



PAY

TIPS FOR PLANNING AND PAYING FOR HIGHER EDUCATION



Your Guide
to Affording
Higher Education

FAME

PAY: TIPS FOR PLANNING AND PAYING FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

This publication was designed to help you navigate the paying for higher education process—how to prepare, when to apply for financial aid, what types of assistance exists, ways to reduce college costs, how to understand and compare financial aid offers, and much more.

In this guide, “college” and “school” refer to a wide range of postsecondary institutions, including public, private, two-year, four-year, community colleges, and trade schools. Typically, financial aid is available at schools approved by the U.S. Department of Education. To confirm if your chosen school offers federal or other types of aid, contact the institution directly.

FINANCE AUTHORITY OF MAINE (FAME)

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.

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ONE-TO-ONE EDUCATION

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FAMEmaine.com/contact

WEB

FAMEmaine.com
NextGenforME.com
ClaimYourFuture.org

SOCIAL

 /FAMEmaine.org
 /FAME.Maine
 /FAMEmaine

JOIN OUR FACEBOOK GROUP

[Paying for College for ME](#)

JOIN OUR LIST

Stay on track with texts and/or emails from FAME. You'll receive timely tips and helpful info about the financial aid process and the FAFSA. Sign up at FAMEmaine.com/join.





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MAKE A PLAN FOR YOUR EDUCATION AFTER HIGH SCHOOL

Education after high school opens doors to better career opportunities and higher paying jobs. Whether you're interested in college, trade school, or specialized training, having additional skills and knowledge gives you more choices in your career and life.

EXPLORE CAREERS

There are so many career options available—where do you start? Think about your likes and interests and connect them to a job you might enjoy:

- What are your interests and strengths? Check out this free Interest Assessment at [Careeronestop.org/Toolkit/Careers/interest-assessment.aspx](https://careeronestop.org/Toolkit/Careers/interest-assessment.aspx).
- What are your favorite and most successful classes?
- What work or volunteer experiences did you like or dislike?
- What made you successful in high school?

Learn how your strengths can translate into possible college majors and career fields. Create a free account on ACT Profile at myACT.org or BigFuture.CollegeBoard.org.

Once you have a job in mind, think about whether you'll want to complete an apprenticeship, get a certification, or college degree. There are many different pathways—find the one that's best for you!



Claim Your Future Explore future careers, salaries, and learn basic money management at FAME.ClaimYourFuture.org.

LEARN ABOUT OPTIONS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING

TYPES OF SCHOOLS

ADULT EDUCATION CENTERS: College preparation, industry certifications, and job training

CAREER AND TRADE SCHOOLS: Certificate programs

COMMUNITY COLLEGES: Certificate and associate degree programs

COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES: Associate, bachelor's, master's, and professional degrees
(Note: not all schools will offer all of these degrees.)

TYPES OF PROGRAMS *(and the standard time to complete if full-time)*

APPRENTICESHIPS: On-the-job training and instruction (Learn more about the Maine Apprenticeship Program at [Apprenticeship.Maine.gov](https://www.apprenticeship.maine.gov).)

CERTIFICATE PROGRAMS: Typically one year or less of full-time courses that provide training and practical skills needed for a specific field

MICROCREDENTIALS: Short-term and targeted certifications for particular skills

ASSOCIATE DEGREES: Typically two years of full-time study

BACHELOR'S DEGREES: Typically four years of full-time study

MASTER'S AND PROFESSIONAL DEGREES: Typically two to four years of full-time study after a bachelor's degree

RESEARCH SCHOOLS AND CONSIDER THE RETURN ON INVESTMENT

Explore and learn more about schools that match your academic, geographical, social, and financial criteria. As you create your list of schools, consider the return on investment (ROI) for each to ensure that the education you are receiving is worth the financial investment.

- To research schools and majors and learn more about financial aid, check out CollegeNavigator.gov and the College Board's BigFuture™ website: BigFuture.CollegeBoard.org. Use BigFuture's "affordability" filter to find schools that, on average, do the best job meeting students' financial need.
- To research school graduation rates and career starting salaries, visit CollegeScorecard.ed.gov.
- To research careers and salaries, check out CareerOneStop.org.

FOCUS ON THE NET PRICE (NOT THE STICKER PRICE!)

The net price is the cost of the school AFTER grants and scholarships. This is the price that matters as very few families pay the full published price. To get an estimate of the net price of the schools you are considering, check out each school's **Net Price Calculator (NPC)**, which is typically located on the school's financial aid webpage. The NPC is student- and school-specific and provides an estimate of what that school will cost YOU! Some of the most expensive schools offer the largest grants and scholarships, making them more affordable than you may think.





FINANCIAL AID

Financial aid helps students and families pay for college expenses and can bridge the gap between family resources and college costs. Financial aid may be need- or merit-based.

BASIC TYPES OF FINANCIAL AID:

- 1 GRANTS** are aid that you are given by the federal or state government or your college that you will **not** need to repay.
- 2 SCHOLARSHIPS** are aid that you are given, sometimes from private institutions or community organizations, that you will **not** need to repay.
- 3 WORK-STUDY** is aid granted through the federal government or through your college that provides an opportunity for you to work part-time on or off campus. While not applied to your tuition bill, money earned throughout the course of the semester can be used toward college expenses, like textbooks or other supplies.
- 4 LOANS** are aid that you borrow from the federal government, the state, or a private institution that you **will** need to repay.



MERIT-BASED VS. NEED-BASED

MERIT-BASED AID

is based on academic, athletic, artistic or other talent, not on financial need. Generally speaking, scholarships are merit-based aid.

NEED-BASED AID

is based on family financial circumstances. All federal grants, work-study, and subsidized federal student loans are need-based aid. This guide will focus on helping you navigate the process of need-based financial aid, but be sure you seek out merit-based aid as appropriate.



DETERMINE IF YOU'RE ELIGIBLE FOR A FEDERAL PELL GRANT NOW!

It is now possible to determine if you are eligible for a maximum or a minimum Pell Grant before you apply for financial aid. Maximum or minimum Pell Grant eligibility is based on your dependency status, family size, adjusted gross income (yours if you're independent or your parent's/parents' if you're dependent), and state of legal residence. To learn more, check out the table that fits your situation to determine maximum or minimum Pell Grant eligibility for the 2027-28 academic year: [FAMEmaine.com/pell-tables](https://famemaine.com/pell-tables).

