



What's Your Plan?
Family and Student
Companion Guide



What's Your Plan? Family and Student Companion Guide

This resource empowers families and students toward successful postsecondary educational outcomes that lead to fulfilling careers. This guide is helpful for ensuring a cohesive and supportive learning experience to get students to the next phase of their lives.

What is the *What's Your Plan?* Campaign

The “What’s Your Plan?” Campaign is led by [PhillyGoes2College](#) in partnership with the [CASE](#) On-Time High School Graduation Action Team. The campaign aims to ensure that every graduating senior leaves high school with a clear and actionable post-secondary plan, whether that path leads to college, trade school, military service, full-time employment, or entrepreneurship. This campaign reinforces the belief that every student deserves support in identifying, naming, and taking steps toward their future goals.

How should I use this guide?

This guide includes resources for families and students on the four major pathways SDP high school graduates pursue, commonly called **the 4 E’s**: **enrollment** (pursuing a 2/4 year degree or a trade/apprenticeship), **employment** (entering the workforce), **enlistment** (pursuing a military career), and **entrepreneurship** (pursuing a path of self-employment).

Each pathway has its own section listing out the important steps to prepare your student for their post-secondary plan, as well as links to organizations and resources to help answer your questions.

To head to a specific pathway or subheading of a pathway, you can click on the *Table of Contents* links below.



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Part One-Navigating Postsecondary Paths

Section A: Enrollment-2 or 4 Year College Pathways

UNDERSTANDING THE APPLICATION PROCESS

START HERE: Check out this link to get an understanding of the college application process, when the deadlines are, and how to apply:

<https://phillygoes2college.org/applying-for-college/applications/>

College Search Process

Before your student starts applying, you need to know what school will be the best fit. Check out the websites below for a comprehensive list of college options for 2 year and 4 year programs.

- Click here to use filters to find schools that are the right fit for you or fill out a brief quiz to get “matched” with colleges that fit your interests and skills.
<https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/college-search>
- **PUBLIC COLLEGES IN PA:** Learn more about the public state schools in PA here: <https://www.passhe.edu/universities/index.html>
- Click here to browse through hundreds of 2 year and 4 year options.
<https://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/>
- Click here to browse schools by rankings and view reviews from students.
<https://www.niche.com/>
- Click here to build a profile and search for schools based on test scores, acceptance rates, and more. <https://www.appily.com/colleges>

Frequently Used College Application Portals

Most colleges and universities will require an application through their own website or one of the options below. The Common App and The Common Black College App allow students to apply to multiple schools with one application.

- **COMMON APP:** Most schools accept the Common App. To make an account or browse the schools available, click here: <https://www.commonapp.org/>
- **HBCU APP:** If your student is interested in attending an HBCU, use this application to send your students information to multiple HBCUs at once and select their top choice: <https://commonblackcollegeapp.com/>
- **QUESTBRIDGE:** If your student excels in and out of the classroom, they may be a great candidate for QuestBridge, an organization that connects high-achieving, low-income students with top colleges. <https://www.questbridge.org/>

Resources for 12th graders families to help your student be ready for college:

- Want to make sure you are doing all that you can to help your student achieve their goals? Review this checklist for 12th grade parents/families to get an idea of what should be accomplished throughout your child's senior year.
<https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/for-parents/action-plan-12th-grade>

FUNDING POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

START HERE: If you're new to the college process, start here to learn about what financial aid is and how it works.

<https://phillygoes2college.org/paying-for-college/financial-aid/>

FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid)

- The FAFSA form (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) is the way your student applies for financial aid (aka - grants, scholarships, and loans). However, completing the FAFSA does NOT require them to take out loans. But it is required in order to receive the majority of FREE financial aid opportunities like grants and scholarships.
 - Learn more about what the FAFSA is here:
<https://studentaid.gov/help/afsa>
 - Take an in depth look at all things financial aid, FAFSA, and paying for college:
<https://understandingfafsa.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/FAFSA-FinAid-Guide-Class-2025-Eng.pdf>
 - Once you begin filling out the FAFSA, or if you have questions before you start, check out the videos here which guide you through the process step by step: <https://www.youtube.com/@FederalStudentAid/videos>
 - Ready to fill out the FAFSA but not sure what information you will need? Check out the checklist here:
https://heights.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/FamilyChecklist_2024-25.pdf

