

# SUMMARY:

## 2024 Midwest FAFSA Summit

### Building Effective Solutions for College Access

June 11-13, 2024  
Chicago, Illinois

#### WHY FAFSA MATTERS

FAFSA completion is crucial for college access, as it is linked to higher rates of college application and enrollment. More FAFSA completions mean more individuals taking steps toward higher education and obtaining credentials that enhance job opportunities and personal outcomes. Support for FAFSA completions is especially important right now in the wake of the rocky rollout of *new* FAFSA in 2024.

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THANK YOU TO OUR COLLABORATORS:



The [Midwest FAFSA Summit](#) was a collaboration of the Midwestern Higher Education Compact ([MHEC](#)), National College Attainment Network ([NCAN](#)), and the State Higher Education Executive Officer Association ([SHEEO](#)), with support from the [Strada Foundation](#). It convened higher education administrators, policymakers, and public and non-profit professionals to enhance FAFSA completion in the Midwest through increased collaboration. Completing the FAFSA is crucial for college access and enrollment. The summit aimed to boost FAFSA completions, thereby improving postsecondary education entry and workforce participation opportunities. Attendees focused on sharing strategies and building connections to achieve these goals.

#### SUMMIT GOALS

- Increase understanding of challenges with supporting FAFSA completions;
- Share promising practices and innovative strategies for increasing FAFSA completions; and
- Develop connections, collaborations, and plans to boost FAFSA completion rates.

#### ATTENDANCE

The summit attendance was focused on the Midwest with 132 participants from 17 states and the District of Columbia. Members of the following groups attended:

- School counselors, administrators, and superintendents;
- State government agencies of higher education, financial aid, and K-12;
- State legislators and legislative staff; and
- Non-profit organizations supporting higher education access and success.

THANK YOU TO SUPPORT FROM:



MIDWESTERN HIGHER EDUCATION COMPACT

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*"I was very surprised and happy with how the sessions supported the work I did and how I was given the space to make several connections and have in depth conversations with others to advance all our work." -Summit Attendee*

## SUMMIT SESSIONS AND CONTENT

The summit featured two days of comprehensive engagement with notable guests and experts, including a question and answer session with James Kvaal, U.S. Under Secretary of Education. Session topics included:

- Successful state FAFSA completion work that can be replicated and inspire innovation;
- Foundational FAFSA completion communication strategies and data systems; and
- Specific FAFSA completion strategies to engage adult and returning students.



Attendees also worked as state teams to map out their FAFSA completion ecosystems and assess them for challenges and opportunities for collaboration and improvement.

## KEY SUMMIT OUTCOMES

- **Increased Awareness.** The summit effectively highlighted the importance of FAFSA completion initiatives and spelled out the complexities and challenges of such work, driving a group sense of urgency to address and minimize such challenges.
- **Actionable Strategies.** Attendees left with practical tools and strategies they could use to improve FAFSA completion efforts in their states.
- **Collaborative Efforts.** The event fostered stronger collaborations among attendees, laying the groundwork for ongoing partnerships and initiatives.

*"Hearing from the states that have implemented universal FAFSA and/or strategies to increase FAFSA completion really helped. Nebraska passed a law that FAFSA is a graduation requirement starting with the class of 2025. I feel WAY more prepared to help implement based on what I have learned. I have several state websites saved to favorites to refer to and have been invited to our state board meeting to discuss implementation strategies" -Summit Attendee*

## STATE WORK SESSION KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Seven of 11 state teams expressed a high need for statewide coordination, communication, and collaboration strategies, even in states with strong FAFSA completion infrastructures.
- State teams noted a need for coordinated efforts among all FAFSA interested actors to reduce duplication of efforts and reach a wider range of students, especially those in rural areas, adult students, and first-generation students.
- Eight of 11 state teams highlighted narrative attacks on higher education and the value of postsecondary as a major threat to FAFSA completion, other common threats included, competing state priorities, and insufficient state need-based aid.
- State teams emphasized a need for more resources to support FAFSA completion work, including funding for more need-based state financial aid, state financial aid agencies and community-based organizations, and staffing at the federal level to support FAFSA completion and processing.

## NEXT STEPS

To maintain the momentum from the summit, the following actions are planned:

- **State Strategizing.** MHEC will virtually re-convene state workshop teams at 3-, 6-, and 9-month intervals to maintain and expand the newly created networks and implement each state's improvement plan.
- **Collaboration.** This summit has brought together numerous interested organizations who want to partner on FAFSA-related projects. MHEC staff will meet with these organizations to determine potential initiatives to further the goals of the FAFSA Summit.

The 2024 Midwest FAFSA Summit was a success, providing attendees with valuable insights, fostering collaboration, and laying the groundwork for significant improvements in FAFSA completion rates across the Midwest. The Compact looks forward to the continued progress and positive impact of the initiatives discussed during the summit.