IECA INSIGHTS

Member-to-Member

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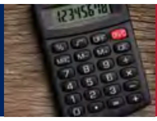
Working Smarter (and Harder) as an IEC

INSIDE



College Affordability

Parent FAQs, Comments about College Costs, and How IECs Can Respond

By Sarah Aikenhead, MBA, IECA (CA) and Thomas Hollins, Jr., EdD, IECA Associate (VA)

IECA's Subcommittee on College Affordability (SOCA) continues to dissect common parental questions and misconceptions and suggest potential answers. We recommend you use qualifying questions to provide context for your responses.

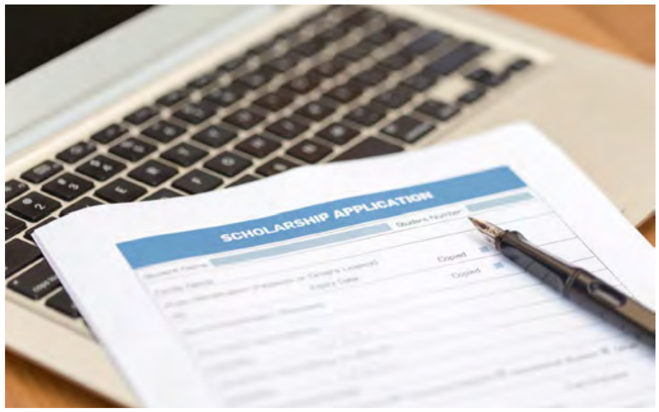


Photo: cnythzl/iStock.com

Parent FAQ/Comment: "I heard that there are billion dollars of scholarships that are just sitting there waiting to be claimed. Can you help my student find them and apply for them?"

IEC Response: Here is some important information I want to share:

There are scholarships available to students for college—and it takes planning and work to find and apply for them.

Institutional Scholarships

The best source of scholarships is the **colleges themselves**. Colleges offer both merit-based and need-based funds to qualifying students.

- Merit-based awards are generally awarded based on the student's (academic) background.
- Need-based awards are awarded based on a student/family's financial strength—particularly going to those with less financial ability to pay for school. Need is determined through FAFSA, the CSS Profile, and institutional-specific processes.

Accessing these monies may vary by institution, but it starts with the admissions process. Read websites and notice the deadlines!

Outside Scholarships

Outside scholarships are available from businesses, nonprofit organizations, and individuals, and are awarded for academic achievement, financial need, and many other reasons: community service, intended careers and majors, artistic accomplishments, etc. The number of outside scholarships available can seem overwhelming. But with good research and organization, many students can earn money to offset their college costs.

- Start early! Parents can help with the research and tracking deadlines and requirements.
- Ask people! Counselors, parents, and others know about local scholarship opportunities.
- Organize! Develop a system to collect, organize, and track progress towards applications. A simple spreadsheet may be the trick. Stay on top of the requirements.
- Be realistic! Many of these scholarships are for $2,000 or less and **are not renewable**. Most families will NOT be able to pay for four years of college with these scholarships.
- Be aware! Some schools practice "scholarship displacement" and outside scholarships may reduce the institutional award. Research your school's practice.
- Be smart! Create a unique email address for the scholarship search and applications process.

Resources

- School counselor's office: books, local opportunities
- Your College-Bound Kid blog, "The Ultimate Scholarship Book"
- Reputable search engines: GoingMerry, Unigo, Fastweb, College Board

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Working Smarter (and Harder) as an IEC

By Lindsay Fried Augustine, IECA (GA)

You know the phrase “work smarter, not harder”? When it comes to being a successful entrepreneur and/or independent educational consultant (IEC), that phrase is only part of the equation. Sometimes, you need to work smart to leave more time to work hard.

One important aspect of working smart and hard is regularly following up with prospects. As an IEC, your pipeline is critical to the success of your business. I often speak with IECs who are worried about following up after a consultation. They feel that if a prospect really wanted to sign on, they would and they don’t want to risk bothering them. While you certainly don’t want to be reaching out every day, in my experience, prospects will not mind if you follow up with them once. Often, they’re still interested and just didn’t have time to actually sign your contract yet. And, if they did have questions after reviewing your contract, reaching out is the perfect opportunity for them to ask. Also, think about how much of our job focuses on project management—you’re simply showing how good you are at your job by following up!