If you aren't eligible for a maximum or minimum Pell Grant based on the criteria above, you may still be eligible based on your Student Aid Index (SAI) once your Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is filed. Either way, be sure to file your 2027-28 FAFSA after October 1, 2026!

SHOULD I APPLY FOR FINANCIAL AID?

YES! EVERYONE SHOULD APPLY FOR FINANCIAL AID, regardless of income. File the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), and complete any other financial aid applications and paperwork required by your school(s).

THE FAFSA IS REQUIRED to access most types of financial aid. Many scholarship programs and most grant programs, including the Maine State Grant Program, require students to complete the FAFSA to determine need before they can be considered for financial aid. Additionally, all federal loans and some state loan programs require students to complete the FAFSA.

REAPPLY EACH YEAR. You **must** reapply for financial aid by filing a FAFSA each year that you plan to attend school.

THREE STEPS TO APPLYING FOR FINANCIAL AID:

- 1 GET READY**
- 2 APPLY**
- 3 FOLLOW UP**



HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT THE FAFSA? GET HELP FROM FAME:

CONTACT US 1-800-228-3734
TTY: 207-626-2717
Education@FAMEmaine.com

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

VIRTUALLY Schedule a free one-to-one education affordability coaching session at [FAMEmaine.com/contact](https://famemaine.com/contact).

STEP ONE

GET READY

To make the process of applying for financial aid as easy as possible, get ready before senior year. Learn more at [FAMEmaine.com](https://www.famemaine.com).

RESEARCH YOUR ESTIMATED NET PRICE of each school you are interested in by using Net Price Calculator. This tool can be found on each school's website.

RESEARCH FINANCIAL AID DEADLINES and requirements for each school you are interested in attending.

DETERMINE IF OTHER APPLICATIONS ARE REQUIRED.

Some schools require additional applications, such as the CSS Profile. Learn more about the CSS Profile at [CSSProfile.CollegeBoard.org](https://cssprofile.collegeboard.org).

TRACK DEADLINES using the School Requirements Tracking Sheet on page 29 or your calendar, notes app, or other tool to help you keep track.

RESEARCH AND APPLY FOR SCHOLARSHIPS. Scholarships can help bridge the gap between school costs and financial aid and reduce borrowing.

CREATE A FEDERAL STUDENTAID.GOV ACCOUNT (sometimes referred to as an FSA ID) at [StudentAid.gov](https://studentaid.gov). All students and at least one parent (if the student is dependent) need an account.

CREATING A FEDERAL STUDENTAID.GOV ACCOUNT

WHEN YOU CREATE YOUR STUDENTAID.GOV ACCOUNT, YOU WILL SET UP A USERNAME AND PASSWORD. Your username and password will be used to access the Federal Student Aid website, including the FAFSA, and serve as your legal signature. Accounts are now matched with Social Security Administration (SSA) in real time and you can start your FAFSA immediately after your account is created.

WHO NEEDS AN ACCOUNT?

- **All students who plan to file a FAFSA**
- **At least one parent if the student is considered a dependent student on the FAFSA.** If two parents (including stepparents) live in the household but didn't file a joint tax return for 2025, both parents will need their own account. (Parents may already have an account if they have older children or have their own federal student loans.)

WHEN SHOULD AN ACCOUNT BE CREATED?

Accounts can be created anytime at [StudentAid.gov](https://studentaid.gov). To create an account, you **MUST** provide an email address you have access to so you can receive the email needed to complete verification. We recommend you also provide

your mobile phone number and be in a location where you can receive a text when creating your account.

STUDENTAID.GOV ACCOUNT TIPS: Enter information carefully and use FAME's *StudentAid.gov Account Information Sheet* to record account information. Worksheets and additional details, including account creation information for parents without a Social Security Number (SSN), can be found at [FAMEmaine.com/FAFSA](https://www.famemaine.com/FAFSA). Keep information confidential and stored in a safe location. You'll need to log in to [StudentAid.gov](https://studentaid.gov) for multiple purposes in the coming years.

AN EMAIL ADDRESS CAN ONLY BE ASSOCIATED WITH ONE ACCOUNT.

Each student and parent must create their own account. Students and parents cannot use the same email address during account creation.

USE AN EMAIL ADDRESS OTHER THAN YOUR HIGH SCHOOL EMAIL. Your high school email will expire after graduation, and you will need access to the email associated with your account for years to come.



AM I CONSIDERED A DEPENDENT STUDENT?

If you're under the age of 24, you'll likely be considered dependent for financial aid purposes, though there are some exceptions, including homelessness and legal guardianship. Dependent students are required to provide parent information when applying for financial aid. To learn more about what determines dependency status, visit [StudentAid.gov](https://www.studentaid.gov).



WORTHINGTON SCHOLARSHIP FOUNDATION

awards hundreds of scholarships per year to graduates of Maine public high schools who will be attending a participating Maine college or university.

Scholarships are renewable and can be up to \$20,000. Scholars attending a four-year college can receive up to \$5,000 per year, and those attending a community college can receive up to \$3,000 per year. To learn more, visit worthingtonscholars.org.

THE MITCHELL INSTITUTE

offers a \$10,000 scholarship (over four years) and so much more including access to free programs, resources, and additional funding options. The Institute awards 200 scholarships per year statewide to at least one graduating student from every public high school in Maine. Learn more at mitchellinstitute.org.



SCHOLARSHIPS

Scholarships come in various amounts and are offered by a variety of different organizations; some may even be in your own community. To begin your search, check out:

LOCAL HIGH SCHOOL GUIDANCE OFFICE

COLLEGE FINANCIAL AID OFFICE

EMPLOYER/PARENTS' EMPLOYER(S)

FAITH-BASED INSTITUTIONS

LOCAL SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS OR TOWN OFFICES

NATIONAL AND STATE-LEVEL PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

FREE SCHOLARSHIP SEARCHES

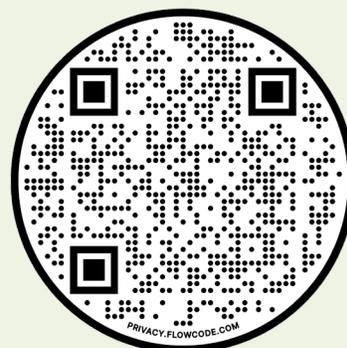
Only use free scholarship searches. You should never have to pay for a search or to apply for a scholarship.