Pell Grant:

- One of the largest sources of federal need-based financial aid is the Pell Grant. By filling out the FAFSA, your student is automatically evaluated for eligibility. Find out more here: <https://studentaid.gov/understand-aid/types/grants/pell>

PA State Grant:

- In addition to the FAFSA, if your student is a PA resident who is considering attending college in PA, fill out the PHEAA PA State Grant Application to apply for additional funding. <https://www.pheaa.org/grants/state-grant-program>

CSS Profile:

- Some schools ask students to fill out the FAFSA and the CSS profile. If this happens to you, click the link below to learn more about what to do:

- CSS Profile allows families to provide a more complete picture of their financial circumstances than the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) may provide alone. Hundreds of institutions use CSS Profile as a common application for nonfederal financial aid, reducing the number of times a student may need to fill out institution financial aid applications at multiple institutions. <https://cssprofile.collegeboard.org/getting-started>

Scholarships

- Check out the links below where your student can search for scholarships.
 - Large database of national scholarships
 - <https://www.niche.com/colleges/scholarships/>
 - <https://www.scholarships.com/>
 - Philadelphia Foundation Scholarships
 - <https://www.philafound.org/students/apply-for-a-scholarship/>
 - List of other scholarship options
 - <https://phillygoes2college.org/paying-for-college/scholarships/>
 - You can also check the college your student is planning to attend to see if they offer additional scholarships.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT FOR COLLEGE BOUND STUDENTS

- As your student prepares for college, check out these “40 Money Management Tips Every College Student Should Know”:
 - <https://www.nefe.org/initiatives/40-Money-Management-Tips.pdf>
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Section B: Enrollment-Trade Schools & Apprenticeships

UNDERSTANDING THE APPLICATION PROCESS

Accreditation

- Finding the right trade school that fits your career goals starts with researching the school’s credibility. An **accredited trade program** will be recognized by a Department of Education-backed agency.
 - Here are some of the top accredited trade programs in Pennsylvania:
 - [Best Trade Schools in Pennsylvania \(2025\)](#)
 - Below are comprehensive lists of accredited programs from nationally-recognized accreditation agencies which you can filter by state:
 - ACCSC: [Search Accredited Schools - ACCSC](#)
 - CHEA: [CHEA - Find Accredited Higher Education Institutions & Programs](#)

- COE: [Member Directory | Council](#)

Admissions Requirements

- All trade programs will have different requirements to be admitted (i.e., age, standard testing, an essay in your application, etc.) so review these carefully when determining which trade school works best for you:
- It varies by state, but *most* trade programs typically require you to be at least 17 years of age, have a GED or a high school diploma, and often require you to have a driver's license.
- If you do not have a driver's license but are interested in a trade program that requires it, below are some top driving schools in Philadelphia:
 - [8 Most Recommended Driving Schools in Philadelphia \(PA\)](#)

FUNDING POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

- Most trade programs tend to be short, typically lasting months as opposed to years. Because of this, these schools traditionally cost less than universities to attend. That said, financial aid options are still available to trade program tuition as they are for a university.
 - Available options for financial management include:
 - **FAFSA:** As mentioned in a previous section, FAFSA is a key step in free financial opportunities such as federal or private grants, which you are automatically qualified for when you submit an application for it.
 - **SCHOLARSHIPS:** Many scholarships applicable to universities can also be applicable to vocational programs; it's important to check these stipulations when submitting an application for one.
 - Here are some vocational-specific scholarships: [Vocational Careers Scholarships - Scholarships.com](#)
 - Some employers offer tuition reimbursement while in trade school. Should you seek employment while enrolled in a trade school, look into your employee benefits to see if you qualify.
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Section C-Employment-Career Exploration, Readiness, and Pathways

STARTING THE PROCESS

- Knowing or having an idea about what you want to do for your career is the first step into building your future. Below are tools to research different careers:

