2026 WFAA Conference Sessions

NASFAA Inside the Beltway Update, Virtual General Session

Presented by Nalia Medina, NASFAA Associate Director of Government Relations

This NASFAA Federal Update will provide an overview of the latest developments in Washington, including a high-level look at the current political climate in D.C., and will focus on federal financial aid policy and how it has impacted students and institutions in recent years. Topics include recent legislative and regulatory activity and predictions for how student aid funding will fare in upcoming budget negotiations. Movement within the Department of Education concerning negotiated rulemaking and updates from Federal Student Aid (FSA) will also be discussed. The session will also provide an overview of NASFAA-led projects, services, and advocacy efforts.

Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) Updates- In Person General Session

Presenter: Marla Skelley, WSAC

Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) will be providing an overview of the 2026 Legislative Session, preview of the 2027 Legislative session, a review of the 2025-2026 award year and provide program updates.

Western Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (WASFAA) Updates- In Person General Session

Presenter: Shellee Kilbride, WASFAA President

Join us as WASFAA President, Shellee Kilbride, updates the Financial Aid Community with WASFAA and how to become involved with the organization.

Rise of the Pack: Around the Fire and Into the Future- In Person General

Presenters: Becky Thompson, Seattle Colleges; Molly Walsh, DigiPen; and Melanie Ruiz, Shoreline College

When challenges arise, the pack grows stronger together. Join WFAA's past, present, and future leadership for a dynamic listening session where stories spark ideas and shared experiences shape what's next. Through conversation and audience engagement, we'll explore what resilience and renewal look like in today's financial aid landscape and how we can collectively lead our profession into the future. Your insights will directly inform the development of WFAA's next strategic plan. Whether you're new to financial aid or a long-time leader, pull up a seat around the fire and help chart the future of our community, our association, and the students we serve.

Rise of the Pack: Every Step Counts with SAP

Presenter: Jennifer Fetters, Bellevue College

Satisfactory Academic Progress is much like hiking a mountain trail—success is achieved one step at a time. Along the journey, students encounter milestones, challenges, and opportunities to regroup, all while moving toward the ultimate goal of graduation. This presentation uses the Rise of the Pack theme to illustrate how understanding SAP requirements, navigating setbacks, and utilizing available resources can help students stay on course and reach the summit of academic success.

WSAC's Behavioral Health Conditional Scholarship / Pipeline to Professional Mental Health Careers

Presenter: Isabel Hernandez, WSAC

The Behavioral Health Conditional Scholarship (BHCS) program was passed by the legislature in 2024 under HB 1946 and is the newest addition to the WHC. The BHCS program establishes a permanent publicly funded mechanism that guarantees a pipeline of highly skilled professionals in behavioral health. The BHCS provides an award up to $51,000 that recipients can apply to tuition, books, and/or childcare in exchange for a commitment to work as a behavioral health professional at an approved mental health clinic in Washington State. By reducing financial barriers to education while connecting scholarship recipients to behavioral health licensure, BHCS helps create a sustainable pipeline of highly skilled professionals prepared to meet Washington's evolving behavioral health needs.

Effective Team Building: Using NASFAA Tools and Resources to Build Your Pack

Presenter: Molly Walsh, DigiPen Institute of Technology

As financial aid offices navigate constant change, staffing challenges, and evolving student needs, building a resilient and engaged team has never been more critical. Using NASFAA tools and resources available to members, this session explores how financial aid leaders can strengthen their "pack" through intentional hiring, effective onboarding and training, and strategic team development.

Designed for newer directors and emerging leaders, the session will focus on renewing and sustaining the workforce by leveraging resources to advocate for staffing needs, communicate the value of financial aid professionals to HR and campus leadership, and address compensation and retention challenges. Participants will gain insights into the realities facing aid offices today and discover the key competencies needed to prepare teams for the future of financial aid.

The session will conclude with practical strategies for fostering team resilience, managing diverse personalities and work styles, and creating a culture of collaboration, growth, and shared purpose. Together, we'll explore how strong leadership and a united team can help financial aid offices not only weather change but thrive in the future.

