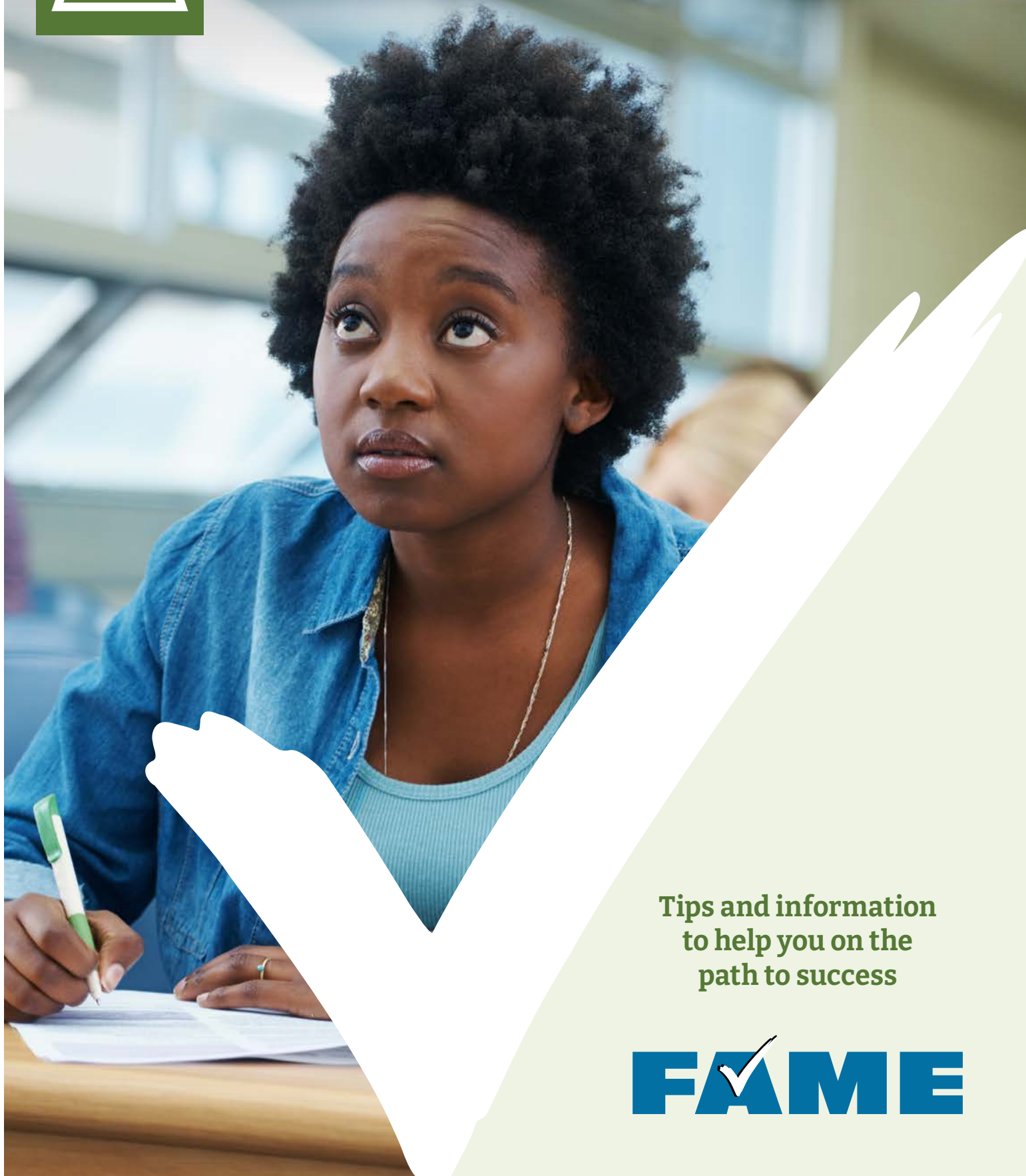




# ADULT LEARNER

## RESOURCE GUIDE



Tips and information  
to help you on the  
path to success

**FAME**

# ADULT LEARNER RESOURCE GUIDE

## TIPS AND INFORMATION TO HELP YOU ON YOUR PATH TO HIGHER EDUCATION.

If you’re an adult who would like to begin higher education—either for the first time or after a long break—but you aren’t quite sure how you will afford it, this guide is for you. The Adult Learner Resource Guide was created for adults who have questions about paying for higher education, finding scholarships, taking out or managing previously borrowed loans, and more.