- PENNSYLVANIA CAREER ZONE: A great resource for career exploration, PA CareerZone gives access to the latest information on occupations, including skills needed, salaries, and qualifications.
 - <https://www.pacareerzone.org/>
- CAREER CONNECTED LEARNING: Having a visual of what steps you need to take to find a position in a given career can be a beneficial tool. Career Connected Learning, or C2L, provides templates you can use to map out your career plan.
 - [Career Pathway Planning](#)

WHERE TO LOOK FOR JOBS

- There are plenty of job recruitment sites, but finding credible and reliable sites is the first step.
 - **WIDE-NET SEARCHES:**
 - Indeed: Ideal for wide-net job searches, entry-level positions.
 - <https://www.indeed.com/>
 - LinkedIn: Ideal for networking, and has an option to post resume onto your profile for employers to see.
 - <https://www.linkedin.com/feed/>
 - **PHILADELPHIA-SPECIFIC:**
 - PA CareerLink: For jobs within Pennsylvania, CareerLink provides job listings, resume-building tools, as well as financial assistance for target groups such as low-income families.
 - [PA CareerLink® - Welcome to PA CareerLink](#)
 - City of Philadelphia: Provides listings of jobs in the City of Philadelphia to residents, including civil and non-civil.
 - <https://www.phila.gov/jobs/#/>
 - Graduate Philadelphia: While maintaining a strong view on college completion, Graduate Philadelphia also provides services that focus on professional development and career connection.
 - <https://graduatephiladelphia.org/>

CRAFTING A RESUME

- Most, if not all, jobs will require applicants to fill out a resume. Below are resources to help you create your own resume.
 - Philadelphia Works Resume Builder: This resource is an easy alternative to creating a resume from scratch or with a template
 - [Career Coach - Résumé Builder](#)

- PA CareerLink “Dos & Don’ts”: Along with other necessary skills such as interviewing, PA CareerLink lays out what should and should not be included in a professional resume.
 - [The Do’s and Don’ts of Resumes](#)
- Templates & Samples: Resumes will vary depending on a number of factors such as experience and education level.
 - Templates: [Free resume templates to download and print | Microsoft Create](#)
 - Samples: [Resume Samples and Examples | Indeed.com](#)

SERVICE AND AMERICORPS OPPORTUNITIES

- While deciding on what your next steps are after graduation, some students choose to join AmeriCorps programs. These programs offer living stipends and an education award upon completion, which can be used towards future education opportunities. Many of these roles are focused on serving high need communities and there are jobs in fields ranging from education to government to disaster relief efforts. Below are some Philadelphia AmeriCorps programs, as well as a database to search for programs across Pennsylvania.
 - [City Year Philadelphia](#)
 - [Pennserve AmeriCorps Program Search Tool](#)
 - [VISTA Corps](#)
 - [UTP Philly](#)

VOLUNTEERING

- There are many volunteering options throughout Philadelphia with the majority tackling big issues like food insecurity, homelessness and lack of educational opportunity.
- **Where to look**-You can find volunteer opportunities by exploring various websites, local organizations, and community events that align with your interest and skills. Below are a few options available
 - **Caring For Friends** Caring for Friends is the most comprehensive free senior meals delivery program and one of the largest food banks in Greater Philadelphia. [Caring for Friends | Philadelphia Volunteer Opportunities](#)
 - **Free Library of Philadelphia:** The Free Library offers volunteering opportunities available for all ages to participate.
 - Volunteer link: [free-library-cevs-volunteer-application.pdf](#)
 - Browse this link for different volunteering opportunities [Volunteer Services - Free Library](#)

- **Philly House:** Philly House offers volunteering opportunities in serving meals, warehouse support and prayer teams
 - Browse this link for opportunities: [Individual Volunteers — Philly House](#)

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

- There are several online websites to develop your skills professionally that are free of charge with subscriptions available. This is a good way to earn certificates to strengthen your resume.
- **Where to look:** You can find professional development opportunities online but also in your community at the local library and community centers like the YMCA and Boys and Girls Club.
 - **Free Library:** The Free Library offers an array of professional development opportunities. Be sure to check out their events calendar to find when events like career exploration workshops available all over Philadelphia. Use this link to find an event near you: [Calendar of Events - Events - Free Library](#)
 - **Coursera:** Online learning platform featuring many different subjects across an array of learning formats, such as courses, Specializations, Professional Certificates, degrees, and tutorials. [Coursera | Degrees, Certificates, & Free Online Courses](#)
 - **Khan Academy:** Online education tool to learn an array of topics for Pre-k through college topics. Completely free website [Khan Academy | Free Online Courses, Lessons & Practice](#)
 - **LinkedIn Learning:** Online learning platform that offers a wide range of video-based courses across various fields including business, technology, and creative skills. Offers many certificates in all areas. Free with library card. Subscription based otherwise.

