

2025-2026 FAFSA Support Activities

Funding Opportunity

Application Deadline: July 12, 2024, 4:00 p.m. HST



OVERVIEW

Hawaii Community Foundation (HCF) is funding initiatives to boost awareness and completion of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) for Hawaii's students in light of changes to the 2024-2025 application process. HCF manages a long-standing postsecondary scholarship program, and FAFSA completion has played an important role in understanding applicants' college affordability, especially for students from low-income households.

To address ongoing concerns about the upcoming 2025-2026 FAFSA application and process, HCF is seeking opportunities to support and partner with community-based organizations or institutions that plan to provide direct services or response in assisting students and families with FAFSA completion.

Background

In 2020, the United States Congress passed legislation to redesign the FAFSA system, application, and process to apply for federal student aid, including the Pell grant. While the redesign intended to simplify the process and expand Pell eligibility to more students, the issues encountered during the rollout of the 2024-2025 "Better FAFSA" caused a three-month delay for students and families to begin the form and solidify their college enrollment plans. These delays also hindered student support organizations and institutions in proactively updating their own FAFSA messaging and resources. In May 2024, Hawaii's high school seniors' FAFSA completion rates dropped by 20 points compared to completion rates in May 2023¹, highlighting a need for innovative approaches to combat this significant decrease in Hawaii's FAFSA completions.

In spring 2024, HCF partnered with the University of Hawaii at Manoa's Master of Public Administration (PUBA) program to assess the impact the new FAFSA had on Hawaii's students and provide recommendations for increased supports.² With hopes of helping community partners and institutions mitigate these changes, HCF has opened this funding opportunity for impactful solutions that will increase awareness and completion of the 2025-2026 FAFSA process and application, currently anticipated to open on October 1, 2024, and recommendations from the PUBA research have been incorporated into this opportunity as part of the funding priorities.

¹ As of May 17, 2024, only 39.6% of the Hawaii high school class of 2024 completed a 2024-2025 FAFSA compared to a 60% completion rate of the 2023-2024 FAFSA in May 2023. <https://www.ncan.org/page/FAFSATracker>

² Cho, S., Kawatani, J., and Phomsouvanh, A. (May 2024), [Free Application for Federal Student Aid \(FAFSA\): Navigating Changes to the 2024-2025 FAFSA & Increasing Student Utilization of Federal Student Aid](#).

FUNDING AND FOCUS AREAS

A total of \$200,000 in funding is available. Organizations may request up to \$20,000 for the following:

- Programs, events, and activities that increase awareness and/or completion of the 2025-2026 FAFSA for Hawaii's students. All events and activities should occur no later than July 31, 2025, but may be extended on a per case basis.
- Priority will be given to programs and activities that align with one or more the following areas:
 - Creation of FAFSA tutorial media and resources, especially if the resources are targeted to Hawaii's students and/or incorporates aspects of Hawaiian culture;
 - Activities that promote joint parent-student or household completion of the FAFSA;
 - Programs or activities that focus on FAFSA completion for students and/or parents who do not have legal resident status, or programs serving students and families who live in rural areas of Hawaii; and/or
 - Creative and innovative ways of promoting FAFSA awareness and completion.

HCF intends to fund organizations best aligned with the Evaluation section below. Funding amounts may vary based on the number of applications, and the overall strength, impact, and budget of the activities. Funds are for activity costs associated with the 2025-2026 FAFSA and during the 2024-2025 academic year and summer 2025. Funds may be used for program personnel, overhead, and costs associated with proposed FAFSA programs and activities. Payments are one-time, one-year awards, and the funding period aims to start mid-September 2024. Applicants will be notified of funding decisions by early September 2024.

EVALUATION

The strongest applications are those that meet all the following criteria:

- Activities occur during the 2024-2025 academic year and conclude by summer 2025
- Organizations that clearly describe their intended FAFSA awareness or completion activities
- Activities that align with more than one funding priority
- Organizations that clearly demonstrate the desired impact of their activities as it relates to increasing FAFSA awareness or completion for their target audience, and how they will measure this impact
- Organizations that intend to collaborate with other community partners
- Program or activity budget is adequate; costs are consistent with the activities and are reasonable

ELIGIBILITY & REQUIREMENTS

Hawai'i nonprofit organizations that are 501(c)(3) IRS tax exempt organizations and programs with a fiscal sponsor with 501(c)(3) status, are eligible to apply. Organizations currently funded by HCF with overdue final reports are not eligible to apply.