MAINE

- Finance Authority of Maine: [FAMEmaine.com/scholarships](https://www.famemaine.com/scholarships)
- Maine Community Foundation: [MaineCF.org](https://www.maineCF.org)

NATIONWIDE

- [FAME.iGrad.com](https://www.fame.iGrad.com)
- [AccessScholarships.com](https://www.AccessScholarships.com)
- [BigFuture.CollegeBoard.org/scholarship-search](https://www.BigFuture.CollegeBoard.org/scholarship-search)
- [Fastweb.com](https://www.Fastweb.com)
- [Petersons.com/scholarship-search](https://www.Petersons.com/scholarship-search)



Visit [FAMEaine.com/scholarships](https://www.fameaine.com/scholarships) to find a scholarship tracker and other resources to help with your scholarship search!

SCHOLARSHIPS

are for students of all ages, including adult and graduate students. If a scholarship doesn't specifically state it's for recent high school graduates, it's fair game to apply if you meet the criteria. **It's important to continue searching and applying for scholarships even after your freshman year.**

STEP TWO

APPLY

Completing the FAFSA is the first step to accessing financial aid. Use FAME's checklist "Get Ready to File the 2027-28 FAFSA" at [FAMEmaine.com/FAFSA](https://www.famemaine.com/FAFSA).

GO TO STUDENTAID.GOV

THE FAFSA IS ROLES-BASED and, if you are a dependent student, includes a student and parent section. Either you or your parent can start the FAFSA, but we recommend you start the FAFSA.

ACCESS THE FAFSA using your [StudentAid.gov](https://studentaid.gov) account username and password. Once in the FAFSA, select the role of student. Your parent will log in to [StudentAid.gov](https://studentaid.gov) using their username and password and select the role of parent.

THE 2027-28 FAFSA will use 2025 income information.

READ EACH QUESTION CAREFULLY and pay close attention to which section is being completed (student or parent).

PROVIDE CONSENT AND APPROVAL to allow federal tax information to be retrieved from the IRS. Consent and approval are required even if a federal tax return was not filed. If consent and approval are not provided, you will be ineligible for federal student aid.



Submit the FAFSA every year as soon as possible after it becomes available on October 1.

ASSET REPORTING

NOT ALL ASSETS NEED TO BE REPORTED ON THE FAFSA.

For example, these are **not** reportable:

- The home you live in
- Personal possessions, such as cars and boats
- Life insurance policies
- Retirement plans
- Family-owned businesses with fewer than 100 full-time employees
- Family-owned commercial fisheries

Many families, depending on financial circumstances, will not be required to provide ANY asset information on the FAFSA.

DIVORCED OR SEPARATED PARENTS

If your biological or adoptive parents are divorced or separated, provide information about the parent who provided the greater portion of your financial support in the 12 months prior to filing the FAFSA.

NEW MAINERS

If you are a new Mainer who is not eligible for federal financial aid, visit [FAMEmaine.com/NewMainers](https://www.famemaine.com/NewMainers) for information and resources to help pay for higher education.

OTHER CIRCUMSTANCES

Parents are sometimes hesitant to provide their information on the FAFSA because they're concerned it will obligate them to pay for college. That is not the case! When required, providing parent information on the FAFSA simply allows students to be considered for financial aid. Without the required information, they cannot be.

If you have unusual circumstances that prevent you from being able to provide parent information on the FAFSA, please contact FAME to discuss your options.

Have other questions about parent information on the FAFSA? Visit [FAMEmaine.com/FAFSA](https://www.famemaine.com/FAFSA) to learn more.



WHAT IS THE CSS PROFILE?

The CSS Profile®, administered by the College Board, is an application used by nearly 400 colleges and scholarship programs to determine eligibility for their own financial aid dollars. To learn more about the difference between the FAFSA and the CSS Profile, visit FAMEmaine.com/fafsa-vs-css.

Check with the schools you are interested in to see if they require the **CSS Profile**, and also check the related filing deadline.

For additional information, including the cost of submitting the CSS Profile and possible fee waivers, visit CSSProfile.CollegeBoard.org.



COLBY COLLEGE

DEADLINES MATTER: DON'T MISS OUT

Deadlines are important because some types of aid are limited and may only be offered to those who meet their school's priority deadline. This example shows a student with a 0 (zero) Student Aid Index (SAI) for the 2027-28 academic year.

FAFSA Submitted in the fall		FAFSA Submitted after school's priority deadline		FAFSA Submitted during summer	
Pell Grant	\$7,395	Pell Grant	\$7,395	Pell Grant	\$7,395
State Grant	\$2,500	State Grant	\$2,500	Direct Loan	\$5,500
Supplemental Grant	\$2,000	Work-Study	\$1,000		
University Grant	\$3,500	Direct Loan	\$5,500		
Work-Study	\$1,600				
Direct Loan	\$5,500				
TOTAL OFFER	\$22,495	TOTAL OFFER	\$16,395	TOTAL OFFER	\$12,895

Find out (and meet) the deadlines at ALL of the schools you are applying to!

STEP THREE

FOLLOW UP WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

REVIEW YOUR FAFSA SUBMISSION SUMMARY (FSS). An email will be sent to the email address in the student section of the FAFSA notifying you that your FAFSA has been processed. Log in to [StudentAid.gov](https://studentaid.gov) with your StudentAid.gov username and password and carefully review your FSS to check for errors. We recommend downloading and saving a copy for your records and for scholarship applications.

MAKE CORRECTIONS OR ADD ADDITIONAL SCHOOLS, IF NECESSARY.

To make corrections to your section or add additional schools, log in to [StudentAid.gov](https://studentaid.gov) with your StudentAid.gov username and password. If corrections to the parent section are needed, have your parent log in to StudentAid.gov with their username and password.

WATCH FOR REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION FROM YOUR SCHOOL(S). Your school(s) may contact you via your school email or student portal and ask you to verify the information you provided on your FAFSA. This process is referred to as verification and does not mean you did anything wrong! Be sure to provide needed information to the school as soon as possible.

WHAT IS MY **STUDENT AID INDEX (SAI)**?

YOUR SAI IS:

- Calculated based on the information that you provided on the FAFSA and will be listed on your FSS
- Used as a measure of your family's financial resources
- Used by colleges to calculate financial aid
- The same at each school that you apply to

YOUR SAI IS NOT:

- The amount your family will have to pay for college
- The amount of financial aid you will receive



Looking for **MORE** answers to your financial aid questions?