CITY JOBS

Starting the process: Knowing the difference between civil service and non civil service jobs. Civil service positions require a competitive exam. You must live in Philadelphia for one year before your appointment date. Non-civil service positions do not require an exam. You must move to Philadelphia within six months after your appointment date.

Where to look: Use this job dashboard to find and filter jobs by position, experience and pay.

- [Jobs | City of Philadelphia](#)

- Visit the City of Philadelphia's Job board and create an account. This will allow you to apply for jobs and internships online, You can upload your resume and personal information which will be saved for future applications.

Prepare for the exam: If applying for a civil service job, familiarize yourself with the exam format and content. The Office of Human Resources (OHR) will review your application and notify you if you are approved to take the exam. Passing the exam places you on an eligible list for hire, which lasts for two years. [Civil service FAQs](#)

Stay in the loop: Get notified when civil service positions open up [Job class specifications](#) | [Office of Human Resources](#) | [City of Philadelphia](#)

CCME: City College for Municipal Employment is a City of Philadelphia program that opens doors to Philadelphians 18 and older with a high school diploma to FREE career training and education, preparing Philadelphians to work and serve in essential areas of City government with good paying jobs, health care, retirement and other benefits.

- <https://www.phila.gov/programs/city-college-for-municipal-employment-ccme/>
- View interest forms, program options and eligibility here [City College for Municipal Employment Interest Form](#) | [Community College of Philadelphia](#)

APPRENTICESHIPS

Understanding Apprenticeships: Apprentices different from full-time employment, in that apprenticeships focus on improving technical skills. There are two types of apprenticeships:

- **REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM (RAPS):** On-the-job, paid training programs which earn you credentials nationally recognized in that field. Some programs offer specialized certifications or college credit.
- **PRE-REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMS:** Prepares you for an RAP with foundational skills such as literacy and work readiness, as well as providing career exposure and some technical training if available.

Where to Look: It's possible to find apprenticeships on traditional job sites such as Indeed, but can be difficult to narrow down. The sites below provide listings specific to trade:

- **APPRENTICESHIPPHL**
 - [Apprenticeship Directory - ApprenticeshipPHL](#)
- **REBUILD PAID TRAINING PROGRAMS**
 - [Rebuild | Programs and initiatives](#) | [City of Philadelphia](#)
- **COMMUNITY COLLEGE OF PHILADELPHIA**
 - [Apprenticeship Programs](#) | [Community College of Philadelphia](#)

- **APPRENTICESHIP GUIDEBOOK**

- [City of Philadelphia Apprenticeship Guidebook](#)

LABOR UNIONS

Alternatively, labor unions also provide a track different from trade. Where an apprenticeship in a trade gives you skills specific to one industry, labor unions represent a wider range of industries and focuses on the needs of workers across multiple professions.

- Laborers' District Council of Metropolitan Philadelphia provides apprenticeship programs and trainings to registered members
 - <https://www ldc-phila-vic.org/Member-Training/apprenticeship.cfm>
 - There are over 700 active labor unions across the Greater Philadelphia area; below is a non-comprehensive list of a few of the well-known, credible unions in the city of Philadelphia:
 - [Philadelphia Labor Unions](#)

Please be aware that all unions have different requirements and it's important that you check the specific qualifications required of each labor union.

Section D-Enlistment-Military Pathways

CAREERS IN THE MILITARY

The military is broken down into seven main branches:

- Army
- Navy
- Air Force
- Marines
- Coast Guard
- Space Force
- National Guard
 - If you are interested in serving but also want to pursue college, you can join the National Guard, which allows you to train part-time while receiving military benefits.