The guide includes:

- Money management basics to set up a good financial foundation
- Tips for paying for higher education
- Information to help manage both new and old student loans

**Ready to get started?** Following the tips and resources provided here will set you on the right path to financial success.

The Finance Authority of Maine (FAME) helps families afford higher education through financial planning tools and programs. No matter where you are on your path to higher education, FAME has the team and the resources to help you be successful.

**PHONE**

1-800-228-3734, TTY: 207-626-2717

**EMAIL**

Education@FAMEmaine.com


**WEB**

FAMEmaine.com

NextGenforME.com

ClaimYourFuture.org

**SOCIAL**

 /FAMEmaine.org

 @FAME.Maine

 /FAMEmaine

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# HOW WILL I PAY FOR HIGHER EDUCATION?

**EARNING A DEGREE OR CREDENTIAL** can increase job opportunities, earning potential and employment benefits. Many students have concerns about how to pay for higher education, especially if their earnings have been or will be reduced. For many, the solution is a piecemeal approach that may include:

- Financial aid
- Savings
- Income
- Reducing expenses
- Borrowing

The checklist below will help you develop your plan.

## PAYING FOR HIGHER EDUCATION CHECKLIST

### FINANCIAL AID & SCHOLARSHIPS

- ☐ **File the FAFSA** at [StudentAid.gov](https://studentaid.gov) every year. Want help filing the FAFSA? Free help is available:
  - Find a Maine College and Career Access (MCCA) Program near you at [Maine.gov/doe/learning/adulted/transitions](https://Maine.gov/doe/learning/adulted/transitions).
  - Finance Authority of Maine (FAME) [FAMEmaine.com/contact](https://FAMEmaine.com/contact)
- ☐ **Start your scholarship search** using FAME's Maine Scholarship Search at [FAMEmaine.com/scholarships](https://FAMEmaine.com/scholarships).

### ALTERNATIVE FUNDING OPTIONS

- ☐ Ask if your employer offers **tuition reimbursement**.
- ☐ Use your **military education benefits**.  
For more information:
  - Visit the Military Families and Veterans page at [FAMEmaine.com/military](https://FAMEmaine.com/military).
- ☐ **Research state programs:**
  - Parents as Scholars is run by the Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) through the ASPIRE Program. Contact DHHS for more info at [Maine.gov/dhhs/ofi/programs-services](https://Maine.gov/dhhs/ofi/programs-services).
  - The Maine College and Career Access (MCCA) Program offers free support to help students get ready for college. Find a program near you at [Maine.gov/doe/learning/adulted/transitions](https://Maine.gov/doe/learning/adulted/transitions).
  - Check out the **Higher Opportunity for Pathways to Employment (HOPE)** through Maine's Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). Learn more at [Maine.gov/dhhs/ofi/programs-services/hope](https://Maine.gov/dhhs/ofi/programs-services/hope).

### SAVINGS

- ☐ **Use savings to reduce student loan borrowing.**  
Possible savings options include:
  - 529 College Savings Plans: Learn more at [NextGenforME.com](https://NextGenforME.com).
  - Family Development Accounts: Learn more at [NewVenturesMaine.org](https://NewVenturesMaine.org).
  - Personal savings not earmarked for emergency savings.

