



# How to Plan a Successful Financial Aid Night

**Make it Informative, Educational and Memorable**



Quinnipiac University  
Office of Financial Aid  
275 Mount Carmel Avenue  
Hamden, CT 06518

Dear Guidance Counselor,

The Connecticut Association of Professional Financial Aid Administrators (CAPFAA) is pleased to present to you our guide on “Planning a Financial Aid Night.” As you know, the financial aid process can seem confusing to families, especially those who are putting their first child through college. The financial aid process can differ from college to college, making the process even more confusing. FAFSA, EFC, SAR, COA, MPN, and FWS are just some of the jargon families will be familiarizing themselves with as they prepare to finance a college education!

Each year in November and December, hundreds of high schools in Connecticut host their annual “Financial Aid Night,” an event where financial aid professionals help college-bound families to understand the financial aid process. A successful Financial Aid Night will better educate parents and students and reduce their stress levels later in the year.

As practicing financial aid administrators and presenters, we are pleased to provide you with this guide in hopes of assisting you in putting on the best “Financial Aid Night” possible. Financial Aid Nights can easily be turned into informative, educational and memorable events for all if properly planned.

Happy planning and we’ll see you in November!

CAPFAA

## Pre-planning

Most financial aid nights are held between mid-November and mid-December, about a 5 week span with the Thanksgiving holiday in the middle. Most financial aid administrators who present at these events will likely be in demand well in advance of this event. If a particular date is important to you, you will want to contact your presenter one year in advance to assure their availability. Remember that finding a quality presenter with less than two months’ notice will be almost impossible.

### Picking a Date

#### ***DO's***

- Pick a date far in advance to allow for adequate advertising.
- Be sensitive to outside obligations such as parent/teacher conferences, athletic events, SAT test dates, etc.
- Check your school’s calendar of events to avoid conflicts.
- If you can coordinate this event with another related on-campus event, do so. Events such as Parents Weekend, PTA meetings or other college-bound student events often act to draw more attendees.
- Be present at YOUR event. Try to avoid scheduling this event on a night you will not be available. If something comes up, be sure to notify your speaker and assign the responsibilities to another counselor in the office.

#### ***Don'ts***

- **DON'T** pick a date on or next to a holiday (i.e. Veteran’s Day, Wednesday before Thanksgiving, etc.)
- **DON'T** ignore that it snows in November and December. Have a backup plan.
- **DON'T** try to find a presenter the month of your event. A quality speaker’s calendar is often filled a year in advance.
- **DON'T** overload the evening and keep the format simple. Panel presentations almost NEVER work to convey important financial aid information and should be avoided at all costs. There will be sufficient opportunities to present college information in this format later in the year to juniors and their parents.

### Picking a Time

7 pm works well on weeknights. Planning anytime earlier may prevent parents from being on time as work schedules and dinnertime may conflict. Most financial aid nights will last from one-and-a-half to two hours, so plan accordingly. Saturdays are a possibility, but you run the risk of your event conflicting with the busy weekend schedules of your parents, students and your presenter. Mondays through Thursdays always work best.

## Selecting a Place

The room you select should comfortably accommodate the number of expected attendees. If you traditionally have 50 people in attendance, you probably want to avoid the auditorium that seats 1,000! More often than not, a facility this large (that's this empty) lends to a more uncomfortable environment for both the attendees and presenter.

In considering the best place to hold your event, you want to consider the following:

- Will it be comfortable? If things like lighting, heating and electricity are problematic, select another venue.
- Is there adequate seating and will you need tables?
- Is the room compatible for an overhead presentation? Many presenters have some kind of visual aids such as overhead slides or PowerPoint. Make sure that the room is designed for this type of presentation.
- Will the speaker require an LCD or overhead projector?
- Do you have a screen big enough to accommodate the visual requirements? Nothing is worse than a 4' screen in the auditorium, especially if there are no accompanying handouts.
- Is the room equipped for sound? Your presenter may need a microphone. If you use wireless technology, make sure that you have an extra set of batteries!
- Is there adequate lighting?
- Is the speaking area clear of obstacles, obstructions and eyesores?

Remember that you are probably hosting your financial aid night after school hours. The AV department has gone home and the heating system may be on a timer to shut off after 5 pm. Make sure that you have all your ducks in order as you will likely not have the resources available to you that you had prior to 3 pm.

## Advertising

Poor advertising always leads to a sub-par event. Sending a note home with your juniors and seniors the week before the event is a formula for disaster.