APPLICATION PROCESS

Instructions and Application Tips

- Applications must be submitted online through HCF's **Grants Portal** available here: https://hawaiicf.smartsimple.com/s_Login.jsp.
- New users must register for an account. Registered users may login to their account to submit an application.
- Give yourself adequate time before the submission deadline to access the system and familiarize yourself with the application process and requirements, including time to complete or update your organization's profile and current financial documents. Instructions
- The online application has fillable boxes with character limits. The character counts in MS Word may not match the character counts in the application. If you cut and paste your work into the application, please be sure your text fits the space provided.
- The online application accepts diacritical markings in written 'Ōlelo Hawai'i (Hawaiian language).

Instructions for Sponsored Organizations with a Fiscal Sponsor

- The sponsored organization, that is not a 501(c)(3) public charity, must submit the application.
- Sponsored organizations that do not have an account, should register, and select "Other Organization". Complete and submit the Organization Profile (see more information below).
- The fiscal sponsor, that is a 501(c)(3) public charity, must also have an account. Fiscal sponsor organizations that do not have an account, should register, and select "501(c)(3) Charity". Complete and submit the Organization Profile.
- In the application "Program Overview" section, the applicant (sponsored organization) must select yes to the question Do you have a fiscal sponsor? Then select your fiscal sponsor from the list. If you cannot find your fiscal sponsor, please ask the fiscal sponsor organization to register in the system.
- In the application "Supporting Documents & Certification" section, the applicant (sponsored organization) must upload the completed Fiscal Sponsor Resolution and Agreement forms. See page 5 for more information. Please upload only the required forms.

ORGANIZATION PROFILE

As part of the online application your organization profile must be certified prior to submission of grant applications and must be certified every six months. Information needed to complete your organization's profile includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- IRS 501(c)(3) determination letter (not required if previously applied to the Foundation or if applying through a fiscal sponsor)
- Number of full-time, part-time, or regular volunteer staff
- Organization Mission
- Service Location(s)
- Types of services provided (including age, gender, and target populations served)
- Financial Statements – including income statement (or profit/loss statement) and balance sheet for the most recently completed fiscal year, and annual operating budget for the current year.
- Audited financial statements are preferred but not required. Local units of national organizations must submit local unit financial information.
- **Your organization's updated financial documents must be submitted in the Organization Profile prior to submitting the application. If the financial documents are not up to date, the application will be administratively denied.**
- Board of Directors List

APPLICATION

The application consists of a handful of questions to assist reviewers in understanding your program and proposed activities. The application consists of 4 tabs. Information needed to complete your application includes, but is not limited to the following:

- **Program Overview:**
 1. Provide general information and characteristics about the program including program title, duration, area of interest, program location(s), ages and genders served, and the CHANGE sector(s) your program most closely aligns with.
 2. For more information about the CHANGE framework, please visit our website <https://www.hawaiicommunityfoundation.org/change>.
 3. If you have a fiscal sponsor, you will be asked to identify your fiscal sponsor. Please note, your fiscal sponsor must first be registered in the Grants Portal prior to submitting your application.
- **Program Information:**
 1. Describe your intended FAFSA activities and timeline. How many activities or events do you intend to coordinate? Provide approximate dates and locations of the activities, targeted populations, and how many are expected to participate. Tell us what staff will support these activities and identify any intended partners.
 2. How will your intended activities increase FAFSA awareness or completion for Hawaii students? If your program does not currently carry out any FAFSA activities, describe why your organization is qualified to implement these activities. If your program already includes FAFSA activities, describe how these activities will increase the scale and impact of your current program, what populations do you currently serve, and how that relates to your intended goals for this grant.
 3. Describe the impact you hope to achieve with your program or activities as it relates to FAFSA awareness or completion, and how you will measure the impact of these activities.
 4. Provide a description of the costs associated with your uploaded budget. If you are requesting funding for personnel costs, provide a brief justification for the requested amount.
- **Budget:** Provide your total program budget amount requested through this application.
- **Support Documents & Certification:** Upload a copy of your program's budget, showing income and expenses, indicating sources of income that are pending and secured.

For questions regarding this funding opportunity, please contact Tara Shibuya, Director, Community Grants & Initiatives, at tshibuya@hcf-hawaii.org.