### EDUCATION TAX BENEFITS

- ☐ To **learn about available benefits** and qualification criteria, download IRS Publication 970, Tax Benefits for Education, at [irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p970.pdf](https://irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p970.pdf)

### TUITION PAYMENT PLANS

- ☐ **Consider a tuition payment plan** to spread payments over time. Typically, there is a small enrollment fee, but payments are interest-free. Contact your school's Billing Office for additional information.

### HOUSEHOLD AND COLLEGE EXPENSES

- ☐ **Manage your household expenses**
  - Set financial goals
  - Review your expenses
  - Create a spending plan
  - Through iGrad® and Enrich®, FAME offers free online financial education to support Maine people.  
[fame.enrich.org](https://fame.enrich.org)  
[fame.igrad.com](https://fame.igrad.com)

# HOW CAN I REDUCE COSTS?

The costs of pursuing higher education include expenses billed by the school and expenses that are discretionary or not billed by the school. Consider the following cost-cutting measures to reduce both billed and unbilled costs while you pursue your higher education goals.

## COST REDUCTION CHECKLIST

### REDUCE HOUSEHOLD EXPENSES

- ☐ **Set financial goals.**
- ☐ **Review your expenses** to determine where you can spend less on cell phones, internet, transportation, housing, utilities, food, insurance, and any extras.
- ☐ **See if you qualify for state financial assistance.** You may be eligible for help with childcare, housing, and other costs. The State of Maine has a 211 hotline (dial 2-1-1) that refers Maine residents to the appropriate service.
- ☐ **Create a spending plan.**

### REDUCE THE BILL

- ☐ **Check out FAME's BUILD: Steps to Financial Wellness** publication for more ideas and resources.
- ☐ **File the FAFSA** at [StudentAid.gov](https://studentaid.gov) every year by your school's priority filing deadline.
- ☐ **Use your benefits.** If you are a Veteran or Service Member, use your education benefits. If you are Native American or were in foster care, pursue tuition waivers.
- ☐ **Talk to your employer** about any available education funding.
- ☐ **If your school is charging for medical insurance** and you already have medical coverage, complete the steps to waive the medical insurance through your school. If you don't have health insurance, see if you qualify for free or more affordable health insurance and compare that option to what the school is offering.

### REDUCE PROGRAM LENGTH

- ☐ **Obtain a Prior Learning Assessment (PLA)** to see if experiences can count toward academic credit.
  - Already enrolled in college? Contact your academic advisor for more information about PLA at your school.
  - Exploring a college? Connect with the admissions office to learn about PLA at that school.
- ☐ **Transfer credits** from a previous school.
  - Contact the Registrar's Office at the school you plan to attend to ask for a transfer credit evaluation.

### SAVE ON BOOKS

- ☐ **Use free resources** like Google Books and your school library.
- ☐ **Consider renting** from a source like [Chegg.com](https://www.chegg.com) or your school bookstore.
- ☐ **Buy your books used.**
- ☐ **Purchase digital books.** Downloadable textbooks are often cheaper than hard copies and are delivered on demand.
- ☐ **Earn cash back** by selling books you no longer need.



## HOW DO I FIND SCHOLARSHIPS?

Scholarships are for students of all ages—some are even targeted specifically to adult learners.

Scholarships are funds that do not have to be repaid. To receive scholarship aid, students must actively search and apply for these awards.

Keep the following tips in mind when searching and applying for scholarships:

## SCHOLARSHIPS FOR ADULT LEARNERS

**The Higher Opportunity for Pathways to Employment Program (HOPE)** is committed to helping parents and specified relatives reach their educational and career goals by helping cover costs related to school. [Maine.gov/dhhs/ofi/programs-services/hope](https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/ofi/programs-services/hope).

**Maine Competitive Skills Scholarship** helps workers learn new skills and succeed in a changing economy. [MaineCareerCenter.com](https://www.maineCareerCenter.com).

**The Adult Learner Scholarship Fund** is for nontraditional students who want to change their lives for the better through education and training. The scholarship supports a range of training, including attending two- and four-year colleges and universities, completing a certificate and other non-degree programs, or attempting a self-directed learning experience with a clear goal. [MaineCF.org](https://www.maineCF.org).