Empower Your Students' Futures: Navigating Parent PLUS and Private Education Loans with Confidence

Presenter: Jeff Lackey, Sallie

Discover Federal PLUS Loan and private student loan program overviews and practical counseling strategies designed to help families make informed choices, boost enrollment, and

ensure every student's path to college stays on track. Join us to learn how you can guide students and parents through their loan options with clarity and encouragement!

Empowering the Pack: Practical Strategies for Financial Aid Access and Student Success

Presenter: Christina Winstead, WSAC

In this workshop presented by the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC), we will discuss Washington state financial aid programs, statewide efforts, and how to support students applying for state financial aid. We will give you a sneak peek into the new Washington Application for State Financial Aid (WASFA). In addition, we will explore systemic barriers to financial aid equity and present strategies for facilitating student access. Participants will leave with free customizable resources they can use to develop their own financial aid access strategies.

Ghostbusters: No One Busts Alone

Presenters: Melanie Ruiz and Michael Taing, Shoreline College

Financial aid fraud has increased in both volume and sophistication. Institutions must take a proactive and collaborative approach to protecting federal, state and institutional resources while ensuring support reaches real students. In this session, we will provide an overview of how we have implemented processes to help minimize ghost students at Shoreline College. Attendees will be able to identify key indicators and red flags that may signal fraudulent activity, develop strategies for cross-departmental collaboration as well as implement tools and processes to help fraud prevention, detection and response efforts on their campus.

Leading the Pack: Driving Change and Student Success Through Innovation

Presenters: Victoria Hill, South Puget Sound Community College and Ray Nault, College Aid Services

Financial aid professionals play a vital role in driving student success. This session explores how to lead meaningful change by leveraging technology, fostering cross-campus collaboration, and embracing innovation to improve efficiency and the student experience. Participants will leave with practical strategies to transform their office into a catalyst for student success.

Making Financial Aid Student Friendly: Building a New Funding Navigation Program From Scratch

Presenters: Tsetsen Annurad, Sean Coveny, Ramon Jimenez, and Moriah Shistle; Seattle Colleges

Financial aid is often labeled as unfriendly to students. Completing aid applications and getting awarded, even in a perfect world, comes with many challenges. Financial aid departments often struggle to communicate guidelines and endless contradicting details, leaving students confused and intimidated about the entire process. However, Funding Navigation, a program that seeks to empower students with knowledge and guidance of funding sources, can play a role in making financial aid interactions positive and fruitful. Join the Seattle College's Funding Navigation team and learn about how we built an entire student facing Funding Navigation program across all three Seattle Colleges from scratch. In this workshop, we will discuss how over the past 2 years our team designed and implemented a program that aims at increasing FAFSA/WASFA

completion through strategic partnerships across a wide range of campus departments, informative and engaging workshops, and strong student-centered support that meets students where they are.

All About the WASFA Redesign

Presenters: Leslie Gonzalez and Victor Fernandez, WSAC

Overview of the WASFA redesign beginning with the 2027-2028 application year, with guidance on navigating the new application platform, WASFA corrections process, and other related updates.

OB3 Changes and SOR Calculations

Presenter: Karen Martin-Brown, Portico

The One Big Beautiful Bill (OB3) has created significant changes and questions for financial aid professionals and partner schools. This session will share practical knowledge, lessons learned, and strategies for proactively navigating these changes. Building on well-received discussions, we'll highlight real-world examples and focus on the OB3 topics most relevant to WFAA members.

On the Bridge: Steering Social Media with Intention

Presenter: Rosemary Martinez-Kepford, Earnest

This session will explore how to plan, create, and manage content that engages your audience while staying aligned with institutional goals and brand standards. Participants will learn how to navigate platform selection, craft clear and consistent messaging, and respond strategically to engagement and challenges. Whether you're new to social media or looking to refine your approach, this session will help you chart a steady course toward more intentional, impactful communication.