Advertising should begin no later than September. Here are some suggestions on where to place ads:

- Your school's monthly newsletter
- Your school's Web site
- The "sandwich board" of events in your main lobby
- Local cable stations (many schools advertise their weekly lunch menus and school cancellations)
- Local radio or newspaper
- Your school's morning announcements
- Send home notices and flyers

All in all, make sure that you get the word out often and well in advance of your event so every interested family can plan to attend!

If you have a small school, you may want to consider partnering with another school in the district to put on a Financial Aid Night. Rather than have an event with five to ten attendees because you have a senior class of 35, you can both host one larger event and split the costs!

## Who and What Will You Have at Your Event?

- Will you ask the other guidance counselors in the office to attend? If so, please make sure to recognize them publicly.
- Will other administrators or faculty be in attendance? If so, introduce them as well. Recognizing folks who are a vital part of your school, and who would not normally be expected to be in attendance, goes a long way for both them and your attendees. It shows you CARE!
- Ask your presenter in advance if they will have any handouts that you can prepare or copy.
- Will you have coffee, beverages and pastries? Parents will appreciate having something to drink and munch on before, during or after the presentation. If this is not in your budget, check with your school's parent organization who may be able to assist.
- Do you have FAFSAs, Student Guides, and Profile Forms in stock for this event? Financial aid materials are abundant and many can be ordered online. For FAFSAs, Student Guides and other federal brochures, log onto: [www.ed.gov/offices/OSFAP/ifap/publications/index.html](http://www.ed.gov/offices/OSFAP/ifap/publications/index.html) For Profile Forms and other materials, log onto: [www.collegeboard.com/](http://www.collegeboard.com/)

## Who Should Present?

Ask any financial aid administrator how many times per week financial aid regulations change and they'll answer, "Too many times to count!" As guidance counselors, you probably have hundreds of things on your plate each day, and none of them likely involves staying on top of the federal registers and financial aid regulations as they unfold. This being said, it is important that you establish a relationship with a practicing financial aid administrator to present at your financial aid nights. Many high schools use the same presenter each year, especially if they do a good job, and most do. Find the presenter that works well for you and use them each year to assure continuity.

## Fees and Honorariums

Many presenters will charge a fee for their services and others will be happy to present without regard to a fee. Most financial aid administrators who charge a fee do so because they have prepared many hours for your event and are providing a service that is well above and beyond their normal call of duty. That beautiful PowerPoint presentation didn't write itself, nor did the handouts, brochures and other materials. Your speaker's expertise did not come without years of hard work, all acquired well before they began presenting at financial aid events. Most speakers have anywhere from five to fifteen presentations to do in a four-week period, placing a huge demand on both their personal and professional lives.

If your presenter does not ask for a fee, you may want offer them a small token of appreciation such as a small honorarium, a gift certificate, etc. This goes a long way in making your presenter feel appreciated and will establish a good relationship for future events. Either way, you'll want to work out these details well in advance of the presentation.

## The Week Before Your Presentation

- Call your presenter to confirm your speaking arrangements. Make sure the presenter has directions to your school and knows the best way to find you and the room in which he/she will be presenting.
- Exchange telephone numbers with the presenter. Cell phone, home, office and voicemail are all helpful in the event of a last minute emergency.
- Insure that the room you've reserved is still available. If you have booked your auditorium, make sure that there isn't another event scheduled at the same time. Also make sure that the carpenters and electricians aren't onstage that night building stage props for the school play that is going on over the weekend!
- Send out a final reminder to make sure that your students and their parents haven't forgotten about the event.

## Lights, Camera, Action!

Your event begins at 7 pm and you're at your school at 6:15 pm. It's the evening of your first financial aid night and you hope you've done everything you possibly can to assure a successful event. If you've done everything we've suggested, you have! So sit back, relax, put your best smile on and welcome the parents as they arrive.

In the meantime, if you are still worried and need something to keep your mind busy, here are a few last minute preparations to consider:

- Did you plug in the coffee pot?
- Do you have a cold beverage (such as water, juice, etc.) available for your speaker?
- Did you put your handouts and materials out on the table?
- Have you checked the PA and AV equipment to make sure it works?

Putting on a financial aid night shows both students and parents that you CARE because YOU DO! More importantly, a successful financial aid night will minimize the financial aid counseling that you would otherwise have to do. It also puts your parents and their children on the right track to assuring an informative college planning experience.

We hope this "How-To" guide has helped in kicking off a successful event at your school. For additional financial aid information, visit CAPFAA's website at:

**[www.capfaa.org](http://www.capfaa.org)**