Number (for non-citizens)

#### Why is it important for me and my family to file taxes by mid-February?

The earlier you file your taxes, the earlier you can submit your financial aid application and receive your award letter. Even though you can submit your financial aid application without having completed your 2015 tax returns, in order to avoid the hassle of verification and having to re-submit information, it is highly recommended that you have your taxes filed before you begin your financial aid application. Also, if you submit your tax returns electronically three weeks prior or through the mail eleven weeks prior to filling out the FAFSA, you can transfer your IRS tax return information directly from the IRS Web site to your FAFSA form. The IRS Data Retrieval Tool simplifies the process, and removes any chances of human error.

Federal Student Aid YouTube Channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/user/FederalStudentAid>

FAFSA Guide (English/Spanish):

<http://www.understandingfafsa.org/>



# STUDENT AMBASSADOR

## TOOLKIT

### APPENDIX III : SECOND MEETING

#### C. SAMPLE GOAL SETTING WORKSHEET

Last year nearly 6,000 low-income seniors didn't fill out a FAFSA leaving close to \$33 million in Pell Grant money on the table. Our goal is to raise the FAFSA completion rate in Dallas County from 43% to 50% of seniors filing by June 30, 2016. The only way the county will reach this benchmark is if each individual high school also gets at least half of the senior class to file a FAFSA! This is where we need your help. The only way to change is to know measure where we've been and where we want to go!

Use this link to research your school's FAFSA completion rates: <http://goo.gl/hK2Nc9>

#### My High School Baseline

As of November 20, 2015 \_\_\_\_\_% or \_\_\_\_\_ (number) seniors had completed the FAFSA at my high school.

**GOAL:** Assuming the number of seniors stay the same, we need \_\_\_\_\_ (number) of seniors to complete their FAFSA by June 30, 2016 to reach our 50% goal for my campus.

	# of Seniors	My High School	My High School	My High School	My High School
My High School					
My High District					
Dallas County	27,583	15,090	54.71%	13,682	49.6%
Texas	307,171	167,487	54.52%	155,295	50.56%

FAFSA Information as of 11/20/2015

#### Monthly Check In

Jan: We have \_\_\_\_\_ (number) of seniors that have completed and need \_\_\_\_\_ to reach our goal.

Feb: We have \_\_\_\_\_ (number) of seniors that have completed and need \_\_\_\_\_ to reach our goal.

Mar: We have \_\_\_\_\_ (number) of seniors that have completed and need \_\_\_\_\_ to reach our goal.

April: We have \_\_\_\_\_ (number) of seniors that have completed and need \_\_\_\_\_ to reach our goal.

May: We have \_\_\_\_\_ (number) of seniors that have completed and need \_\_\_\_\_ to reach our goal.

June: We have \_\_\_\_\_ (number) of seniors that have completed and need \_\_\_\_\_ to reach our goal.





# STUDENT AMBASSADOR

## TOOLKIT

### APPENDIX IV : SAMPLE MISSION - HIGH SCHOOL AMBASSADOR

Mission	Entries Allowed	Award Date
<b>Post Up:</b> Hang the campaign posters/flyers with workshop dates prominently on your campus, preferably in heavily trafficked areas of the school where seniors will notice them.	One entry per poster	January 29
<b>Teacher Selfie:</b> Give senior teachers copies of the "Save-the-Date" business cards to hand out in their classrooms. Ask them to remind students about the workshops in February and FAFSA/TASFA completion. Prioritize the teachers who you believe inspire students the most!	One entry per week	January 29
<b>Table Toppers:</b> Place five foldable table tents on the lunch tables in your school cafeteria, front office, college advising center, or other areas where seniors will notice them.	One entry per week	February 12
<b>Save-the-Date Selfie:</b> Hand out "save-the-date" business cards to seniors and then take a selfie with as many seniors as you can. The bigger the better. Try this during lunch or at a senior assembly!	One entry per week	February 12
<b>Superstar:</b> Utilize your speaking points to give a mini-presentation to a club, team, youth group or senior assembly on your campus to let them know about the importance of filing the FAFSA/TASFA early! Take a short video or picture and upload it to be entered.	One entry per week	February 12
<b>Holla If You Hear Me:</b> Turn in a morning announcement to your front office reminding seniors to attend the upcoming workshops and fill out their FAFSA! Before submitting a short video of the message being read, make sure your counselor or principal has approved these announcements. A sample message is below. If counselor allows you to do one every week you can receive one raffle entry per week.	One entry per week	February 12
<b>Butcher Banner:</b> Work with your campus art teacher, club or other creative students to create butcher paper signs you can hang in the hallways and cafeteria promoting FAFSA completion. Use the #FirstFAFSA	One entry per sign	March 11
<b>Meme UR School:</b> Create a meme you can hang up at your school. Have your counselor approve it and ask them if you can make 25 copies.	One entry per meme	April 1

Get creative! Have an idea for a mission that is not listed here? Email us and let us know! Your completed ideas can count as raffle entries.

#### Sample Morning Announcement / Sporting Announcement

Attention seniors! Get excited for college. But first - FAFSA! The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is a form students fill out that can get you money for college. Filling out the FAFSA form is the first step for almost all financial aid. It helps determine how much money you can receive in grants/scholarships (free money!) and what your eligibility is for loans and priority on campus jobs. It is based on how much the student/family can afford to pay for college (not based on grades). It is required by all colleges. And, guess what - NO ESSAYS!

It is very important that you submit your financial aid application as early as you can to increase your chances of receiving the maximum aid you're eligible for. Need help? Stop by the counseling office or come to a workshop in Dallas. Go to [www.YouCanAffordCollege.org](http://www.YouCanAffordCollege.org) for more info.

Visit [www.YouCanAffordCollege.org/counselor](http://www.YouCanAffordCollege.org/counselor) to learn more about the ins and outs of FAFSA and TASFA. We have numerous resources there including sample emails and morning messages you can use as well as short videos from TG.