The Incomplete Character Sheet: LinkedIn, Personal Brand, and Your Next Opportunity

Presenter: Chantelle Isaacs, Ascent Funding

Your LinkedIn profile is your character sheet — and for most professionals, it's incomplete. In this session, we'll explore how the same intentional thinking that goes into building a compelling character for Dungeons and Dragons can transform how you approach your personal brand and professional presence online. Whether you're just starting out or you've had a profile for years that no longer reflects who you've become, this talk will help you think differently about the most powerful career tool you're probably underusing. You'll walk away with a practical framework for identifying your strengths, clarifying your professional brand, and translating both into a LinkedIn profile that actually opens doors. Because the sheet was always there — it just needs to reflect the adventurer you already are.

Building Student Resilience Through Psychologically Attuned Financial Aid Communication

Presenter: Chantel Fields, Bellingham Technical College

Every financial aid office sends communications that shape students' perceptions of their institution, especially during moments of uncertainty and academic challenge. The language we use can either create additional barriers or help students navigate a path forward.

This session explores how financial aid professionals can apply principles of psychologically attuned communication to create messages that foster belonging, encourage action, and support student resilience. Participants will examine the research behind psychologically attuned communication, compare traditional and redesigned notifications, and engage in a hands-on activity to rewrite common financial aid communications using evidence-based strategies.

True Colors – Building Emotionally Intelligent Teams

Presenter: Dawn Cypriano-McAferty, WSAC

The True Colors personality model categorizes workplace behavior into four color-coded temperaments. In this workshop we will complete a True Colors self-assessment to identify our dominant traits, understand how we can use this framework to improve communication, discuss strategies for working with different personalities, and match individual strengths to our workplace roles.

WA Grant for Apprenticeship at CTC's

Presenters: Remy Plate, WSAC; Stephanie Casino, SBCTC; and Elizabeth Moon-Patrick, Columbia Basin College

Learn more about the awarding process for WA Grant for Apprenticeship at Community and Technical Colleges. We will walk through basic information about WA Grant and the awarding process in WSAC and SBCTC's platforms. Additionally, there will be an opportunity for financial aid administrators to ask questions about administering the program at their college.

Leading with Excellence: Advancing Equity in Institutional SAP Policies and Procedures, WASFAA IDEEA

Presenter: Lorena Saucedo and Monserrat Vargas, WASFAA IDEEA

Research consistently shows that students who are first-generation, from low-income backgrounds, balancing employment or family responsibilities, and navigating other systemic barriers are more likely the ones who fail to meet SAP standards. While federal regulations establish the minimum requirements institutions must follow, they also provide opportunities for financial aid professionals to lead with intention, equity, and excellence. This session explores SAP, inviting attendees to look at their institutional policies and procedures through the lens of student-centeredness. Participants will explore how institutional policies, communication strategies, and appeal processes can either reinforce existing inequities or serve as meaningful tools to support students facing the greatest barriers to degree completion. Drawing on peer-reviewed education research, this presentation will highlight strategies to advance equity in SAP policies at no additional cost. Attendees will also examine where their institutional policies can be modified to better serve students while maintaining regulatory compliance. Participants will leave this session with practical recommendations to evaluate their own institution's SAP policies.

SAVE Your Pack: Demystifying Non-Citizen Eligibility for Financial Aid

Presenter: Erin West, Spokane Community College

Ready to howl at the complexities of non-citizen eligibility? This session will provide you with the guidance you need to determine whether a student qualifies as an eligible non-citizen, identify acceptable documentation of immigration status, and navigate the submission of documents through the USCIS SAVE system. We'll also explore which non-citizen statuses do—and do not—require verification through SAVE. By the end of this training, you'll be able to confidently support your non-citizen students and keep your financial aid pack on the right track!

Navigating Federal Loan Program changes for Graduate/Professional Programs

Presenter: Lynette Splinter, Seattle University School of Law and Jennifer Young, Seattle University

This presentation will review key policy changes, including new borrowing limits, Grad PLUS and legacy provisions and the operational implications for financial aid offices. A review of how our offices implemented the new regulations and getting the work out to our students. This is also an opportunity to talk with fellow financial aid administrators on how their offices are implementing the new regulations and advice as we move forward in this new landscape.