Visit FAMEmaine.com/Affording-Education to learn how to prepare and pay for college.

Student financial aid history can be found by logging in to [StudentAid.gov](https://studentaid.gov) with your username and password. Visit FinAid.org to find information on loans, scholarships, and other types of financial aid, as well as dozens of calculators.



IMPORTANT INFORMATION IS COMING TO YOUR EMAIL INBOX.

Once you're offered admission, each school may ask you to activate your school email address. Schools want to communicate and provide information using their own email system.

It's important to check all email accounts regularly, as information may be time-sensitive. Respond promptly to requests, and share information with parents or guardians when appropriate.

TYPES OF FINANCIAL AID

There are three types of federal aid that may be listed as part of your financial aid offer: grants, work-study, and loans.

FEDERAL GRANTS

Federal grants are considered “gift aid” and, unlike loans, do not need to be repaid. The most common types of federal grants are:

- **Federal Pell Grant:** A need-based grant available to undergraduate students. The amount of the grant is based on the information provided on the FAFSA.
- **Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (SEOG):** A need-based grant available at some colleges.

FEDERAL WORK-STUDY

Federal work-study provides part-time employment for students to work on or off campus. Funds are not available at all colleges. Funds are paid to the student as earned and not applied to the student’s bill.

FEDERAL LOANS

Federal loans are available to students and parents to help finance college. Loans must be repaid with interest.

- **Direct Subsidized Loan** is a need-based loan that does not accrue interest while the student is enrolled in college.
- **Direct Unsubsidized Loan** is a loan that is not based on need. Interest does accrue while the student is enrolled in college.
- **Direct PLUS Loan for Parents** is a credit-based loan available to parents of dependent students.

For the most up-to-date information regarding federal loan and grant programs, visit [StudentAid.gov](https://studentaid.gov).

INDIVIDUAL SCHOOLS may also award their own scholarship, grant, work-study, and loan funds. To learn more about what your school has to offer, contact the financial aid office.



Work-Study—Did You Know...

Work-study is earned throughout the course of the year, based on the student’s rate of pay and number of hours worked. As a result, it isn’t applied to and doesn’t reduce the student’s bill. Many students use work-study earnings to cover miscellaneous and travel expenses, or even books for an upcoming semester.





STUDENT LOAN BASICS

Many families borrow to pay for college. Successfully borrowing and paying back student loans can help build good credit and achieve other financial goals. Throughout the process, keep the following basics in mind:

LOANS HAVE TO BE REPAID,* including any interest that accrues, even if you don't graduate.

FORGIVENESS MAY BE GRANTED to some eligible state and federal student loans under limited circumstances.

UNDERSTAND THE LOAN RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES and repayment options before you borrow.

NEVER BORROW MORE THAN YOU NEED to pay for your direct education expenses.

LIMIT YOURSELF TO FEDERAL STUDENT LOANS IF POSSIBLE as the repayment and forgiveness terms are more flexible than with private student loans.

*Student loans are typically not dischargeable in bankruptcy.

VISIT STUDENT.AID.GOV to retrieve federal loan information.

RESEARCH YOUR FUTURE SALARY when considering borrowing. It is recommended that student loan payments be no more than 8-10% of your gross earnings. We recommend your total debt not exceed the amount you can expect to earn in your first year of employment. Visit [FAMEmaine.com/calculators-tools](https://www.famemaine.com/calculators-tools).

YOUR LOAN SERVICER IS THERE TO HELP. Contact your loan servicer if you are unable to repay due to financial hardship.

BEFORE YOU BORROW

Be informed about your options, including borrowing less; using forgivable loans; and knowing the differences between federal, private, and Maine student loans. Visit [FAMEmaine.com/studentloans](https://www.famemaine.com/studentloans).



NEBHE TUITION BREAK

REDUCED TUITION FOR MAINE STUDENTS

Some state universities in New England offer reduced tuition to Maine students pursuing a program that is not offered in Maine. For more information on reduced tuition at an out-of-state school, visit the New England Board of Higher Education at NEBHE.org/tuitionbreak.

PROGRAMS FOR MAINE RESIDENTS

These programs are designed to support Maine students and help meet Maine's workforce needs. There are additional programs for students pursuing certain graduate degrees. Find more information and program applications at FAMEmaine.com/Affording-Education/Pay-for-School.

Maine State Grant Program is a need-based grant for undergraduate students attending an eligible school. File the FAFSA by May 1 to be considered for the grant.

Learn more at FAMEmaine.com/mainestategrant.

Tuition Waiver Program (Foster Care) is available to certain foster children and adopted children/wards under subsidy from the Maine Department of Health and Human Services. The student must attend a Maine public college or university. Applications are available on March 1 and awards are made on a first-come, first-served basis. There are 30 new waivers awarded per year.

Tuition Waiver Program (Public Servant) provides free tuition to spouses and children of firefighters, law enforcement officers, or emergency medical services personnel killed in the line of duty. The student must attend a Maine public college or university. Applications are accepted year-round.

Learn more at FAMEmaine.com/tuitionwaiver.

Educators for Maine Program is a renewable, merit-based loan for students pursuing careers in education, including speech pathology and child care. The loan is forgivable upon eligible employment in Maine. This loan is also available to graduate students.

Learn more at FAMEmaine.com/educatorsformaine.

my **Alfond** grant

THE \$500 ALFOND GRANT—UNLOCKING OPPORTUNITY

The first recipients of the Alfond Grant are getting ready for life after high school. You may be one of the Mainers who received a \$500 Alfond Grant at birth. Now what?

Visit NextGenforME.com/AGPAY to get the information you need to know about using the Alfond Grant.

FINANCIAL AID OFFERS

After you complete the financial aid application process and have been admitted to a school, you will receive a financial aid offer. Schools have different schedules for when they send (or email) financial aid notifications. We recommend not making a final school selection decision until you receive and review offers from all schools.

CAREFULLY REVIEW YOUR NOTIFICATION, including the types of financial aid that you are offered.

COMPARE THE NET COST OF EACH SCHOOL if you receive financial aid offers from multiple schools, using the “Comparing Costs and Financial Aid Offers” worksheet on page 19.

ACCEPT OR REJECT EACH TYPE OF AID once you have compared all of your offers and decided which school to attend.

