

FACT SHEET:
Education Datapalooza to Promote Innovation in Improving College Access, Affordability, and Completion

In August, President Obama outlined an [ambitious new agenda](#) to combat rising college costs and make college affordable for American families. As a part of this plan, the President called on the U.S. Department of Education to enlist entrepreneurs and technology leaders to catalyze new private-sector tools, services, and apps to help students evaluate and select colleges.

Today, in response to the President's call, the White House, the U.S. Departments of Education and Treasury, and the General Services Administration are hosting an Education "Datapalooza", highlighting innovators from the private, nonprofit, and academic sectors who have used freely available government data to build products, services, and apps that advance postsecondary education, empower students with information, and help colleges innovate in creative and powerful ways.

The program focuses on two areas directly responsive to the President's call: empowering students and families with the information, apps, websites, and other tools to help them make informed decisions about going to and paying for college; and leveraging technology to increase the quality of online teaching and learning, which can lead to breakthroughs on college cost and quality.

Technologies like those being showcased at the Datapalooza can play important roles in support of President Obama's plan to make college more affordable and accessible. That plan calls for measuring college performance through a new ratings system so that students and families have the information they need to select schools that provide the best value for them; enhancing competition and innovation to provide higher value at lower costs; and supporting new ideas in higher education through a limited number of experimental sites. The plan also proposes to cap Federal student loan payments at 10 percent of income for all borrowers, and directs the Department of Education to ramp up efforts to make sure borrowers are aware of, and can take advantage of, all available repayment options.

Key Administration Steps to Build Momentum for Innovation

As part of today's Datapalooza, the U.S. Department of Education announced a series of next steps aimed at opening up resources that higher-education leaders, private-sector and philanthropic leaders, technology developers, and entrepreneurs can use to enhance affordability, access, and outcomes in higher education. These actions include:

- **Exploring the Use of APIs to Improve Access to Education Resources:** The U.S. Department of Education will explore the use of Application Program Interfaces (APIs) as a way to help students and families access key education processes, programs, and data. The Department will issue a Request for Information (RFI) to gather ideas and feedback on potential development of APIs with key education data, programs, and frequently used forms—including the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). These efforts will build on steps the Department is already taking to make data available to the public in API format from the National Center for Education Statistics' Common Core of Data and Integrated Postsecondary Education Data Systems (viewable at www.ed.gov/developers).
- **Opening Targeted FAFSA Completion Data to High Schools and Guidance Counselors.** The U.S. Department of Education is committed to responsibly sharing data

with schools and guidance counselors about whether their students have applied for the FAFSA, as a tool to increase financial aid application rates. This effort can help spur the development of new resources for parents, school leadership, and guidance counselors to assist students applying for Federal student aid.

- **Pursuing Data-Driven, Targeted Strategies for Communicating with Student Loan Borrowers:** Last fall, the U.S. Department of Education conducted a targeted outreach campaign to 3.7 million borrowers to inform them of their options to manage their Federal student loan debt. Building on these targeted outreach efforts, the Department's Office of Federal Student Aid will continue to develop data-driven strategies for communicating with student-loan borrowers, tailoring communications to borrowers to maximize awareness of repayment options for Federal student loans. By analyzing available student aid data, the Department will continue to develop more sophisticated approaches to communicating with students, such as targeting easy-to-understand information about Income-Driven Repayment plans to those borrowers who may benefit from such plans.
- **Considering the Integration of Third Party Apps into the Department's Financial Aid Toolkit:** Last month, the U.S. Department of Education launched the Financial Aid Toolkit at financialaidtoolkit.ed.gov as an online "one-stop shop" for financial aid resources, aimed at guidance counselors, community-based organizations, and others who help students select and finance their higher education. The Financial Aid Toolkit consolidates into one searchable online database a full range of financial aid resources covering the entire financial aid lifecycle—from applying for financial aid to repaying student loans. Going forward, the Department will study the potential benefits of integrating third-party apps, tools, and other services into the Toolkit, potentially making this resource even more accessible and user-friendly.
- **Continuing Engagement around Higher Education Innovation and Open Data:** In the coming weeks, building on the innovations highlighted at the Datapalooza, the U.S. Department of Education will continue to engage with leaders in higher education, business, and philanthropy across the Nation to explore ways to further empower students with tools to make more informed decisions about college and to develop ways to improve teaching and learning. Additionally, the Department will continue to receive feedback and ideas from stakeholders on ways that it can make Department data sources, tools, or forms for students more open and accessible. Feedback can continue to be directed to datapalooza@ed.gov.
- **Calling for Ideas for Experimental Sites:** The President has called for the U.S. Department of Education to support new ideas in higher education through a limited number of experimental sites. The Experimental Sites authority under Title IV of the Higher Education Act (HEA) allows the Secretary of Education to waive specific Title IV, HEA requirements of the Federal student financial assistance programs to test responsible innovations coupled with evaluations of their effectiveness. Experiments could include enabling colleges to offer Pell grants to high-school students taking college-level courses, allowing Federal financial aid to assist students seeking academic credit for prior learning, and combining traditional calendar-based and competency-based courses into a single program of study. The Department is asking the public, the higher education community, and others to send their ideas for experimental sites that would support a better-educated workforce and citizenry. Ideas should be submitted by Jan. 31 to experimentalsites@ed.gov. For more information, please see the Department's [Dear Colleague Letter](#) and [Federal Register notice](#).

- **Streamlining Application Paperwork:** The U.S. Department of the Treasury will explore opportunities to help consumers access their own Government-held financial records online. Federal student-loan borrowers need access to Government-held personal records, such as tax returns, to help apply for aid and scholarships, as well as to enroll in programs to help them repay their loans, such as Income-Driven Repayment programs. As a part of this overall effort, the IRS is launching [Get Transcript](#), which will give taxpayers the ability to view, print, and download their tax transcripts—making it easier for student borrowers to access their own tax records needed for loan and grant applications.
- **Seeking New “Pull Mechanisms” to Support Development of New Learning Technologies:** The White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) is seeking input on how incentive prizes and other “pull mechanisms” might be used to accelerate the development, rigorous evaluation, and widespread adoption of high-impact learning technologies. Some of the advantages of pull mechanisms are that a funder can: (a) pay only for success; (b) set a goal without having to choose in advance which team or approach is most likely to be successful; and (c) increase the number and intellectual diversity of the teams that are working to solve a particular problem. Already, Federal agencies have offered almost 300 [incentive prizes](#) on Challenge.gov, providing opportunities for citizen solvers to offer novel solutions to a wide array of tough problems. OSTP intends to build on this pull-mechanism momentum with a specific focus on learning technologies, and has released a Request for Information (RFI) asking stakeholders (e.g., Federal agencies, philanthropists, employers, researchers, non-profits, and state and local education agencies) what roles they would be willing to play in the design, funding, and implementation of pull mechanisms for learning technology. The full Request for Information can be found [here](#) and supplemental information on pull mechanisms can be found [here](#). Comments are due by March 7, 2014, and can be sent to learning@ostp.gov.