# 5 TIPS FOR SCHOLARSHIP SUCCESS

## 1 FILE THE FAFSA AT STUDENTAID.GOV.

Visit [FAMEmaine.com/FAFSA](https://famemaine.com/FAFSA) for information that will help you prepare to file and tips to make FAFSA completion easier! As part of their application process, many scholarship organizations request a copy of your FAFSA summary known as the FAFSA Submission Summary (FSS).

## 2 USE FREE SCHOLARSHIP SEARCHES.

Never pay for a scholarship search. Instead, use free search sites to build your list of potential scholarships. Legitimate scholarship organizations are trying to give away money, not take your money. Start by visiting [FAMEmaine.com/scholarships](https://famemaine.com/scholarships) where you will find a scholarship search, links to legitimate scholarship searches, and a downloadable spreadsheet that you can use to track scholarships.

Using the right keywords or search terms will yield the best results. Here are some recommended search terms:

- Adult Student
- Returning Student
- Returning to School
- Nontraditional Student
- Lifelong Learner
- Graduate Student

## 3 DEVELOP A STRATEGY FOR SUCCESS.

Determine how much time you can dedicate per week to completing applications. Stay focused and positive! The more quality applications you submit, the more likely your efforts will pay off.

## 4 MEET DEADLINES AND SUBMIT COMPLETE APPLICATIONS.

The scholarship selection process can be very competitive. Don't let your application drop to the bottom of the pile because it is late or has errors. Start early and have another set of eyes proofread your application.

## 5 APPLY EVERY YEAR.

Ask if scholarships you receive are renewable. If so, submit the renewal application and documents by the deadline.

- Keep searching for new scholarships each year. Any money you receive from a scholarship helps limit the amount of money you have to borrow.
- Maintain strong academic performance—grades and progress matter!

# SERVICE MEMBERS, VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES

**STUDENTS WITH A MILITARY CONNECTION** may have access to military service-related educational opportunities and benefits. Consider these resources and programs as you plan your future.

## CHOOSING A SCHOOL

Many schools offer military-friendly services and benefits such as **Veterans' Support Service Advisors**, a **Veterans' Mentor Program**, a **Veterans' Resource Center**, or special publications and web content for veterans. As you research schools, ask them what services they offer veterans and their families. These websites can help you in your search:

- **The Maine State Approving Agency for Veteran's Education Programs** ([Maine.gov/veterans/benefits/education/msaa/index.html](https://maine.gov/veterans/benefits/education/msaa/index.html)) is responsible for approving education and training programs in Maine for students that receive GI Bill benefits.
- **Military Friendly** ([MilitaryFriendly.com](https://militaryfriendly.com)) provides a list of military-friendly schools. Students can search for schools based on size, type, and location. To search for schools by name, location, and/or area of interest, visit [GIJobs.com/schools-forveterans](https://GIJobs.com/schools-forveterans).

## CAREER PLANNING AND COLLEGE APPLICATION ASSISTANCE

The following organizations are not specific to veterans, but may be helpful if you are looking for assistance with college preparation and applications or the process of transitioning to college:

- **Maine Educational Opportunity Center**  
([MEOC.Maine.edu](https://meoc.maine.edu))
- **The Maine College and Career Access (MCCA) Program**  
([Maine.gov/doe/learning/adulted/transitions](https://maine.gov/doe/learning/adulted/transitions))

## RESEARCHING A CAREER

- **My Next Move for Veterans** ([MyNextMove.org/vets](https://MyNextMove.org/vets)) helps veterans match their military experience to a civilian career.
- **O\*Net** offers a self-directed career exploration and assessment profiler at [ONetcenter.org](https://ONetcenter.org).