Another way to “work smarter” as an IEC is to be strategic when setting expectations from the very beginning. For me, that begins with the consultation. At Simply Admissions, I offer 30-minute complimentary consultations. While the calendar invite shows up on the prospect’s side as 30 minutes, I block out an hour on my end. I structure my consultations to generally finish up within that half-hour time frame. That means that I am usually able to send out my contracts and catch up on emails during the remaining time. However, consultations might run a few minutes over and families often note that we’re running out of time. By reassuring them I’m not in a rush and happy to continue speaking, prospects instantly feel listened to and supported. The extra five or 10 minutes of my time goes a long way.

This strategy aligns with my philosophy as an IEC, since I enjoy working with high-need families. I completely understand that it may not work for everyone, but I encourage you to consider what small, but impactful gestures you could make that align with your company’s philosophy, strengths, and/or niche. These simple acts will help you speed up your business growth!

This “work smarter and harder” principle translates to your email inbox and calendar, too! The Inbox Zero Method is a popular approach that can help you stay on top of your email and reduce digital clutter.

The basic principle of Inbox Zero is simple: strive to keep your inbox empty or near-empty by processing every email that comes in. That can sound overwhelming, but the following steps will help make it seem more doable:

1. **Set aside specific times to check your email.** Don’t let it interrupt your workflow throughout the day, but also don’t wait until 11 p.m. to open your inbox for the first time. Figure out at least three times each day to review every email in your inbox and put those times in your calendar as recurring appointments.

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Member Benefit Spotlights

Graduate by Hilton

Graduate by Hilton is a collection of handcrafted hotels located within walking distance of colleges/universities in the US and UK. The full-service hotels are designed to tell the story of the dynamic college town in which each is located, feature gorgeous rooftop lounges and Poindexter coffee shops, and are brimming with nostalgia! All IECA members receive 15% off the best available rate at every Graduate Hotel (includes complimentary WiFi). To take advantage of this discount, visit the Travel section of the Discounts for IECA Members webpage: *link.IECAonline.com/member-discounts*

UC Berkeley Professional Program in College Admissions Consulting

IECA members (Professional, Associate, and Student) receive a 10% discount on all required courses in this new program, including: Foundations of College Admissions Advising, Strategies for College Admissions Advising, The Business of Independent Educational Consulting, and Practicum in Independent Educational Consulting. To take advantange of this discount, visit the Educational Resources section of the Discounts for IECA Members webpage: *link.IECAonline.com/member-discounts*

Working Smarter, from page M3

2. **When you check your email, quickly scan through each message and decide what to do with it.** Options include deleting, responding immediately, filing away for future reference, or deferring to a later time. Do not leave any emails in your inbox unless it equates to a task for you to complete later on. Essentially, think of your inbox as part of your to-do list.

3. **Prioritize prospects and clients first.** Make it a goal to respond to all prospect and client emails within 12-18 hours. That doesn't mean you have to fully answer all of their questions—you're just providing a touch point and showing that you care. If a client is asking you to do research on their behalf that will take you several days, a quick reply confirming you've received their request and are currently working on it will go a long way!

4. **Use folders, subfolders, and/or labels to categorize your emails by topic.** This will help you quickly find the messages you need when you need them. Here are some folders you might want to incorporate:

- Clients (with each client having their own subfolder)
- Prospects
- Continuing Education
- Networking
- Back Office (Accounting, legal, etc.)
- Tools (Software, resources, etc.)
- Compliments (Nice emails from students or parents that you can read when you're having a tough day)

Your calendar is another tool that can help you stay organized and focused. By blocking out your day and adding tasks, you can ensure that you make the most of your time and accomplish what needs to be done.

Here are some tips for optimizing your calendar:

1. **Just like you do with client meetings, block out time for specific tasks, such as responding to emails, college research, and prospecting.** This will help you stay focused on one task at a time and avoid distractions, while also helping you get your long-term initiatives started.

2. **Add long-term tasks to your calendar, such as visiting colleges and attending conferences.** At the beginning of the year, set aside some time to think about your long-term goals. When are you going to visit colleges during the upcoming year? Do you want to work on a self-paced course? Once you have your goals in place, add them to your calendar and set reminders. If you're planning to visit Vermont colleges in July, block those days out on your calendar now and set a reminder to book the hotel and flights in May. December you will thank January you!