[Start here](#) to get an understanding and provide insight into each military branch, and military, non-military, and civilian jobs. [In this resource](#), you'll find information on setting goals, college cost, job qualifications and skills or training required for specific job

positions and other planning resources. You can also research the branches via this link: [Learn about the U.S. military branches | USAGov](#)

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS.

- Every Branch has their own requirements to be eligible to join. You can view the general requirements and find info on specific branches here: [Requirements to join the U.S. military | USAGov](#)

MILITARY ACADEMIES

- After looking through the resources above, you might decide that you want to pursue a college degree and also get military training. Aside from joining the National Guard, you could attend a Military Academy, which offers you a chance to receive a college education and a military job afterwards. See below for links to specific Military College application information:
 - The West Point Academy (Army)
 - The United States Naval Academy (Navy)
 - The United States Air Force Academy (Air Force)
 - The United States Coast Guard Academy (Coast Guard)

TALK WITH A RECRUITER

- The recruiter will explain the process, job options and answer questions. They will help you begin paperwork and schedule tests. There is no commitment just by talking to them.
 - You can find a recruiter at local recruitment offices, school career fairs and official military websites
 - Questions to ask a recruiter [41 Questions To Ask A Military Recruiter \(Updated for 2022\)](#)

ASVAB TEST

- To join the military, you will need to complete the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB). This test covers reading, math, and problem solving, and, based on your score, will show you what jobs are available to you should you join the military.
 - For resources around the ASVAB [start here](#) and at [ASVAB Test & Preparation | U.S. Army](#)

ATTEND MILIARY ENTRANCE PROCESSING STATION (MEPS)

After completing the steps above, you will attend MEPS, which is like a big check-up and interview day. You'll go through the following procedures throughout the day:

- Medical Exam
- Background Check and Interview
- Job Matching- based on ASVAB + availability
- Enlistment- take the Oath of Enlistment if you decide to commit.
 - If you pass everything and accept a job, you'll get a ship date to basic training.
- Learn more about what to expect at MEPS here: [Military Entrance Processing Stations \(MEPS\) | U.S. Army](#)

PREPARING BEFORE SHIPPING OUT

Below are some steps/resources to consider to prepare yourself for your 6-13 weeks of Basic Training:

- Get Fit [Tips for Meeting Military Fitness Standards | Military OneSource](#)
- Learn Military Rank & Structure [Military Insignia: Stripes and Bars by Rank | Military OneSource](#)
- Study Basic Customs & Courtesies
- Handle Personal Affairs- bank account, ID, health records, power of attorney (if needed)

ATTEND BASIC TRAINING

- Each branch has their own training varying in length. Here you'll learn discipline, teamwork, physical training and basic military skills.

ADVANCED TRAINING/JOB SCHOOL

- After boot camp, you go to a technical school to learn your specific job. This could last weeks or months, depending on your specialty.

JOIN YOUR FIRST UNITS

- Once training is complete, you're officially in the fleet/force and begin serving your assigned unit.

MILITARY TERMS GLOSSARY

- [Military Acronyms & Abbreviations | Military OneSource](#)
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Section E-Entrepreneurship-Self Employment Pathways

LEGAL FOUNDATIONS

- In most states, minors (under 18) cannot legally form an LLC on their own because contracts they sign aren't enforceable. Other options include:
 - Review <https://legalclarity.org/can-you-legally-start-an-llc-under-18/>
 - Form the LLC with a parent/guardian as organizer or co-owner.
 - Run a sole proprietorship until you turn 18.
 - A sole proprietorship means only you will be responsible for owing and operating your business. This does not require formal registration outside of necessary permits/licenses for your intended service.
 - You as owner will be responsible for all services and all debts/liabilities.
 - Beneficial for conducting freelance services
 - Check your state's laws for exceptions.

BUSINESS FOUNDATIONS

- Start with a plan that outlines your company
 - [Write a Business Plan](#) : A strong business plan includes a brief overview of your services/product description, your goals, market, finances, and company description.
- Identify your industry using [NAICS](#) code. This is important when looking into things like business registration, taxes, funding, and government contracts.

