Financial Aid for Undocumented Students in California

If you are undocumented and live in California, there is financial aid to support your educational goals (college, university, or trade school).

The following are some of the most frequently asked questions by undocumented students about the financial aid process.

FAQ

1. I am undocumented — is there financial aid available for me? Do I put myself at risk by applying?

If you are undocumented, you may feel nervous about completing a government application for financial aid. However, California has a financial aid application process designed to help and protect undocumented students and families. The information you provide when you complete the California Dream Act Application is never shared with any federal agencies and is used to determine your eligibility for financial aid offered by the state and colleges in California.

2. What is the California Dream Act Application (CADAA)? What is the difference between FAFSA and CADAA?

CADAA is California's state financial aid application operated by CSAC that allows undocumented students (read more on FAQ #4) to receive free financial aid such as: state and university grants, community college fee waivers, Cal Grants, and private scholarships. Additionally, the CADAA allows students to pay in-state tuition at any public college or university in California.

In comparison, the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) is a federal financial aid application for U.S. citizens, permanent residents ("green card" holders), T visa holders and other eligible non-citizens to apply for state and federal financial aid.

So, while undocumented students are not eligible for federal financial aid or the FAFSA, they *are* eligible for state financial aid through the CADAA.

3. Who can apply for the CADAA?

Thousands of undocumented students in California apply for and receive financial aid every year. Any of the following students who meet the requirements for a "non-resident tuition exemption" (read more on **FAQ #4**) can apply for the CADAA:

- Undocumented students
- DACA recipients (valid or expired)
- Students with a U Visa
- Students with Temporary Protected Status (TPS)

U.S. citizens or "green card holders" whose parent(s) or spouse are undocumented (**mixed-status families**) can also apply for the CADAA if they do not want to submit a FAFSA.

4. What is the non-resident tuition exemption?

For more than 20 years, California has provided a pathway to allow undocumented students to attend college. "Non-resident tuition exemption" is often referred to as "AB 540" and is a requirement to apply for CADAA. AB 540 is a status that allows students to be considered a California resident for purposes of paying in-state tuition (instead of out-of-state tuition, which is much higher). To qualify for AB 540, students must submit an AB 540 Affidavit indicating that they have:

- 3 years of coursework and
- 3 years of attendance at a combination of California elementary school, middle school, high school, adult school, or community college

There is a short section in the CADAA that allows you to submit the AB 540 Affidavit. So, by completing the CADAA you *also* submit your AB 540 Affidavit!

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5. When is the deadline to submit the CADAA?

Submit your CADAA by March 2 *every year*! Students attending a California Community College can apply by September 2. While it is never too late to apply, the sooner you submit a CADAA you maximize your financial aid options and have time to address any challenges that may come up.

6. What will students need to fill out the CADAA?

You only need a few items to get started and complete your CADAA.

- valid and permanent email address (do not use an email provided by your school)
- copies of tax filing information (if applicable) for you and your parent(s) or spouse

7. How can I get help with completing the CADAA?

You don't have to complete this journey alone — help might be closer than you think. Start with your school by reaching out to a counselor. If it's hard to find time to meet with a counselor, financial aid experts at CSAC and local community organizations are available to provide step-by-step assistance at *free* **Cash for College workshops** (either in person or virtually).

8. What if me or my parents do not file taxes?

Taxes can be stressful to think about. Luckily, there are options for you and your family if you did not file taxes two years before the award year you are applying for.

- If you indicate the option of "not going to file" you must still report income. If you/your parents earned more than what the IRS considers the **threshold** for filing taxes, the application will be flagged, and you/your parents will have to get an ITIN and file taxes for that year.

- If you indicate the option of "will file" a tax return, you will have to provide income estimates. After the tax return is filed, you will have to update your CADAA with the new tax information.

9. How do parents sign the CADAA?

If it is determined that parent information is needed on the CADAA, only one parent's signature will be required. There are two options for how parents can electronically sign the CADAA:

- If a parent is with the student while completing the CADAA, they will be able to sign at that moment by selecting a check box agreeing to the accuracy of the information they provided.
- If a parent is unable to provide a signature at the time that the student is applying, they can sign at a later time by either (1) having the student log back into their application and selecting the appropriate box or (2) via the **external parent signature page**.

Both signature options are quick and easy! Please note that your CADAA will not be processed if a parent signature is missing.

10. What's next after completing the CADAA?

You are almost at the finish line, congrats! After submitting your CADAA, you should review the Confirmation Page to identify and fix any errors. CSAC will email you a nine-digit "Dream ID number" that you will need to create a **WebGrants 4 Students** account and check the status of your application, eligibility for Cal Grant and Middle Class Scholarship, and any next steps. CSAC will send your CADAA to all the colleges that you listed on the application to determine what type of financial aid you are eligible for.

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