3. **Check in with yourself quarterly. As the year progresses, things will change.** You may be filling up slower than you expected and need to add in a marketing event. Thinking long term while also being adaptable is key here.

The final step is often more easily said than done: following through on your calendar commitments. If you schedule time for a task, push yourself to complete it by the end of the assigned day. You wouldn't miss a meeting with a client, right? Think of yourself and your business as one of your clients.

The final step is often more easily said than done: following through on your calendar commitments.

Ultimately, the key to working smart and hard is finding a balance between efficiency and effort. And don't forget that everyone's different. Some people may feel stifled by the calendar optimization but love Inbox Zero. Others might feel the complete opposite. Don't be afraid to adjust your approach to find what works best for you.

Looking for more business tips? Join the Business Practices Roundtable on the second Friday of each month at 1 p.m. ET as we share ideas on a specific topic. IECA members of all specialties are welcome! Look for the meeting topic and the Zoom link to join on the Member Network calendar (*network.IECAonline.com/events/calendar*) and in 5 Minute News.

IECA Membership: A Testament to Trust

By Julia Gooding, EdM, CEP, IECA (ME), Vice President for Ethics & Standards of Practice

Julia Gooding, One Sky Education, can be reached at Julia@OneSkyInt.com.

I lost count of the times international families, new to US application processes, have asked me, “But how do we prove these activities? Do we need to upload certificates somewhere?” Their jaws often drop when I tell them, “Nope, it’s based on trust.”

Students check boxes before submitting their applications, affirming their work is their own, and all information is accurate and true. Isn’t it incredible how much trust there is in that! Sure, we know reality is messy, but trust is baked into our educational system. Trust is fundamental not only to application processes but also to our work and identities as independent educational consultants (IECs).

If we really think about it, as IECs, trust might be our most valuable asset and an invisible force that underpins everything. Trust also sets IECA members apart from those who don’t adhere to an ethical code of conduct and extends in multiple directions. For example, families trust us with their children’s futures. Schools and therapeutic programs trust IECA members to provide accurate information about students and represent them honestly to families. Colleges and universities trust that IECA members are professional and respectful during campus tours, conferences, and other events.

Author Frank Sonnenberg aptly describes trust as “blood pressure. It’s silent, vital to good health, and if abused, it can be deadly.” Our IECA membership is itself a testament to trust. We join and renew as members because we trust in IECA’s collective knowledge, professionalism, and quality of opportunities and resources available. In return, IECA trusts us members to be good stewards of the association and live up to standards of professional excellence and ethical conduct.

Whether we realize it or not, we are ambassadors of IECA when we advertise ourselves as members of IECA, visit campuses, and engage with colleagues and other professionals. This responsibility requires us to continuously earn and maintain the trust placed in us by staying transparent, honest, and respectful.

IECA’s *Principles of Good Practice* (*link.IECAonline.com/POGP*), and the *Code of Conduct for IECA Members on Tours* (*link.IECAonline.com/tour-conduct*), serve as tangible frameworks for upholding trust and outlining best practices for engagement. For example, when we meet with admissions reps or colleagues on a tour, it’s incumbent on us to communicate with integrity, respect, curiosity, and a desire for mutual understanding. When we’re working with parents, students, and other stakeholders, it’s critical that we present everything, including ourselves, students, and educational options, truthfully and accurately.

Photo:

Engaging respectfully and professionally is important even when, and especially when, we disagree with someone. Educational consulting is a people-centered sector where interpersonal skills are paramount. Challenges that arise from disagreements present valuable opportunities to hone our professionalism and demonstrate our trustworthiness. By approaching each institutional visit and each interaction with someone with an open mind and professional curiosity, we continue the work of earning the trust of IECA members. The good news is that you are far from alone in these efforts. Collectively, as nearly 3,000 IECA member colleagues worldwide, we can be a powerful force for raising the credibility and trust of IECs as a profession and IECA as an association.

As we navigate the complexities of our field and the divisive times of the world, let’s continually try to remember not to take the trust placed in us for granted. Our individual and collective efforts to stay aligned with our core ethical and professional principles will serve our students and contribute to a more ethical, transparent, and trustworthy education ecosystem.

