



2014 College Application Month

Illinois College Application Month Implementation Guide

Tips for Counselors and Mentors Hosting a College Application Month Event(s)

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Introduction

For many students, particularly first-generation students who do not have an immediate family member who attended college, applying for college can seem overwhelming. For those students, not having someone who can help them navigate the college application process can be enough to prevent them from pursuing a postsecondary education. During FAFSA completion workshops in the spring, we often find that a significant number of first-generation college students have not yet applied for college admission. By implementing a College Application Month program, your school can ensure that all seniors have the opportunity to receive hands-on assistance as they take the first big step towards continuing their education following high school.

The Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC) is pleased to sponsor Illinois College Application Month. ISAC, along with college access partners, will provide support through resource materials and the ISACorps. Planning, scheduling and implementation of any or all of the suggestions in this Guide are the responsibility of the host school.

We hope that you will find the information contained in this Guide useful as you implement a program in your school. In addition, you may also find it helpful to review some of the resources in the College Application Month Online Toolkit, available at www.collegechangeseverything.org/appmonth. Some additional websites that may be helpful include:

www.isac.org

www.whatsnextillinois.org

nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/

Good luck as you plan your event!

Recommendations/Requirements for Participating High Schools

Identify a site coordinator.

Every school participating in College Application Month must identify a site coordinator. This can be a counselor, advisor, coach or other school professional who will be responsible for planning and implementing the event. It is also recommended that you designate a back-up coordinator.

Build a school-wide team.

Recruit counselors, teachers and other staff to help plan and implement the event. Forming a team will help share the work and help ensure the entire school supports the event. Students could also be identified to volunteer to help and earn community service hours.

Encourage school-wide involvement.

Get the entire school excited about the event and applying to college. Activities, such as holding daily trivia contests, wearing college shirts, sharing college stories, or decorating classroom doors with college logos, photos and other mementos are all great ways to get students excited about college.

Advertise.

Use the following materials within your school:

- Banners
- Posters
- Stickers/Buttons that read “I helped” or “I applied to college”
- College pennants

Reserve your event location.

Make sure it's equipped with a sufficient number of networked computers and printers, well in advance of the event. Typical event locations include the school's media center, computer labs and classrooms with computers.

- Ensure that enough computers are available to allow adequate time for each student to participate. Typically, each student requires 45 minutes to an hour to complete a college application.
- Work with technology support staff to ensure that school firewalls or other access restrictions will not prevent students from accessing online applications the day of the event.
- Consider reserving computer lab space for multiple days, depending on the size of the senior class.

Hold the event during the day.

Holding the event during the day, if possible, will ensure the participation of students who may not typically attend an evening event or who may not typically submit an application for college admission in a timely fashion.

Promote the event early and often.

Publicize it through e-mails, letters, conversations, school announcements, school newsletters, posters, press releases and social media such as Facebook and Twitter. Make sure parents are aware of College Application Month as well. As the event approaches, consider announcing the event on the school sign. Also, be sure to include the event on the school calendar. Remember to invite local media to attend the event.

Recruit volunteers.

Ask community leaders from the local area to help with the event. Here are some examples of volunteers:

- Local colleges and universities, including representatives from the admissions and financial aid offices
- Chambers of commerce
- Local library staff
- Parents/PTA
- Board of Education staff and school board members
- After-school programs
- Local professional associations

Provide ALL seniors access to the event.

Develop a schedule for your event (see sample schedule in the back of this guide on pages 11-12) which will provide all seniors the opportunity to participate. Requiring that seniors sign up beforehand is strongly discouraged as often those who could benefit the most from the event will not sign up.

Allow for adequate student preparation prior to the event.

Help students make the most of their College Application Month experience. Meet with seniors early in the school year to allow adequate time for students to research the various colleges in which they may be interested in attending.

The ISACorps can also provide workshops and presentations to help students prepare their college applications. The ISACorps can provide presentations such as College 101, which introduces students to the basics of searching and applying to colleges, as well as essay-writing assistance workshops. To complete an outreach request form, or to see a listing of events being offered, please visit <http://www.isac.org/students/before-college/outreach-activities-calendar.html>.

Have a paper application alternative.

Some schools will only accept application fee waivers if they are attached to a paper application. Before the event, download a PDF of the application or gather paper applications from the schools your students are most likely to be interested in attending that require a paper application using a fee waiver and have them available in the computer lab or reserved event space.

Encourage students to attend one of the Illinois Regional College Fairs in your area.