## EXPLORING MILITARY EDUCATION BENEFITS

**Military OneSource** is a Department of Defense-funded program that provides free and comprehensive information on every aspect of military life, including higher education benefits to active duty, Guard and Reserve members and their families. For more information visit [MilitaryOneSource.mil](https://MilitaryOneSource.mil).

**Maine Army National Guard Education Services Officers** are willing to assist all of Maine's current and former service members with education-benefit-related questions. For more information call 207-430-5922 or email [ng.me.arng.list.j1-esos@army.mil](mailto:ng.me.arng.list.j1-esos@army.mil).



## NEW MAINERS

**IF YOU ARE NEW TO MAINE** as an immigrant, refugee, new resident or new citizen, you may have questions about the education system in the United States, such as how to pay for college, whether you qualify for financial aid, and if your existing credential(s) will be accepted for work or school. We've shared some important information below, but to learn more visit [FAMemaine.com/newmainers](https://FAMemaine.com/newmainers).

### USING YOUR EXISTING DEGREE

Do you have an existing degree or certificate from your home country? You may be able to use it in the United States for work or schooling. You may need to have your degree or certificate reviewed by an objective third party to see which degree is similar when using United States standards. This is called **Credential Evaluation** and you can [learn more](#). Decide if you want your credential evaluated and who you want to evaluate it. Choose who will review your degree or certificate depending on how you will use it.

#### FOR SCHOOLING

Every school may have different requirements for credential evaluation. Start by speaking with the school you want to attend. The school's admissions or international students office should be able to offer more information about their requirements.

#### FOR WORK

It may not be necessary to obtain a credential evaluation. Talk to people in your industry and employers to learn more about their requirements. If you've had your credential evaluated, clearly stated on your resume that your credential has been evaluation based on U.S. standards. If your credential has not been evaluated, it's still import to list your credential on your resume. License requirements vary from state to state. Before you have your degree or certificate reviewed for a professional license, confirm the requirements of the professional board in your state.



# NEW MAINERS

## EARNING A HIGH SCHOOL DEGREE

In order to attend college in the United States, you must have a high school diploma or equivalent. In Maine, the HiSET exam is used to award a Maine High School Equivalency Diploma. Adult Education programs across Maine offer free HiSET preparation and testing services. Find an Adult Education program near you at [maineadulted.org](http://maineadulted.org).

## PREPARING FOR COLLEGE

The Maine College and Career Access (MCCA) Program offers career planning, academic preparation, financial aid help, college planning and admissions testing. Find a program near you at [Maine.gov/doe/learning/adulted/transitions](http://Maine.gov/doe/learning/adulted/transitions).

## PAYING FOR COLLEGE

Many students in the United States rely on financial aid to pay for higher education. Financial aid includes grants, scholarships, loans and work study. Financial aid is offered by the federal government, individual states, colleges and universities, community groups and some employers. Federal student aid includes grants and loans, and Maine offers the Maine State Grant. To apply for federal student aid and the Maine State Grant, students must complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (referred to as the FAFSA).

## TO BE ELIGIBLE FOR FEDERAL STUDENT AID AND THE MAINE STATE GRANT, YOU MUST BE:

- A U.S. citizen, or
- A U.S. permanent resident or an individual who has an arrival-departure record (I-94) from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services showing one of the following:
  - Refugee
  - Asylum Granted
  - Cuban-Haitian Entrant
  - Parolee

## IF YOU ARE NOT ELIGIBLE FOR FEDERAL STUDENT AID OR THE MAINE STATE GRANT BECAUSE YOU ARE AN ASYLUM SEEKER OR UNDOCUMENTED MAINER, THERE ARE OTHER WAYS TO PAY FOR COLLEGE.

- Many employers offer education benefits such as reimbursement for tuition or scholarships. See your human resource office to see if your employer offers this benefit.
- Pay for courses as you can until your immigration status changes and you become eligible for federal student aid and the Maine State Grant.
- There are [scholarships](#) that asylum seekers and undocumented Mainers can apply for.