The Entrepreneurial Journey: Supportive Tips for New IECs

By Danielle McKenna, MEd, IECA Associate (MA) and Ronke Olatilo, MBA, MA, LPC, IECA Associate (PA), with contributions from Tanya Hunt, IECA Associate (NY), Beth Mansfield-Griswold, PhD, IECA Associate (PA), and Kate Ryan, IECA Associate (NY)

How many of us said as kindergartners, "When I grow up, I want to be an independent educational consultant (IEC)"? None! Many of us came to this work as a natural progression from being in the classroom, working as a school counselor or psychologist, or as a second/third career professional. Kate Ryan, Associate member (NY), described her evolution: "I became obsessed with the variation in public schools when I began researching schools for my son." Other IECs chose the profession based on their personal experience navigating the process alone as first-generation students or immigrants. Ronke Olatilo, Associate member (PA), reflects on her journey, "As someone who didn't attend high school in the US, I felt (in retrospect) that my college choice was not optimal because I did not have anyone to advise me."

Challenges in Establishing Our IEC Practices

Challenges come whenever people are trying to build something from scratch. Starting an IEC business is no exception. Beth Mansfield-Griswold, Associate member (PA), and Danielle McKenna, Associate member (MA), cited work-life balance as a challenge they faced when starting their businesses; having school-aged children while simultaneously launching a new business is difficult. Tanya Hunt, Associate member (NY), found it challenging to determine how many students she could reasonably work with in a way that aligned with how she would like to support them. And, of course, we have all had difficulty recruiting enough clients or "filling my roster to a point where my IEC career can be considered a full-time job," as Ronke added. We all agree that without our colleagues, mentors, and the other excellent professional connections we have made, running our businesses effectively would undoubtedly be much more challenging. Amidst our many obstacles, Kate made a wonderful point: "Instead of feeling alone, I felt very supported."

How We Are Overcoming the Challenges

- **Becoming part of professional associations such as IECA, NACAC and our regional ACACs.** Tanya summed up the benefits of membership perfectly: "The biggest benefits I get, particularly from IECA, are professional development webinars and the incredible support of fellow IECs [to reach out to] with any questions I have."

- **Networking. As described by Beth, "Along this journey, I've learned that spontaneous, informal networking can be powerful."** Danielle agreed, as she had the same experience in her community.

  Being active in your community and sharing news about your new business with your personal network is a great way to get the word out.

- **Seeking the learning opportunities you need and creating them if they don't exist.** During one of IECA's monthly Associate & Student Members Roundtables, a group of us started a conversation about needing to go on more college tours. Identifying a common need, we broke off and formed a subgroup that has met biweekly for about a year now. We have been on college tours together, but our mission has grown beyond just college tours to now include sharing best practices, challenges, and tips and tricks of the trade.

Tips or Advice for New IECs Just Starting Out

Danielle remembers that as she was about to embark on her first admissions cycle, many IECs cautioned her not to take on too many students that first year. It was great advice, and those other consultants were right! There is such a worry that it will be difficult to fill our classes, but it's essential not to overextend that first year or two.

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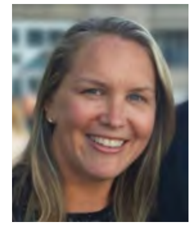

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Clearing Up "Contributor" Confusion

By Lisa Rielage, MEd, IECA (VA)

Lisa Rielage, Admissions Decrypted, can be reached at Lisa@AdmissionsDecrypted.com.

You're talking with a group of parents and conversation turns to paying for college and the financial aid process.

Parent #1: "He's 18. He's an adult. Why can't he be considered financially independent?"

Parent #2: "We're divorced. Whose information do we use on the FAFSA?"

For a refresher on the rules regarding who needs to participate in the FAFSA process, read on. We're here for you.

Photo: SeventyFour/iStock.com

Response to Parent #1: Who Is an Independent Student?

The US federal and state governments assume that families are the first source of student support for college costs. Federal Student Aid (FSA) has specific rules for who is considered an independent student. The FAFSA asks students several questions to determine their dependency status. If the student matches any of the criteria below, they qualify as independent.