RESPOND QUICKLY to any request from each school and provide any additional forms, such as loan applications and student loan entrance counseling.

CONTACT YOUR SCHOOL’S FINANCIAL AID OFFICE if you have questions.

QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT YOUR FINANCIAL AID OFFER

- Is your financial aid likely to stay the same for all of the following years (assuming the financial information doesn’t change dramatically)?
- Are there GPA requirements to maintain any of the types of aid?
- How will outside scholarships impact the financial aid offer? Can outside scholarships be in addition to the current financial aid? If aid has to be reduced, what type of aid is reduced first—grants, need-based loans, or work-study?



SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

CONTACT THE FINANCIAL AID OFFICE DIRECTLY

to discuss special circumstances, such as:

- Unemployment
- Loss of income
- Parent(s) and siblings attending college
- Divorce or separation
- Unusual medical expenses
- Any financial change not reflected on the FAFSA

For more information on appeals, see FAMemaine.com/AppealSteps.

COMPARING COSTS AND FINANCIAL AID OFFERS

Use this worksheet to compare estimated college costs and financial aid offers. Find the information you need to complete this worksheet in your financial aid notification or on your school's website. Costs and financial aid offers can vary significantly from one college or university to another.

COLLEGE NAME	EXAMPLE	SCHOOL 1	SCHOOL 2	SCHOOL 3
	School X			
DIRECT COSTS TO ATTEND				
Tuition & Mandatory Fees	\$12,500			
Housing & Food	+ \$14,000	+	+	+
Direct Costs (Billed by school)	= \$26,500	=	=	=
FINANCIAL AID: GRANTS & SCHOLARSHIPS				
Grants & Scholarships	- \$13,500	-	-	-
Net Cost Before Loans	= \$13,000	=	=	=
FINANCIAL AID: FEDERAL STUDENT LOANS				
Federal Direct Subsidized Loans	\$3,500			
Federal Direct Unsubsidized Loans	+ \$2,000	+	+	+
Total Loan Amount¹	= \$5,500	=	=	=
ESTIMATED TOTAL COST (OUT-OF-POCKET)				
Balance Due (Direct Costs minus grants, scholarships, and loans)	= \$7,500			
Indirect Costs (Books, supplies, travel)	+ \$1,500	+	+	+
Estimated Total Cost² (Out-of-pocket cost)	= \$9,000	=	=	=
FINANCIAL AID: WORK-STUDY				
WORK-STUDY³	\$1,500			

¹ Most schools do not list Federal PLUS or private loan eligibility as part of the financial aid offer as these loans are credit-based and may not be approved for everyone. If PLUS or private loan eligibility is listed, please exclude for the purposes of comparing offers.

² Estimated Total Cost would be the amount paid by the student and/or the student's family using savings, outside scholarships, and/or loans.

³ Federal work-study funds are earned throughout the year so are not available to help pay the full balance.

REDUCING COSTS

For most students, financial aid does not cover the entire cost of education. Before borrowing additional loans, consider the following cost-cutting measures.

1 ENROLLMENT COSTS

RESEARCH TUITION-FREE OPTIONS IN MAINE.

Some schools offer free tuition to students depending on their circumstances. Ask schools you are considering what programs they have available.

SEE IF YOU'RE ELIGIBLE FOR REDUCED TUITION.

Some state university systems have agreements with neighboring state university systems to offer reduced tuition rates, especially if you are majoring in a program not offered at your state school(s). Check out NEBHE.org/tuitionbreak for more information.

TAKE ADVANTAGE OF SCHOOLS WITH FLAT TUITION RATES by taking extra classes to accelerate completing your degree without paying more money.

TEST OUT OF COLLEGE COURSES or take Advanced Placement (AP) and/or dual enrollment classes in high school. Some colleges will grant you course credit for your high school AP classes if you receive high scores on the test. Additionally, some colleges will give you an opportunity to test out of general education classes.

ENROLL IN SUMMER COURSES AT YOUR LOCAL COLLEGE OR ONLINE to fulfill general education requirements at a lower cost per credit hour.

REVIEW YOUR BILL AND WAIVE OPTIONAL COSTS like student health insurance (if you have insurance from another source) or parking permits.

2 LIVING EXPENSES

CONSIDER LIVING AT HOME, if possible, and commuting to college.

GET ROOMMATES if you decide to live off campus. If you live on campus, skip the single room.

CHOOSE A MEAL PLAN that works for you. More importantly, if you have a meal plan, use it!

3 TRAVEL EXPENSES

LEAVE YOUR CAR AT HOME to save on parking fees and gas.

CONSIDER COMMUTING with another student, or use public transportation.

4 STUDENT DISCOUNTS

TAKE ADVANTAGE of student discounts for computers, travel, or entertainment.

5 BOOKS

UTILIZE FREE RESOURCES like Google Books and your school library to see if you can use a textbook for free.

CONSIDER RENTING from a source like Chegg.com, BiggerBooks.com, eCampus.com, or your school bookstore, or share a book with another student.

BUY YOUR BOOKS USED AND BUY THEM EARLY. School bookstores and online sources like Amazon.com and BigWords.com have a limited supply of used books, which tend to go first. Also, consider selling books that you no longer need.

PURCHASE DIGITAL BOOKS. Downloadable textbooks are often cheaper than hard copies and are delivered on demand.



WANT MORE MONEY \$MARTS?

Check out FAME's companion publication ***Build: Steps to Financial Wellness*** for more tips on reducing costs, budgeting, building savings, and staying debt-free during college and beyond.

Request a copy at
FAMEmaine.com/Publications.

ONLINE FINANCIAL WELLNESS

Powered by iGrad® and Enrich®, FAME offers free online financial wellness tools to support Maine people during high school, college, and beyond. While in high school and through college, students can access the resources at **FAME.iGrad.com**, with expanded resources for after college available at **FAME.Enrich.org**.

HOW TO GET STARTED:

- Create a free iGrad account while you're in high school or college, or through Enrich if you're no longer in school.
- Complete your financial wellness assessment.
- Browse recommended videos and articles, or complete a course.

IF THE FINANCIAL AID ISN'T ENOUGH

Colleges aren't always able to meet the full financial need of every student. What can you do if your financial aid isn't enough and you've already reduced all possible costs?

