

# FAFSA

Free Application for Federal Student Aid



SchoolHouse  
Connection

## FINANCIAL AID FOR YOUTH WHO ARE HOMELESS (OR AT RISK OF HOMELESSNESS) AND ON THEIR OWN

You do not need to provide your parents' information, and you do not need to file a financial aid appeal if you are:

- Under the age 24; and
- Experiencing homelessness on or after July 1st of the year specified on the FAFSA. Homelessness means you are staying:
  - with other people temporarily because you lost your housing or similar reason;
  - in a shelter
  - in a motel/hotel due to lack of alternatives
  - in a car or other unsheltered situation
  - living in a campus residence hall but otherwise would have nowhere else to go; and
- Not in the physical custody of your parents or guardians.

**If you meet all of these criteria, you are considered an independent student for the FAFSA, because you meet the definition of an “unaccompanied homeless youth.”**

**To complete your FAFSA, you will need one of the following three people to determine your status as an unaccompanied homeless youth.**

**1. McKinney-Vento liaison or another high school staff member.**

If you were identified as homeless in high school by a McKinney-Vento liaison or another high school staff member who knew about your homelessness, you might have received a determination letter in high school. Your liaison can write a letter for you each year of college if you continue to meet the definition of an unaccompanied homeless youth, and if the liaison knows enough about your situation to make a determination. Financial aid administrators are required to accept this letter, unless they have conflicting information. Reach out to your high school and ask for the McKinney-Vento liaison's contact information. Use the email template below to request a determination letter from the liaison.

**2. Shelters that are HUD-funded or a youth or transitional program.**

If you stayed at a shelter, you may be able to request a letter from this shelter. Shelters that are HUD-funded or a youth or transitional program are authorized to write a determination letter. Financial aid administrators are required to accept this letter, unless they have conflicting information. Reach out to the shelter or program you stayed at and ask for the Director's contact information. Use the email template below to request a determination letter.

**3. Financial aid administrator.**

If you do not have, and cannot obtain, a determination letter from the people above, your financial aid administrator must make a determination based on the definitions of unaccompanied and homeless, or unaccompanied, self-supporting, and at risk of homelessness. Financial aid administrators can make a determination based on a documented interview with you. The goal of this conversation is to determine if you meet these definitions, not to determine or assess the reasons why you are experiencing homelessness. Please use the email template below to request a documented interview with your financial administrator.

For definitions of homelessness, please visit pages 7 and 8.

## **EMAIL TEMPLATE TO MCKINNEY-VENTO LIAISONS REQUESTING A DETERMINATION LETTER**

Dear **(Insert name of Liaison)**,

My name is **(insert name)** and I am emailing to request a letter determining my status as an Unaccompanied Homeless Youth for my Financial Aid. I attended **(insert school)** from **(insert dates)**.

SchoolHouse Connection has provided this [tool](#) to help authorized entities, including McKinney-Vento liaisons, make determinations for unaccompanied homeless youth.

I am available during these times **(insert availability)** and can be reached at **(insert email address and phone number)**.

Thank you and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

**(Signature & Student ID Number)**

## **EMAIL TEMPLATE TO HUD-FUNDED/YOUTH OR TRANSITIONAL PROGRAM REQUESTING DETERMINATION LETTER**

Dear **(Insert name of Director, or Designee of the Director)**,

My name is **(insert name)** and I am emailing to see if **(insert name of shelter)** is a HUD or RHYA funding recipient. If so, I would like to request a letter determining my status as an Unaccompanied Homeless Youth for my Financial Aid.

SchoolHouse Connection has provided this tool to help authorized entities, including directors of HUD or RHYA-funded shelters, make determinations for unaccompanied homeless youth.

I am available during these times **(insert availability)** and can be reached at **(insert email address and phone number)**.

Thank you and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

**(Signature)**

## **EMAIL TEMPLATE TO FINANCIAL AID ADMINISTRATORS REQUESTING DOCUMENTED INTERVIEW FOR INDEPENDENT STATUS**

Dear Financial Aid Administrator,

My name is **(insert name)** and I am emailing to request a documented interview to determine my independent status as an unaccompanied homeless youth.