- **Age:** Is at least 24 years old (as of December 31 of the award year)
- **Has own household:** Is married (not separated) or remarried, or has children or other dependents they primarily support
- **Education level:** Is (or will be) a graduate or professional student during the award year
- **Military status:** Is on active duty in the US armed forces (other than for training) or is a veteran of the US armed forces
- **Loss of parents or parental care:** After the age of 13 was an orphan, foster child, or ward/dependent of the court; is or was (at age of majority) an emancipated minor or in a legal guardianship
- **Homelessness:** Unaccompanied and either homeless or self-supporting and at risk of being homeless (requires verification)

Students who do not meet the above criteria are considered "dependent students." In addition to submitting their own financial information, they will need to invite one or more "contributors" to provide additional information on family income and assets.

Important Notes for Parent #1:

- Submitting FAFSA information does not require parents to pay for college, but choosing not to pay your child's college costs does NOT make the student independent.
- Living apart from parents or being financially independent does not affect FSA dependency status.

Unusual Circumstances Exception

Students who are homeless or at risk of homelessness are considered independent for financial aid. This status must be verified under Higher Education Act (HEA) and McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act guidelines. Documentation from school staff or homeless service providers may help with this determination.

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The Joy of Running Through College Visits: The Unscripted Adventure

By Laura Barr, MEd, CEP, IECA (CO)

Laura Barr, Emerging Educational Consulting, can be reached at LauraBarr@EmergingConsulting.com.

There's an ineffable magic in exploring a college campus on a run. Unlike the structured, guide-led tours brimming with details, my approach transforms the visit into a personal adventure, allowing me to absorb the essence of the campus in my unique way.

For the past two decades, my running shoes have carried me through countless campuses, each one unveiling hidden spaces often overlooked on conventional tours: a secret garden, a tree swing, a modest gallery, or an underground thrift store.

While traditional tours hold undeniable value—offering a structured overview—I have come to depend on my approach to engage in "the unscripted journey."

As a runner, I blend in with the campus vibe and can absorb the energy of the place. Whether I'm sitting in the quad observing student and teacher interactions or grabbing a snack in the cafeteria, I gain a unique perspective on the interactions and culture of the place.

Exploring a college in this way goes beyond simply observing buildings and listening to scripted perspectives. Instead, I am able to access the pulse of the community, understanding its quirks and gems along the way.

As I head into my second recertification for CEP (Certified Education Planner), I will have visited over 70 colleges in the past five years. Stepping away from the traditional college visit format has made these trips far more interesting and engaging. I have also noticed that my students love the fun facts I have gathered over the years about colleges that are not typically revealed from online searches or the *Fiske Guide*.

Photo: Drazen Zigic/iStock.com

I get that not everyone is a runner, but that doesn't mean you can't explore in your own way. Take a leisurely walk around the campus or rent a bike to cover more ground. These alternative approaches allow you to see the college from a different perspective, creating a more memorable and authentic experience—one step at a time.

Entrepreneurial Journey, from page M6

Here is some additional advice for new IECs starting out:

- Beth believes "**building a professional network is essential, especially for new IECs**." Danielle agreed, adding that she connected early on with as many local IECs in her community as possible. "I was blown away from the beginning by how generous people were with their time and sharing their expertise with me. Many of my first referrals came from the local IECs I connected with early on in my career."

- "**Seize as many learning opportunities as possible, because that is what you are selling—your knowledge**," says Ronke. This is an essential reminder to everyone, not just those just starting out.

- Kate makes a wonderful point that we must have all felt at one time: "**Don't feel like an imposter**. You know far more than the families you are working with and will be a great guide to help them no matter how early you are in your practice."

- "**Visit as many colleges and universities as possible**," suggests Tanya. There is no better research to be done than actually setting foot on the campus of the schools we suggest.

- Lastly, Beth recommends that IECs just starting out should "**pursue professional training in independent educational consulting.**" In addition to the wonderful certificate programs that the authors of this article benefited from (UCLA and UC Irvine), there are endless professional development opportunities available through IECA. Danielle and Ronke attended IECA's Summer Training Institute (STI) for new IECs, and still benefit from the incredible resources shared in the "giant binder" all participants receive.