CONSIDER THESE OPTIONS:

Scholarships are funds awarded by various organizations and don't have to be repaid. Be sure to research and apply for outside scholarships early and every year you are in school. For more information on scholarships, see page 10.

Savings may come from various sources. Any money available from savings is money that doesn't have to be borrowed and repaid with interest.

Tuition Payment Plans allow you to pay your tuition in installments over the semester or year and are typically offered through the college. Most plans are interest-free but may charge a small fee.

Federal Direct PLUS Loan for Parents is a credit-based loan for parents. Borrowers can request up to the cost of education minus any financial aid.

Private Education Loans are credit-based education loans offered through a bank, credit union, or state agency. Usually the student is the borrower and will need a creditworthy cosigner like a parent or grandparent. Since private loans lack the benefits of federal student loans, consider them after other federal financial aid has been exhausted.



Need help understanding your options?

Sign up for FAME's Free Education Affordability Coaching at [FAMEmaine.com/contact](https://famemaine.com/contact).

SAVING FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

REDUCE DEBT BY SAVING. Using savings and investment plans for higher education may reduce borrowing. Families who have college savings have more options when paying for college. Remember, every dollar available from savings is a dollar that doesn't have to be borrowed and repaid with interest!

A COVERDELL EDUCATION SAVINGS ACCOUNT (ESA) is a tax-advantaged investment account designed to encourage education savings. Contributions are limited to \$2,000 per year, per child.

A SECTION 529 PLAN is a tax-advantaged investment plan to help students and families prepare for qualified education expenses. To learn more about Maine's Section 529 plan, visit [NextGenforME.com](https://nextgenforME.com).

EARLY TRADITIONAL AND ROTH IRA WITHDRAWALS, before age 59½, are allowed without the 10% early withdrawal penalty if funds are used for qualified education expenses. These withdrawals may still be taxed as ordinary income. See **IRS Publication 970** for more information.

BEFORE TAKING OUT ADDITIONAL LOANS,

take the time to answer the following questions to help you find the loan that is right for you.

- Who will be the primary borrower?
- What loan features are most important to you when you think about the cost of borrowing?
 - Fixed or variable interest rate?
 - Length of repayment?
 - Smallest monthly payment?
 - Visit [FAMEmaine.com/studentloans](https://fame.maine.gov/studentloans)
 - Lowest interest rate?
 - for more information about student loans.
 - No or low origination/loan fees?
- What are the various tax benefits of your borrowing options?
- Can you make payments while you are in school? Doing so can reduce the total amount you will repay.
- Do you know your and your cosigner's credit scores? Since private loans are credit-based, typically the better the credit score of the borrower or cosigner, the lower the interest rate.
- How much student loan debt can you afford? Visit [CareerOneStop.org](https://careeronestop.org) to get an estimate of your annual salary. Once you have that, use FAME's Student Loan/Salary Calculator at [FAMEmaine.com/calculators-tools](https://fame.maine.gov/calculators-tools) to calculate the maximum amount of student loan debt that is reasonable for your circumstances.



CONTACT YOUR FINANCIAL AID OFFICE

to discuss your situation if your aid isn't enough. The financial aid office only has the information provided through the financial aid process. If there are other special circumstances impacting your family's ability to pay for school, such as unemployment, multiple family members in college, or high medical bills, report the additional information.

They may be able to help. Even if you don't have special circumstances, ask if more aid is available or if there are ways to receive more aid in the future.



COMPARING PLUS AND PRIVATE LOANS

	FEDERAL DIRECT PLUS LOANS	PRIVATE EDUCATION LOANS
Who Makes These Loans?	Federal Direct PLUS Loans are offered by the federal government.	Private education loans are offered by banks, credit unions, or state agencies.
Who Can Be the Borrower?	Only a biological or adoptive parent, or a stepparent on the FAFSA, can be the borrower on behalf of an undergraduate student.	The student can be the borrower for a private education loan but may need a creditworthy cosigner.
What Are the Interest Rates?	All borrowers, regardless of credit quality, will pay the same fixed interest rate of 8.94% for the 2025-26 school year.	Interest rates can be fixed or variable and are generally determined by the credit quality of the applicant, and if applicable, cosigner. Chosen repayment term or other factors may also impact interest rates.
Are There Fees?	All borrowers, regardless of credit quality, will pay the same origination fee of 4.228%.	Fees vary by lender. However, in the current market, there are many zero/low-fee private education loan options.
Can You Postpone Repayment?	Deferments and forbearances are available through federal student aid regulations.	Deferments and forbearances will vary by lender.

SELECTING A PRIVATE STUDENT LOAN LENDER

Lenders present the features and benefits of their student loans in different ways. When you compare student loans, make sure you are looking at what the loan will cost YOU. Pay particular attention to these features and benefits:

ANNUAL PERCENTAGE RATE (APR) The APR is the cost of interest and fees on a loan over time—how much the loan will cost you to repay. The APR is intended to assist you in comparing the cost of various loans that have different fees, rates, and payback periods. Typically, APRs can be found on a lender’s website. If you have trouble finding an APR on the website, call the lender.

FIXED OR VARIABLE INTEREST RATES A fixed interest rate is set during the application process and does not change during the life of the loan. A variable interest rate (and your monthly payments) may increase or decrease if the base rate changes during the life of the loan.

REPAYMENT AND DEFERMENT OPTIONS Consider repayment options. Lenders may offer a variety of repayment options—immediate repayment, interest-only repayment, partial repayment, or full deferment. If you are able to make payments while you are in school, look for a loan that offers that option. Also consider future deferment options that may be important in case you experience financial hardship while you are repaying your loan.



Visit [FAMemaine.com/studentloans](https://www.famemaine.com/studentloans) to find and compare Maine lenders who offer private student loans with various features, terms, and fees.



EDUCATION TAX CREDITS AND DEDUCTIONS

AMERICAN OPPORTUNITY TAX CREDIT* This federal tax credit is up to \$2,500 per student. It is available for the first four years of postsecondary education. To receive it, you need to show you paid for qualified education expenses. Be sure to keep your tax records. There is a maximum income limit for this tax credit.