I do not have and am unable to obtain documentation from any of the legally authorized entities: a school district homeless liaison, the director **(or designee)** of an emergency shelter or transitional housing program funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, or the director **(or designee)** of a runaway or homeless youth basic center or transitional living program.

Therefore, as described in the [Application Verification Guide](#), I am requesting to receive a determination from my Financial Aid Administrator. This [tool](#) from the U.S. Department of Education's technical assistance center provides a document for conducting an interview.

I am available during these times **(insert availability)** and can be reached at (insert email address and phone number).

Thank you and I look forward to hearing from you soon.  
**(Signature & Student ID Number)**



## **OTHER TIPS FOR COMMUNICATING**

When requesting financial aid documents, it is important to keep detailed records of all conversations you have and with whom you speak. Here are some tips for requesting financial aid documents or information:

1. Use your University email address or a reliable email address whenever possible.
2. In the subject line of each email, be sure to include your first and last name and a few words about what you are asking or requesting. For example, “John William’s Financial Aid Letter Request” You can also include your Student ID number when it applies.
3. If you speak on the phone with someone, consider writing notes in an email while you are on the call and sending it to yourself as a reminder of what happened on the phone call.
4. Follow-up each week as needed if you have not gotten a response, or if you need additional assistance.
5. Consider moving all financial aid emails into a folder titled “FAFSA,” so that you can quickly access them when needed

## **PERTINENT DEFINITIONS FROM THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION'S APPLICATION AND VERIFICATION GUIDE 2019-2020**

### **Homeless**

“A student is considered homeless if he lacks fixed, regular, and adequate housing. This is broader than just living “on the street.” It includes temporarily living with other people because he had nowhere else to go; living in substandard housing (if it doesn’t meet local building codes or the utilities are turned off, it is generally not adequate); living in emergency or transitional shelters, for example, trailers provided by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) after disasters; or living in motels, camping grounds, cars, parks, abandoned buildings, bus or train stations, or any public or private place not designed for humans to live in. It also includes living in the school dormitory if the student would otherwise be homeless. A student living in any of these situations and fleeing an abusive parent may be considered homeless even if the parent would provide support and a place to live.”

### **Unaccompanied**

“When a student is not living in the physical custody of a parent or guardian.”

### **At Risk of Being Homeless**

“When a student’s housing may cease to be fixed, regular, and adequate, for example, a student who is being evicted and has been unable to find fixed, regular, and adequate housing

### **Self-Supporting**

“When a student pays for his own living expenses, including a fixed, regular, and adequate housing.”

### **Youth**

“Any student who is not yet 24 may qualify for a homeless youth determination.”

### **Recognized third parties**

“Relevant information can come from recognized third-parties such as private or publicly funded homeless shelters and service providers, financial aid administrators from another college, college access programs such as TRIO and GEAR UP, college or high school counselors, other mental health professionals, social workers, mentors, doctors, and clergy.

## OTHER IMPORTANT INFORMATION

### **McKinney-Vento Liaisons**

McKinney-Vento liaisons are authorized to make determinations of unaccompanied homeless youth status. Under the McKinney-Vento Act, every local educational agency is required to designate a liaison for homeless children and youth. The local educational agency liaison coordinates services to ensure that homeless children and youths are identified, enroll in school, and have the opportunity to succeed academically. Under the law, the liaison must be able to carry out the duties included in the law. Liaisons are specifically required to inform unaccompanied homeless youth of their status as independent students on the FAFSA, and to assist them to obtain determinations. This [short document](#) describes those duties. According to the [Application and Verification Guide 2019-2020](#) (AVG-118) “local liaisons may write subsequent-year letters of verification for unaccompanied homeless youth through age 23 for whom they have the necessary information to write such letters. This documentation is acceptable for verifying unaccompanied homelessness.”

### **HUD Homeless Assistance Programs**

Directors of an emergency shelter or transitional housing program funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development are authorized to determine unaccompanied homeless youth status (see AVG-27 in the Application and Verification Guide 2019-2020). For more information on HUD homeless assistance, click [here](#).

### **Runaway and Homeless Youth Act Programs**

Directors of a runaway or homeless youth basic center, or transitional living program, are authorized to determine unaccompanied homeless youth status (see AVG-27 in the Application and Verification Guide 2019-2020 ). For more information, click [here](#).