IECs enter the profession to help students and families at a critical junction of their lives. With a new business, challenges are bound to arise. Keep in mind, however, that you are not alone, and there are many incredible resources available to support and guide you along the way. Remembering the numerous lives you will positively impact will also certainly give you the fuel to keep pushing forward. You've got this, new and newish IECs!

A Survey of Career/Interest Inventories Useful for IECs

By Michael K. Smith, PhD, IECA Student (TN)

Independent educational consultants (IECs) often use student characteristics to help determine the best fit colleges. A student's interests, abilities, and personality can be guides to potential college majors and future careers. For IECs that want to use inventories or questionnaires, two questions can be addressed: (1) What can I learn about my client that will help me in developing a college list? and (2) What could a student learn about him or herself that could broaden an understanding of the transition from high school to college?

It's been almost 100 years since E. K. Strong (1927) developed the first Interest Inventory that tried to match a person's interests with potential careers. Since that time, psychologists and other researchers have developed dozens of instruments that attempt to link individual characteristics with careers (Lowman 2022). This article will survey a few of these instruments that have been in use with current IECs. This article will focus on the measurement of interests and their use to predict careers. The assessment of abilities and personality will not be addressed.

IEC Constructed Questionnaires

A fitting starting point could be questionnaires that individual IECs have constructed. Students could report on their own interests and abilities and suggest possible majors and careers. Steven Antonoff's *Self-Survey for the College-Bound* provides a template that can be used or modified (Antonoff 2022).

Holland Codes

Many research-based interest inventories use the system developed by John I. Holland (1959, 1973). Holland proposed six personality types: Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Conventional (see Table 1 on page 12). Each personality type displayed interests that inclined them to pursue specific work environments. Holland felt that work environments could also be categorized as one of these six types. He hypothesized that individuals seek to match their personality type with a corresponding work environment. For instance, an Investigative personality type would prefer a work environment that featured Investigative skills, such as math and science. Holland then surveyed members of hundreds of specific occupations. From this research, he was able to categorize specific types of occupations as belonging to one of these six categories.

Most of the Holland inventories assign a person a three-letter code suggesting the strength of the environments that match their interests. For instance, an IAS person would prefer Investigative activities with Artistic and Social possibilities. Holland's original research matched his six codes to a multitude of occupations. The list of possible occupations has understandably changed over the ensuing decades.

Most inventories use a 5-point rating scale with 1 being Strongly Disagree to 5 Strongly Agree. Some also use responses such as Yes/No or Like/Dislike. All inventories suggest potential occupations broken down by Holland code. Many inventories also offer extra resources to explore occupations. The number of questions range from 60 to several hundred (as with the Strong Interest Inventory), with time of administration from 15 minutes to a little over an hour. Some inventories only require a basic understanding of the Holland system while others require more extensive training. Table 2 on page 12 presents some commonly used resources to assess these Holland codes.

How Useful are Interest Inventories?

Let's look at an example to see how an IEC might use the results of an Interest Inventory. The author completed the free O*Net Interest Profiler consisting of 60 questions. These are my scores: Realistic 3, Investigative 27, Artistic 22, Social 16, Enterprising 14, Conventional 13. My top three Holland codes are Investigative, Artistic, and Social (IAS).

The O*Net Interest Profiler also asks a respondent to rate the amount of preparation that could be needed from Little or No Preparation to Extensive Preparation. The author selected Extensive Preparation. O*Net proposed these 10 occupations as fitting the author's interests and preparation level with the top four Best Fit careers (in bold):

- **Climate Change Policy Analysts**
- **Industrial-Organizational Psychologists**
- **Political Scientists**
- **Sociologists**
- Clinical & Counseling Psychologists
- Economists
- Genetic Counselors
- Historians
- Marriage & Family Therapists
- Neuropsychologists

The author received an undergraduate degree in history and a PhD in experimental psychology (very close to the

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Financial Aid Matters, from page M7

Contributors: Clarifications for Parents

FSA uses "contributor" to refer to anyone other than the student who provides information and a signature on the FAFSA form. Dependent students will always have at least one parent contributor.

- Parents are married and file taxes jointly: Only one parent completes the contributor section on behalf of **both** parents.
- Parents are married but file taxes separately: Both parents must submit individual contributor sections.
- Parents are unmarried, but live together: Both parents must submit individual contributor sections.
- Parents are divorced/separated, but live together: Both parents must submit individual contributor sections.
- Parents are divorced/separated, and live apart: One parent submits the contributor section, and if remarried, their spouse might also be a separate contributor.