You may even consider making arrangements for them to attend if your school does not already do this. This will be a great opportunity for them to gather information and do some preliminary research. For more information, visit the Illinois Association of College Admissions Counselors (IACAC) website at www.iacac.org/college-fairs/.

Student Preparation

Encourage students to complete college research prior to the event.

To help ensure students are able to make the most of their College Application Month experience, students should arrive to the computer lab with a list of colleges that they have determined would be a good match for them and to which they would like to apply.

If your school has an advisory program, advisors should incorporate college research into their interactions with seniors. Additionally, consider developing a worksheet or online activity to help guide students through the process of researching colleges. College characteristics students should be encouraged to consider include:

- Location
- Size
- Available majors
- Available financial aid as well as the average net price
- Admissions requirements
- Characteristics of incoming freshman class
- Graduation rate

Make use of the student preparation checklist on page 16

This document will help ensure students have the information needed to complete an application for college admission. The information students should be encouraged to gather includes the following:

- Student's full legal name
- Social Security Number (if applying for federal and/or state financial aid)
- Test information such as SAT/ACT test dates and scores
- College essays and/or personal statements (even if these are not "required" they are almost always recommended)

Encourage teachers to incorporate college essay assignments into their classes.

This will help ensure that students applying to colleges requiring essays will be prepared. Students applying to colleges requiring an essay and/or personal statement should be encouraged to save their essay to a disk or thumb drive so they can quickly and easily copy and paste it into the admission application during the event.

Encourage student to ask teachers and staff about their college experience.

This will help students get a personal perspective about the college teachers and other school personnel attended. This will also help create a buzz about the program. Teachers and staff can place "Ask me" signs on their door to help engage students and to drive attendance at the event.

Encourage students to become familiar with application fee payment options prior to the event.

If the colleges to which they plan to apply require an application fee:

- Students should be encouraged to meet with their high school counselor to determine if they are eligible for a fee waiver. Eligible students should investigate whether their chosen colleges accept fee waivers and how to go about providing that waiver with their application.
- Students not eligible for a fee waiver should conduct research to determine the amount of the required application fee for the college to which they plan to apply. They should also investigate payment methods accepted by the college (e.g., credit card, online check, mailed check, etc.).
 - For colleges that require payment information to be entered online in order to complete the application submission process, students should be made aware of the following options which may be available to them:
 - Save the application and submit it at home later when they have access to a payment method
 - Purchase a prepaid credit card in the amount of the application fee so credit card information can be entered into the online application
 - Students should bring the appropriate payment information to the event

Provide students with information about the Common Application.

Make sure they know if a college they are considering accepts or requires the Common Application instead of a school-specific application. If students plan to complete the Common Application during the event, they will need to do their research and prepare for it ahead of time because it is typically longer and more detailed than other applications. For more information, visit www.commonapp.org.

Let ISAC Help

The ISACorps works one-on-one with students to help them search and apply to colleges. We can help your students by setting up in-school office hours to help students apply to reach and match colleges. If you would like to the ISACorps to work with your students on planning and applying to college, please contact:

Abel Montoya

Director of Outreach Operations

Illinois Student Assistance Commission

847-831-8295

Abel.Montoya@isac.illinois.gov

Volunteer Coordination

Never underestimate students' need for help!

Exit surveys of similar events have shown overwhelmingly that students considered the event a major factor in their decision to apply to college. Volunteer support is crucial to holding an event that will positively impact the students.

Use a volunteer registration form.

Consider using a volunteer registration form to help keep track and to communicate with volunteers. Alternatively, you may want to set up an online volunteer registration form. Many free online survey tools are available to help with this task. It can be helpful to collect the following information on the volunteer registration form:

- Volunteer name
- E-mail
- Phone number
- Affiliation (name of postsecondary institution, company, nonprofit or government agency)
- Area of expertise
- Hours they are available
- How they heard about ICAM

Follow your school's security policy.

Once you have received your volunteer sign-ups, remember to allow for enough time to conduct any necessary background checks, if required by your school's policy.

Utilize student and other leadership in the school as volunteers for the event.

- **School Planning Team:** Student ambassadors from all grade levels can be used to share ideas, distribute materials, decorate the school and promote the ICAM event through Facebook, Twitter, and other forms of social media.
- **School leadership:** Involve school administrators and counselors, personnel and PTA members in the planning and logistical details.
- **Peer mentors:** Consider using seniors who have already completed the college application process to help other students during the event
- **ISACorps:** Connect with your local ISACorps member(s), who are experienced helping students apply for college and financial aid, and use his or her resources. To identify your local ISACorps member(s), check out a full listing at www.isac.org.

