



College Planning

Smart Ways To Get The Most Financial Aid For College

(NAPSA)—Figuring out how to pay for your child's education does not have to be stressful or confusing. Regardless of your family's financial circumstances, the following tips can help simplify the process.

"The key to paying for college is to take charge of the process: Investigate aid options, contact your prospective colleges' financial aid offices for more information, and keep track of deadlines," says Linda Bell, director of financial aid at Lehigh University, in Bethlehem, Pa. "Keep a file for each college during the search and retain the folder for the college you decide to attend until you graduate and repay your loans."

She offers this advice:

- **Start saving now.** Whether your child is 6 months or 16 years old, your savings can reduce the amount you may have to borrow later, and some savings plans, like 529 plans and Coverdell Education Savings Accounts, offer tax benefits. Contact your financial adviser for more information.

- **Expand your college search.** Private colleges and universities value geographic diversity and often have more resources to devote to financial aid. While your local state college or university probably has lower tuition and fees, out-of-state private institutions may offer more generous financial aid packages.

- **Complete the FAFSA.** Regardless of your income, complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) as soon as possible after January 1. The FAFSA determines your eligibility for federal and state grants, work-



Following a few expert tips can help you get the most out of financial aid.

study and federal college loans. Some private colleges also require the CSS/PROFILE. Check with the financial aid office.

- **Apply for scholarships.** You can find information about federal grants and scholarships in the Student Aid Guide on the Department of Education's website (<http://studentaid.ed.gov>), and at your prospective college's financial aid office. Check websites like www.fastweb.com for private scholarships, and don't forget about scholarships that your employer or community organizations may sponsor.

- **Be proactive.** Keep track of the deadlines and required application materials. If you have any questions, contact the school's financial aid office. E-mail is the best form of communication because it's easy to keep track of. Financial aid offices and the Department of Education should be able to help you for free.

For more information, visit www.lehigh.edu/assistance.