Source: *https://studentaid.gov/articles/fafsa-for-parents/*

Warning! Headache-Inducing, Commonly Messed Up FAFSA Question

A question on the 2024-25 FAFSA asked: "Are the student's parents unwilling to provide their information, but the student doesn't have an unusual circumstance...that prevents them from contacting the parents or obtaining their information?" followed by Yes/No options. Many students responded Yes (parents are unwilling) when they probably meant No (parents aren't unwilling).

This response prevented students from inviting parents as contributors and only left them eligible for Direct Unsubsidized Loans. It was difficult to go back and correct and led to significant delays in FAFSA processing. It's not clear if this phrasing will be improved on the 2025-26 FAFSA. We sincerely hope so.

Response to Parent #2: Changes to Divorced Parent Requirements

New FAFSA rules for divorced parents caused confusion. In the past, with whom the student lived the most determined which divorced parent submitted financial information. Starting with the 2024-25 FAFSA, parent contributor status is based on which divorced parent provided the most financial support. Child support counts for the payer when determining which parent is the contributor.

If the parent who provided the most financial support has remarried, their current spouse's financial information is also required. If this couple files taxes separately, then the stepparent will also be identified as a contributor.

If neither parent provided more than 50 percent of the student's financial support, the parent (and current spouse) with the greater income and assets will be the required contributor.

Photo: Valeria Venezia/iStock.com

Application Tips

Students should start their application first, then invite the required contributors. If parents are married and file taxes jointly, only one has to complete the contributor section. If the student invites both parents, the first to accept the invitation becomes the required contributor.

The student and each contributor are required to have their own FSA IDs. If a contributor had an FSA ID in the past (e.g., for older children or their own student loans), they must use that same FSA ID. Setting up FSA IDs well in advance is prudent.

Important Distinctions for Contributors: FAFSA vs. CSS Profile

While FAFSA only requires one of the divorced parents (plus any new spouses) to submit financial information, CSS Profile usually requires financial information from both parents (plus any new spouses).

Where FAFSA uses separate logins for the student and each contributor, CSS Profile uses the same account to collect information on the student and parent. If parents are divorced, the custodial parent submits information on the same account as the student. Typically only non-custodial parents need their own account.

Some CSS Profile colleges do not require information from non-custodial parents. The College Board maintains a list of CSS Profile participating colleges that indicates if the Non-Custodial Parent application is required.

Helpful References

2024-2025 Federal Student Aid Handbook Application and Verification Guide Chapter 2: Filling Out the FAFSA
fsapartners.ed.gov/knowledge-center/fsa-handbook/2024-2025

CSS Profile requirements table
profile.collegeboard.org/profile/ppi/participatingInstitutions.aspx

Is My Parent a **CONTRIBUTOR** When I Fill Out My FAFSA® Form?

Federal Student Aid

*A **parent** means your legal (biological or adoptive) parent or a person that the state has determined to be your legal parent. A **stepparent** is considered a parent if they have adopted you. Stepparents that have not adopted you will be identified as a parent spouse.*

Are your biological or adoptive parents married to each other?

Do your biological or adoptive parents live together?

Did one parent provide more financial support than the other over the past 12 months?

Your parents' marital status is married (not separated), and both of your parents' information must be included on the FAFSA® form. If your parents did not file taxes jointly, then both of your parents are contributors. Their individual information, consent and approval, and signatures will be required on the FAFSA form. If your parents filed taxes jointly, only one parent is required as a contributor and will report information for both parents.

Your parents' marital status is unmarried (both legal parents living together), and both of your parents are contributors, even if they were never married, are divorced, or are separated. Their individual information, consent and approval, and signatures will be required on the FAFSA® form.

The individual information, consent and approval, and signature of the parent who provided more financial support over the past 12 months will be required on the FAFSA® form, and this parent will be identified as a contributor.

The individual information, consent and approval, and signature of the parent who has the greater income and assets will be required on the FAFSA® form, and this parent will be identified as a contributor.

Has this parent married/remarried?