## HOW DO I BORROW FOR MY EDUCATION?

If you need to borrow loans to help pay for your education, whether it's for the first time or in addition to what you have previously borrowed, there are important things to know and consider when borrowing.

Request a free annual credit report at [AnnualCreditReport.com](https://AnnualCreditReport.com), as your federal loan history and any private education loan history will be listed in your credit report.

### UNDERSTAND YOUR FEDERAL LOAN OPTIONS

Federal loans are available to students and parents to help finance education. To be considered for a federal loan, a FAFSA must be filed at [StudentAid.gov](https://StudentAid.gov). Loans must be repaid with interest.

#### Types of loans:

- **Direct Subsidized Loans** are need-based student loans that do not accrue interest while the student is enrolled in college. They are not credit based.
- **Direct Unsubsidized Loans** are student loans that are not based on need. Interest does accrue while the student is enrolled in college. These loans are also not credit based.
- **Direct PLUS Loan** for Parents and Graduate Students are credit-based loans available to parents of dependent students and to graduate students.

The Federal Student Aid website, [StudentAid.gov](https://StudentAid.gov), is the best source for up-to-date information, including loan limits for the federal loan programs.

### HOW MUCH SHOULD YOU BORROW?

Limit total student loan debt to no more than your salary for your first year of employment. Your total anticipated monthly payment should be no more 10% of your take-home pay.

Use FAME's Student Loan/Salary Calculator at [FAMEmaine.com](https://FAMEmaine.com) to help you figure out how much you should borrow based on expected future earnings.

# I HAVE AN EXISTING FEDERAL STUDENT LOAN—WHAT SHOULD I DO?

If you have an existing federal student loan (or if you are not sure if you have one), you should know that **keeping your federal student loan in good standing will help you receive additional federal financial aid funds.**

## NOT SURE IF YOU HAVE A FEDERAL STUDENT LOAN?

To determine if you have federal student loans, log into **StudentAid.gov**. You will need your **StudentAid.gov** username and password to log in. If you don't have one, you can create one at **StudentAid.gov**.

## DO YOU HAVE A PRIOR FEDERAL STUDENT LOAN THAT IS IN GOOD STANDING?

Your loan may be eligible for deferment (postponement of loan repayment) if you are planning to enroll at least half-time. Contact your loan servicer to see if you are eligible for a deferment and, if so, what paperwork is required. Be sure to find out whether interest will be accumulating while you are in deferment.

## DO YOU HAVE DEFAULTED FEDERAL STUDENT LOANS?

If your federal student loan has been referred to a collection agency, the loan is most likely in default. If one or more of your loans are in default, you must resolve the default before you can receive additional federal student aid. There are three ways to resolve a federal student loan default that can help you regain federal student aid eligibility:

- Repayment involves paying the entire balance due, including principal and all accrued interest and collection costs, in one lump sum. Settlement involves settling the debt by paying a sum less than the total payoff amount.
- Loan rehabilitation typically allows borrowers to exit default by making a series of on-time payments.
- Loan consolidation allows you to pay off one or more federal student loans with a single new loan that has a fixed interest rate.

For more detailed information about defaulted student loans visit **[StudentAid.gov/manage-loans/default/get-out?b=inspiredbudget](https://studentaid.gov/manage-loans/default/get-out?b=inspiredbudget)**.

For more information on tips and tools for successful money management and financial wellness, check out FAME's **BUILD: Steps to Financial Wellness** publication, [FAMEmaine.com/buildbooklet](https://famemaine.com/buildbooklet)

Want to learn more? Visit the Financial Wellness section at [FAMEmaine.com](https://famemaine.com) for more money management tips or the iGrad free money management tool at [FAME.iGrad.com](https://fame.iGrad.com).



**Finance Authority of Maine**

PO Box 949

5 Community Drive

Augusta, Maine 04332-0949

1-800-228-3734,

TTY 207-626-2717

[FAMEmaine.com](https://famemaine.com)

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