

TIPS FOR PREPARING FOR AN INDEPENDENT FINANCIAL AID INTERVIEW

Filling out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) can be complicated and tedious. For youth experiencing homelessness on their own (unaccompanied homeless youth), this process is even more complex. Unaccompanied homeless youth are not living with, or supported by, a parent or guardian and cannot obtain parental income information (to learn more about the definition of an unaccompanied homeless youth, see [here](#).)

If you are an unaccompanied homeless youth, you are considered an “independent student” under the Higher Education Act. This means that you do not need to include parental information on the FAFSA. However, you will need to provide certain documentation about your status as an unaccompanied homeless youth to the financial aid office. This documentation can come from a high school or school district homeless liaison, or a director from a shelter that is U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)-funded or a Runaway and Homeless youth program. To learn more about applying for the FAFSA as an unaccompanied homeless youth, see [here](#).

If you do not have, or cannot obtain, documentation from those individuals, your financial aid administrator is required to make a determination of your status as an unaccompanied homeless youth. The financial aid administrator’s determination may be based on a documented interview with you. **This resource is designed to help unaccompanied homeless youth prepare for documented interviews with the financial aid administrator.**

The goal of this conversation is to determine IF you meet the definition of an unaccompanied homeless youth, not to determine or assess the reasons WHY you are experiencing homelessness. **The most common question financial aid administrators are likely to ask is the timeline of your living situation.** It is inappropriate for them to ask for the reasons for your homelessness, and, according to federal guidance, they may not base determinations on these reasons.

Based on our own personal experiences, and our experience helping other young people, we provide the following tips to help you prepare for this interview.

- Practice telling your story and include a timeline with dates if you can. The financial aid administrator is looking to see if you were experiencing homelessness on or after July 1st of the year specified on the FAFSA. Write out everything in advance so you can keep track of your timeline.
- Reach out to any recognized third parties like other homeless shelters and service providers, college access programs such as TRIO and GEAR UP, college or high school counselors, mental health professionals, social workers, mentors, doctors, and clergy to see if they can provide supporting documentation.
- Take notes during the interview and ask clarifying questions if you don't understand something. Ask the financial aid administrator when you should expect to have a determination.
- Remember your financial aid administrator's name and send a thank you email afterwards. Follow up with the financial aid administrator if you haven't heard back from them in a few business days.
- For more tips about communicating with a financial aid administrator, see [here](#).