Your parent's marital status is married/remarried. Your stepparent will also be identified as a contributor on the FAFSA® form if they didn't file their taxes jointly with your parent.

Your parent's marital status is single (never married), separated, divorced, or widowed. An additional parent will not be identified as contributor.

Note: Dependent students are required to report parent information on the FAFSA® form, and in most cases, a parent will be identified as a contributor for these students. All contributors are required to provide their information, signature, and consent and approval to have their federal tax information transferred directly from the IRS into the FAFSA form. Being a contributor on the FAFSA form does not mean an obligation to pay for the student's education.

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industrial-organizational field).

What questions must an IEC address to use these instruments?

1. Do I understand the Holland codes and can I communicate results to my client?
2. Can I suggest ways to use and follow-up suggested career choices?
3. Can I learn the other options provided by most of these systems?
4. Will results help me and my client in developing best fit college lists?

How Accurate are Interest Inventories?

Hanna and Rounds (2020) conducted an extensive meta-analysis of how well interests predict career choice. The authors compiled results from 166 previous research studies representing almost 800,000 respondents. The authors analyzed results from over 50 different interest inventories, many but not all using the Holland system. The authors made the following conclusion:

The present meta-analysis demonstrates that interest inventories have a substantial level of criterion-related validity for predicting career choices. Specifically, interest inventories accurately predict individuals' career choices about 50 percent of the time. This prediction rate indicates that measured interests are important predictors of both educational and occupational membership.

Summary

IECs may find these career interest inventories useful as they establish a relationship with a client, build a profile of the client's characteristics, and construct lists of best fit colleges.

Sources

To see the list of sources used for this article, use the QR code at right or visit *link.IECAonline.com/inventories*.

Table 1: Holland Codes

Holland Code	Letter	Description
Realistic	R	Realistic people are generally interested in mechanical, construction, and repair activities; nature and the outdoors; providing public safety, and adventurous, physical activities. They like working with tools, machines, and equipment. They are interested in action rather than thought and prefer concrete problems to ambiguous, abstract ones.
Investigative	I	Investigative people are generally interested in activities related to science and math. They like gathering information, uncovering new facts or theories, and analyzing and interpreting data. They are scientific and inquiring, and enjoy ambiguous, abstract problems.
Artistic	A	Artistic people are generally interested in visual art, performing arts, culinary arts, and writing. They like observing the arts and participating in them, and frequently express their artistic interests through leisure activities as well as work. They are interested in aesthetics and self-expression.
Social	S	Social people are generally interested in being with other people. They enjoy working in groups, sharing responsibilities, and communicating with others. They like to solve problems through discussion of feelings and through interactions with others.
Enterprising	E	Enterprising people are generally interested in persuading and leading. They seek positions of leadership, power, and status. They enjoy working with other people and leading them toward organizational goals and economic success.
Conventional	C	Conventional people are generally interested in activities that require attention to organization, data systems, detail, and accuracy. They work well in large organizations and like to use information to solve problems efficiently.

Source: Borgen and Grutter (2012)

Table 2: Career Interest Inventories Information

Name	Website	Description	Cost
O*NET Interest Profiler	*MyNextMove.org/explore/ip*	Also matches careers that require little to extensive preparation	FREE
BigFuture	*BigFuture.CollegeBoard.org/career-search/career-quiz*	Also lists average income of occupations and most common education level	FREE or use with College Board login
ACT Interest Inventory	*ACT.org/content/act/en/students-and-parents/high-school-success/what-to-do-after-high-school.html#plan*	Also features a Career Map and Career Connector	Available with an ACT assessment account
CareerCode	*CareerCode.com*	Provides links to research potential careers that match codes	$19 single use
Self-Directed Search	*Self-directed-search.com*	Also includes Occupational Daydreams	$18.95 single use
Strong Interest Inventory	*TheMyersBriggs.com/en-US/Products-and-Services/Strong*	Also includes Basic Interest Scales; Personal Style Scales; Possible College Majors	$1250 for training; yearly license $195; $12.95 per report
Greenwood System	*GreenwoodSystem.com*	Combines Myers-Briggs Personality with Holland; has new AI interface to explore interests and occupations	$500 for training; $50 a year for license; $300 single use (also comes with one-hour consultation)
YouScience	*YouScience.com*	Also measures a variety of abilities	$49 single use