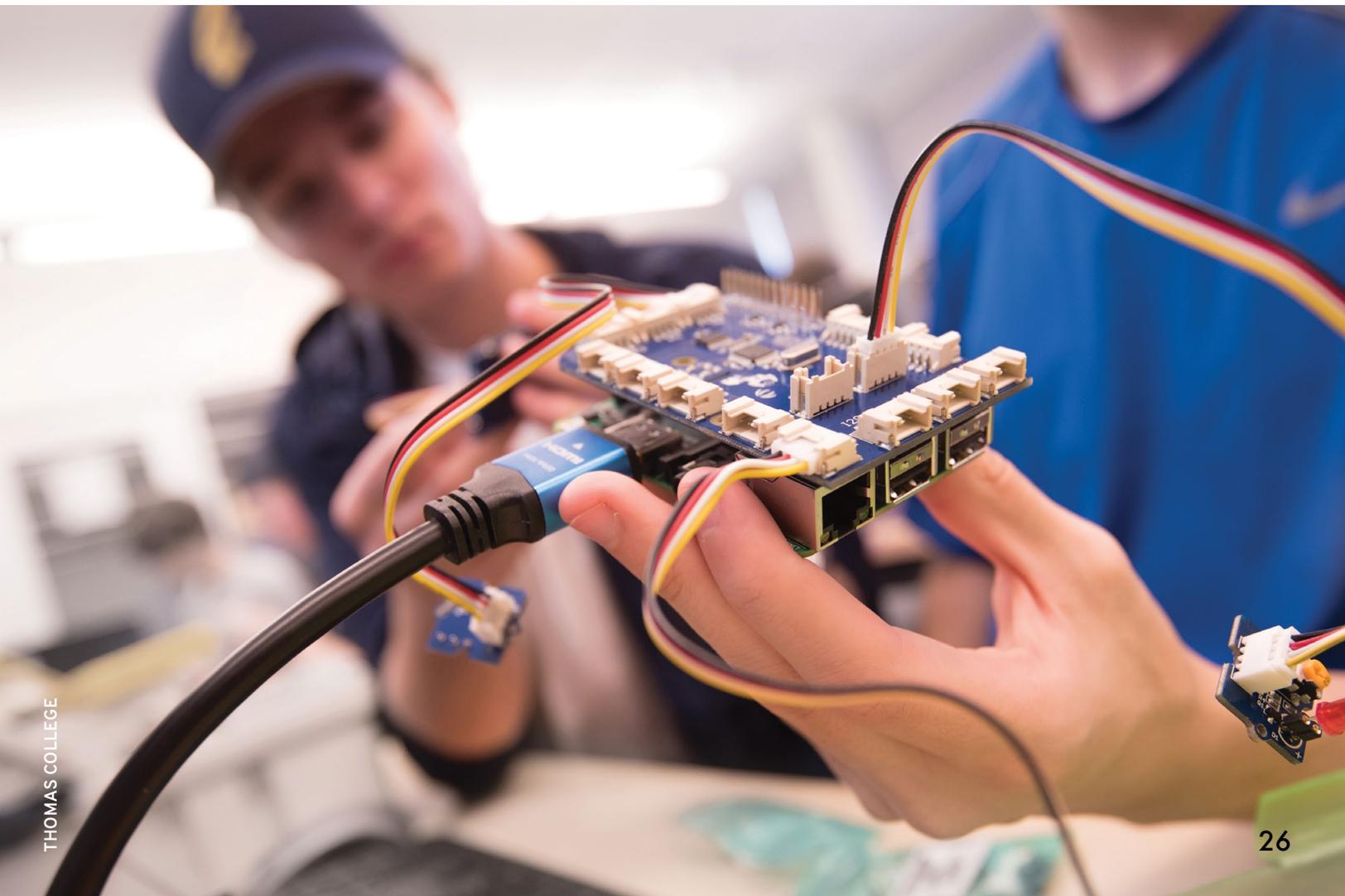
LIFETIME LEARNING CREDIT* You may be able to claim up to \$2,000 for qualified education expenses on your federal tax return with this credit. The number of years you can claim this credit is unlimited for eligible students. As of 2018, there is a maximum income limit for this tax credit.

*A parent or student can only claim one of the two above credits for the same student.

STUDENT LOAN INTEREST DEDUCTION You may be able to deduct interest you paid on a qualified student loan, reducing your federal taxable income up to \$2,500. This deduction has an income limit.

For additional information on federal tax credits and deductions, including income and other limitations that apply, see IRS Publication 970–Tax Benefits for Education at [IRS.gov](https://www.irs.gov), or consult a tax expert.

STUDENT LOAN REPAYMENT TAX CREDIT If you earned an associate, bachelor’s, or graduate degree from an accredited community college, college, or university after December 31, 2007, and are a Maine resident, you may be eligible for an annual refundable tax credit of up to \$2,500 on your Maine income tax return. For more information, visit [LiveandWorkinMaine.com/opportunity-maine](https://www.liveandworkinmaine.com/opportunity-maine).



JUNIOR YEAR PLANNING CHECKLIST

ALL YEAR

- ❑ Explore careers and their earning potential.
- ❑ Research schools using free online search tools.
- ❑ Attend college fairs or open houses.
- ❑ Visit schools.
- ❑ Research higher education costs and financial aid using the Net Price Calculator tool on college websites.
- ❑ Save any money from working, or gifts at birthdays and holidays, for higher education.
- ❑ Explore dual enrollment courses.
- ❑ Create your resume and keep it up to date and share as needed.

FALL

- ❑ Take the PSAT. You must take the test in 11th grade to qualify for certain scholarships, including the **National Merit Scholarship**.
- ❑ Create an email address to use specifically for scholarship searches and college applications. Be sure to choose an email address that makes a good first impression.
- ❑ Review some scholarship applications to see if you have “gaps” in your experience. For example, do you need to perform some additional community service? Knowing what is expected now will help you to be more successful with your scholarship search.

- ❑ Sign up for FAME’s e-newsletters, texts, tips, and more at **FAMEmaine.com/join**.

SPRING

- ❑ Attend a financial aid information session. For a list of FAME sessions, visit **FAMEmaine.com/events**.
- ❑ Create your StudentAid.gov account at **StudentAid.gov**.
- ❑ Register for and take exams for college admission and AP tests.
- ❑ Research scholarships using free online searches.
- ❑ Line up your summer job to begin earning money for college expenses.

SUMMER

- ❑ Narrow down the list of colleges you are considering attending. If you can, visit the schools that interest you.
- ❑ Contact colleges to request information and applications for admission.
- ❑ Research college admission and financial aid deadlines/requirements and develop a checklist.
- ❑ Continue researching and applying for scholarships.
- ❑ Save any money you earn over the summer.





