

# Unaccompanied Homeless Youth Policy

To be considered an unaccompanied homeless youth on the FAFSA® form, an individual must be a youth who is (1) unaccompanied **and** homeless **or** (2) unaccompanied, self-supporting, **and** at risk of being homeless. Outlined below are some initial terms that support a homeless youth determination, as defined in section 725 of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (McKinney-Vento) (42 U.S.C. 11434a). Note that the last two definitions do not appear in McKinney-Vento. Also, institutions should refer to [Chapter 5](#), “Special Cases,” of the Application and Verification Guide in the Federal Student Aid Handbook for additional components of the definition for homeless children and youths.

- **Unaccompanied**—when a student is not living in the physical custody of a parent or guardian
- **Homeless**—lacking fixed, regular, and adequate housing
- **At risk of being homeless**—when a student’s housing may cease to be fixed, regular, and adequate, for example, a student who is being evicted or has been asked to leave their current residence and has been unable to find fixed, regular, and adequate housing
- **Self-supporting**—when a student pays for his or her own living expenses, which includes paying for fixed, regular, and adequate housing

Regardless of their age, applicants who are unaccompanied and homeless, or self-supporting and at risk of being homeless, qualify for a homeless youth determination and will be considered independent students on the FAFSA® form.

## Applying for Title IV Aid

Starting with the 2024-25 FAFSA® form, applicants under the age of 24 will be presented with a single question to determine if they are a youth who is (1) unaccompanied and homeless or (2) unaccompanied, self-supporting, and at risk of becoming homeless. If they answer “Yes” to the homeless question, they will be asked if they have a documented determination from one of the eligible authorities listed below. Applicants who affirm they are an unaccompanied homeless youth will be able to submit their application as an independent student.

First-time applicants will need to follow up with their institution to submit documentation supporting their homeless determination. Renewal applicants who had their 2023-24 FAFSA® form processed as an independent student due to a homeless youth determination are eligible to have their status carried forward if their circumstances remain unchanged and they are enrolled at the same institution for 2024-25. Institutions will need to manually adjust 2024-25 FAFSA® forms for students in these situations.

Beginning with the 2024-25 FAFSA® form, applicants with an unaccompanied and homeless determination or unaccompanied, self-supporting, and at risk of homelessness youth determination will have their answer to the homeless question carried over to subsequent award years. For the 2025-26 FAFSA® form and all applications moving forward, applicants with a previous homeless youth determination will be provided the opportunity to review the pre-populated answer to the homeless question and make a correction, if necessary, prior to submitting their form as an independent student.

In addition, homeless youth should use a mailing address on the FAFSA® form where they can reliably receive mail. This can be, for example, the address of a relative, friend, or social service agency that has given the applicant permission to use that address. It also can be the applicant's institution's address, if they have contacted the institution for permission and instructions are in place to ensure that mail they receive at the institution reaches them. Applicants should update their address on the FAFSA® form once they have more stable housing.

## Acceptable Authority Documentation

Homelessness is verified by one of the following authorities through a documented phone call, written statement, or a verifiable electronic data match:

- A local educational agency homeless liaison, as designated by the *McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act* (42 U.S.C. 11432(g)(1)(J)(ii))), or a designee of the liaison;
- The director or designee of an emergency or transitional shelter, street outreach program, homeless youth drop-in center, or other program serving individuals who are experiencing homelessness;
- The director or designee of a program funded under subtitle B of title IV of McKinney-Vento (relating to emergency shelter grants) (42 U.S.C. 11371 et seq.);
- The director or designee of a Federal TRIO program or a Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate program (GEAR UP) grant; or
- A financial aid administrator (FAA) at another institution who documented the student's circumstance in the same or a prior award year.

The HEA, as amended, provides that documentation from one of the above authorities is sufficient for establishing a student's unaccompanied homeless youth status.

Additionally, if an applicant believes they are an unaccompanied homeless youth—or unaccompanied and self-supporting youth at-risk of homelessness—but are unable to answer or

are uncertain of their answer to the homeless question on the FAFSA® form, the applicant should contact the Compton College Basic Needs Center to make a homeless youth determination.

In these situations, Financial Aid will make a case-by-case decision that is:

- Based upon a written statement from, or a documented interview with the student and the San Joaquin Delta Basic Needs Department, that confirms that they are an unaccompanied homeless youth, or unaccompanied, at risk of homelessness, and self-supporting; and
- If no documentation can be submitted and the Basic Needs Center is unable to make a determination, then a student may meet with their Financial Aid Specialist to conduct a documented interview in order to make such a determination.