FUNDING

- **Grants**: Look for youth, minority-owned, or women-owned business grants through the **Small Business Administration (SBA)** or nonprofits.
- **Loans**: SBA microloans, community banks, or credit unions (often require a guarantor if under 18).
- **Crowdfunding**: Platforms like Kickstarter, GoFundMe, or Indiegogo allow raising money without loans.
- Review [Latest grants, programs, and resources for small businesses | Department of Commerce | City of Philadelphia](#)

OUTSIDE SUPPORT AND ORGANIZATIONS

- **OWBO** (Office of Women's Business Ownership) – SBA program supporting women entrepreneurs.

- **ONAA** (Office of Native American Affairs) – SBA resource for Native American entrepreneurs.
- **Business Development Program** – SBA program for socially and economically disadvantaged business owners.
- **T.H.R.I.V.E. Emerging Leaders** – SBA training for small business leaders aiming to scale.

POST-SECONDARY PATHS

- Consider post-secondary education for additional resources
 - **Undergraduate (Majoring in Business)** – Provides general skills in management, finance, and marketing.
 - **M.S. in Entrepreneurship & Innovation** ([Drexel University, Online option](#)) – Advanced degree focused on startup creation, innovation management, and growth strategies.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [20 Business Resources For Young Entrepreneurs | TRUiC](#)
- [Free Small Business Mentorship and Resources | SCORE](#)

Part Two-Resources for Supporting Student Well-Being and Success

Below are resources for students and families to promote a students' physical, mental, and emotional health.

PHYSICAL WELL-BEING RESOURCES

- [SDP Office of Student Health Services](#) promotes student health, preventing disease, and fostering optimal well-being for focused learning and achieving full potential.
- [Dental Clinics](#) available to all K-12th-grade district students.
- [Wellness Centers](#) onsite at various high schools available to district students enrolled at those schools. Services are available with parent or guardian consent, regardless of insurance status. Available services include: Sports and school physicals, immunizations and care for minor illnesses or chronic conditions, asthma, diabetes, and chronic condition support, behavioral health screenings

and counseling, sexual health counseling and care, nutrition and healthy weight guidance, help enrolling in health insurance and public benefits. Locations below

- [Bartram High School](#)
- [Building 21 High School](#)
- [Philadelphia High School for Girls](#)
- [Vaux High School](#)
- [West Philadelphia High School](#)
- [Promoting Adolescent Student Health \(PASH\)](#)
 - Additional information on mandated screenings, immunizations, and insurance available through OSHS.

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS

- [Behavioral Health Emergency Procedures](#)
- [SDP Office of Prevention and Intervention](#) focuses on mental, behavioral and social-emotional health needs.
- [Healthy Minds Philly - Youth Resources](#) - this extensive list of resources are designed to meet the needs of students experiencing mental health challenges or crises.

PREGNANT/PARENTING STUDENT SUPPORTS

- [City of Philadelphia DBHIDS](#) - Children & Youth Services

Part Three-Parent/Guardian Specific Resources

PARENT AND FAMILY UNIVERSITY

- [The Parent and Family University](#) is an initiative led by the School District of Philadelphia offering free resources, courses, and support to parents and families in the below areas:
 - Student Attendance and Joy
 - Health and Wellness
 - Civic Engagement
 - Financial Literacy
- Courses are held in person [at 8 schools across the district](#) as well as virtually.
 - Some examples of courses are “Building Children’s Literacy at Home,” “Exploring Math Together”, “Adult Financial Empowerment Series: Real

Estate & Building Equity,” “Raising Resilient Children in the Digital Age,” and more!

- Meals and childcare are available at their events, as well as translation and interpretation services upon request.
 - This initiative has also partnered with Graduate Philly and Good as Gold to offer two multi-session programs for adults wanting to pursue homeownership or gain professional development skills such as job search skills, AI essentials, resume writing, and more. You can find more information on each program [here](#).
 - You can find a full calendar of PFU events [here](#).
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Looking for More Resources?

Get more tips and tools from the What's Your Plan? Campaign

👉 Follow our partners on social: PG2C: [@phillygoes2college_](#) | PEF [@philaedfund](#)