SENIOR YEAR PLANNING CHECKLIST

PRIOR TO OCTOBER 1

- ❑ Create your StudentAid.gov account at [StudentAid.gov](https://studentaid.gov). Have your parent(s) create one too!
- ❑ Research admission and financial aid deadlines/requirements and develop a checklist.
- ❑ Attend college fairs or open houses.
- ❑ Research scholarship opportunities using free online searches.

FALL

- ❑ Sign up for FAME's e-newsletters, texts, tips, and more at [FAMEmaine.com/join](https://famemaine.com/join).
- ❑ If you haven't already, create your StudentAid.gov account at [StudentAid.gov](https://studentaid.gov) before filing the FAFSA.
- ❑ File your FAFSA at [StudentAid.gov](https://studentaid.gov) and list all schools of interest.
- ❑ Keep copies of all documents and forms.
- ❑ Ask teachers, coaches, or school counselors for letters of recommendation. Share your up-to-date resume with those writing your recommendation letters.
- ❑ Begin submitting college admission applications.
- ❑ If required, submit the CSS Profile.

LATE FALL/WINTER

- ❑ After you file your FAFSA, review your FAFSA Submission Summary (FSS) and make any necessary corrections.

- ❑ Submit any required documents to the financial aid office.
- ❑ Begin completing scholarship applications.
- ❑ Look for your financial aid notifications to begin arriving in the mail or by email.
- ❑ Once accepted for admission, check your college-assigned email address frequently. Your college may be sending important notifications to this new email address.

LATE WINTER/SPRING

- ❑ To be eligible for a Maine State Grant, submit your FAFSA by the **May 1 deadline**.
- ❑ Confirm that financial aid offices have received all necessary paperwork.
- ❑ Continue completing scholarship applications.
- ❑ Compare financial aid offers.
- ❑ Notify all colleges of your plans to attend (or not attend). Many colleges require an admission deposit and typically have a deadline of **May 1**.
- ❑ Line up your summer job to begin earning money for college expenses.

SUMMER

- ❑ If you have been awarded private scholarships, send copies of notifications to your chosen school's financial aid office.
- ❑ Attend college orientation.
- ❑ Look for your fall semester tuition bill, and reduce expenses where you can.
- ❑ Make arrangements to pay your balance.

SCHOOL REQUIREMENTS TRACKING SHEET

	School Name:	School Name:	School Name:
Admission Application Deadline	Date Submitted:	Date Submitted:	Date Submitted:
Priority FAFSA Deadline	Date Submitted:	Date Submitted:	Date Submitted:
Other Application Requirements (CSS Profile, etc.)	Date Submitted:	Date Submitted:	Date Submitted:
Follow-up Requirements (If selected, complete verification requirements; if borrowing, complete loan-related documents.)	Date Submitted:	Date Submitted:	Date Submitted:
Check your college email regularly!			

DO YOU HAVE AN ALFOND GRANT?

Find out if you have an Alfond Grant and see what it could be worth today! Visit myalfondgrant.org or call FAME at 1-800-228-3734 to learn more.

Open a NextGen 529[®] account. It's not too late to open doors for your student's bright future.



NextGen 529 is Maine's education savings plan that many families use to invest for higher education.

Why NextGen 529?



There are Matching Grants available for Maine residents!¹



Savings can grow tax-free, and withdrawals are tax-free when used for qualified higher education expenses.*



Every dollar in a NextGen 529 account is a dollar that doesn't need to be borrowed (and repaid with interest) later.



A NextGen 529 account can be used for college, trade schools, qualified online courses, and more.

Scan to learn more or visit NextGenforME.com/ALLEV0923



¹ Grants for Maine residents are linked to eligible Maine accounts. An Alfond Grant recipient is eligible to receive the \$100 Initial Matching Grant if the minimum required initial contribution is made before the beneficiary's first birthday. Upon withdrawal, grants are paid only to institutions of higher education. See Terms and Conditions of Maine Grant Programs for details about eligibility and other conditions and restrictions that apply at NextGenforME.com. Grants may lose value.

NextGen 529 is a Section 529 plan administered by the Finance Authority of Maine (FAME). You may obtain the NextGen 529 Program Description by requesting a copy from your financial professional, visiting NextGenforME.com or calling the program manager at 1-833-336-4529. The Program Description should be read carefully before investing.

The Program Description contains more complete information, including investment objectives, charges, expenses and risks of investing in NextGen 529, which you should carefully consider before investing. If you are not a Maine resident, you also should consider whether your or your designated beneficiary's home state offers any state tax or other state benefits such as financial aid, scholarship funds, and protection from creditors that are only available for investments in such state's 529 plan.

NextGen 529 accounts are not bank deposits and are not insured by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC). Returns on investments in NextGen 529 accounts are not guaranteed or insured by the State of Maine, FAME or any NextGen 529 service providers. NextGen 529 participants assume all investment risk of an investment in NextGen 529, including the potential loss of principal and liability for tax penalties that are assessable in connection with certain types of withdrawals of amounts invested in NextGen 529.

Vestwell State Savings, LLC is the program manager, The Bank of New York Mellon is the program custodian, BlackRock Advisors, LLC is the program investment manager, and BlackRock Investments, LLC, Member FINRA, is the program distributor and underwriter.

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* Qualified expenses are defined in Section 529 of the Internal Revenue Code. Earnings withdrawn for non-qualified expenses are subject to federal income tax; a 10% federal penalty, and state and local income tax rules, which may vary.



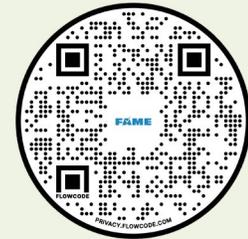
FAMEmaine.com



SOUTHERN MAINE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

DID YOU KNOW FAME OFFERS THE FOLLOWING SERVICES?

- Financial Aid Information Sessions
- FAFSA Help Sessions
- One-to-one Education Affordability Coaching
- Timely Texts and Emails
- *Paying for College for ME* Facebook Group
- Maine-based Scholarship Search



FAME's FAFSA and financial aid help is always **FREE!**

Finance Authority of Maine

Mailing: PO Box 949
Augusta, Maine 04332-0949

Physical: 5 Community Drive
Augusta, Maine 04330

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

FAMEmaine.com

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