

# Planning a Financial Aid Awareness Program

The first 3 steps in planning a financial aid awareness program are to decide on a:

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## 1 LOCATION:

- Is the facility in a convenient location?
- Is the room large enough to comfortably seat the number of people you expect?
- Can the room's lighting be adjusted when using audiovisual equipment?
- Is a microphone(s) needed?
- What are your audiovisual needs? PowerPoint projector and laptop?
- Is there a screen that's at least 8' x 8' (preferably 10' x 10')?
- Is the temperature of the room adjustable?
- Is the facility/room available for the date(s) you have in mind?

## 2 DATE:

- Recommend date(s) for financial aid presentation(s) which suit your school's needs.
- Don't hold the program so late in the winter that many seniors will have missed colleges' financial aid deadlines. (Many school deadlines are in February.)
- After you narrow down the time frame, you need to look carefully for potential conflicts that would prevent people from attending. You probably won't be able to avoid every possible conflict, but if you find a date when there are no major events affecting your school's population, you are more likely to draw a crowd to your financial aid program.

For example, consider:

- Does the date conflict with any holidays, religious observances, deer season or planned school closings? Attendance and focus are usually down around these times.
- Are school sporting events or other extracurricular activities being held that day? If so, will their start and end times conflict with the times of the aid event? How much of your potential audience would be involved?
- Are there any major community-wide events occurring on that date?
- Is the date far enough in advance that you have time to publicize the program and parents have enough time to make plans to come?
- If possible, try to schedule the event a year in advance so that you have plenty of time to get it on the school website, calendar and publications (sports programs, etc.)

## 3 TIME:

- When setting the time to begin for evening events, remember to allow time for parents to get home from work and get a bite to eat before going to the program.

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## TIME – continued –

- Set a time for the program to end. People usually like to know in advance how long they need to stay. The amount of time you schedule for the program will depend on what activities you have planned. Try to stick to the times you publicize.
- Typically, starting between 6:00 and 7:00 p.m. works well. Be sure, however, to consider any special patterns and needs in your area. For instance, in some areas, a weekend program or an afternoon program might be more effective than an evening program.

## Announcement and Promotion of Your Event

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You can't publicize your financial aid awareness program too much! Get the word out as early as possible and in as many ways as possible. The target audience should be 9th–12th grade parents/students. Hearing this information more than once is to everyone's benefit and ultimately acts as a "de-stresser" for the parent because they will know what needs to be done and when it needs to be done.

Consider sending an email or postcard to your parents, or contacting them directly by phone with a pre-recorded message. You could also post event information on "Twitter" for your students/parents. Often the local newspaper's website will have a "Community Calendar" on which you can manually add to the schedule of events.

### » OTHER IDEAS TO CONSIDER:

- Hanging flyers and/or posters in school;
- Posting announcements on the school's public address system;
- Putting advertisements and/or articles in the school newspaper;
- Placing a notice in the parent/teacher/student association (PTSA/PTO/PTA) newsletter;
- Adding a message at the bottom of report cards about upcoming events;
- Offering door prizes, raffles or drawings (ex. scholarships, movie passes, gift certificates, etc.);
- Serving food / refreshments;
- Providing a baby sitting service;
- Giving extra credit for students that bring one or both parents (or caregivers as appropriate) to aid night.

### » EVERY ANNOUNCEMENT SHOULD INCLUDE:

- The key subject points that will be covered in the program, such as giving instructions on sources/ types of financial aid; how to complete the FAFSA; etc.
- The date (and if applicable the "snow date");
- The location, including the address and room;
- The start time and program length;
- A telephone number to call for more information;
- You might also include the presenter's name and affiliation, parking instructions, child care information, and other important details.

## Financial Aid Seminars That Utilize Professionals

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Consider calling in a variety of professionals with specific expertise during the school year to do a series of “Getting Ready for College” seminars for parents. Maybe hold multiple concurrent sessions at one event and let students/parents pick and choose which sessions they want to hear.

### » EXAMPLES OF SESSIONS MIGHT INCLUDE:

- How to identify your student’s interests and aptitudes
  - Matching up your student’s interests with possible career choices / educational paths
  - Writing a college essay
  - “Paying for College” seminar
  - FAFSA completion session for seniors
  - Panel of recently graduated students that have moved onto higher education to share their experience on what they did and did not do right in preparing for higher education
- “Choosing the Right School.” Bring in an admissions officer(s) from a higher education institution to speak to the parents about what admissions officers look for in applicants
  - “Caveat Emptor.” Don’t be a sucker. Beware of the various scams that prey on students and their families.
  - Is the military right for my student? Have a local recruiter come in and answer questions from interested parents.

## Organize for Success

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If possible, consider organizing with a neighboring high school for more efficient use of everyone’s resources. It helps to be organized if you want to produce a useful awareness program. Consider creating a checklist itemizing the tasks you need to complete. Remember, with good planning, your awareness program is sure to be a success. Good luck!

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