Enlist teachers.

They can volunteer during a planning period and/or to dedicate class time for college-related activities, such as writing college essays, researching earning potential of college graduates, and helping student research colleges online.

Identify contacts in the community.

Civic groups and community organizations may be interested in helping make the event a success by donating time and/or resources. Be sure to use any press releases or publicity to promote the need for volunteers.

Stress that Illinois College Application Month events are NOT a recruitment opportunity for colleges.

Representatives from local colleges and universities are highly encouraged to attend, but they should not use the event as a recruiting tool. Volunteers should help students during the application process and should not simply communicate information solely about their respective colleges.

Have plenty of volunteers.

It is recommended that you plan to have one volunteer for every four or five computers in use during the event. Extras may be needed to assist with sign-in, printers, etc., and to provide the opportunity for volunteers to take breaks.

Communicate with volunteers early and often.

Create a system such as an e-mail distribution list or regular updates via text message. Be sure to contact all volunteers ahead of time to provide them with specifics such as parking, when to arrive, where the event will be held, options for lunch, etc.

Assign each volunteer a specific responsibility.

Take into account areas of expertise (e.g., greeting students, helping students complete their application, answering financial aid questions, etc.). Consider collecting areas of expertise during volunteer registration process to facilitate the volunteer assignment.

Provide volunteers with a printed schedule.

Include lunch times and breaks when no students will be in the lab/media center/classroom. The best way to keep volunteers happy is to make sure they are well fed.

Follow up with a thank-you letter.

Write all participating volunteers, thanking them for their dedication and support in making the event a success. This is a great way to leave volunteers with a positive feeling and to increase the chances they will volunteer to help at another event.

The Day of the Event(s)

Make sure students are prepared.

On the day or days during your College Application Month event(s) when students will actually be completing applications, follow the suggestions in the Student Preparation section (page 5 and 6) to make sure students arrive with everything they need to apply. You can't remind students what to bring too often.

Welcome volunteers.

- Thank them for their participation
- Inform them of the game plan for the day including:
 - The assignment location, if multiple locations will be in use during the day
 - Break times
 - Lunch time. If lunch will not be available, consider providing all volunteers a list or map of local restaurants (providing lunch, if at all possible, is a nice way to say "thank you")
 - The location of restrooms

Welcome each group of students and explain the events for the day.

Explain:

- The importance of applying to college
- That the goal for the day is for them to complete and submit at least one application for admission
- That they should feel free to ask a volunteer if they need help while working on their application or if they have any questions about applying to or attending college
- What they should do once they have completed an application
 - Make sure students know how to complete an application either online or by mailing in their documents
- Remind students of what they need to do after applying, such as making sure high school transcripts are sent to the college

Provide proper oversight.

High school staff should remain available throughout the event and should not expect volunteers to ensure students stay on task. Remember, the volunteers are there to help students complete the admission process, not to discipline students.

Evaluations

Feedback can be provided by students and staff online or by completing a paper survey. Paper surveys can be obtained through ISAC or the Corps member in your area. Time should be allotted at the end of each workshop for students to complete an evaluation. A summary of your students' responses will be relayed to you per your request.

If a paper survey is completed, the surveys will need to be returned to ISAC for data entry. Results may take longer to compile depending on the volume of paper surveys submitted.

Making the Month Special

Invite educational and community leaders.

Include school board members, district administrators, local and state representatives to speak to students before the event about the importance of attending college and to motivate them to participate.

Contact local media (print, television, radio).

Invite them to cover your event. Encourage them to attend with cameras and reporters to fuel student excitement.

Contact local businesses.

They may agree to donate snacks for participating students and/or volunteers or even lunch. Finding a local business willing to provide pizza for participating students can be a fun and exciting way to wrap up a month of applying to college! Providing lunch for participating volunteers is a nice way to say “thank you” for their assistance. Remember, well fed volunteers are happy volunteers.

Give away stuff.

Ask local colleges and universities to consider providing college gear and goodies for students participating in the event. You can have a drawing of student participants or make rewards for students who apply to the most colleges, have the best essays, or some other criteria.

Set goals.

Consider setting a school-wide goal for the number of applications submitted. This goal can be a huge collective motivator.

Hold a senior assembly or pep rally.

Having a rally to celebrate college application helps to build excitement and communicate expectations for the event. Throw a party at the end of the month to celebrate academic achievements and college aspirations.

Dress the part!

Make “casual” meaningful by encouraging faculty and staff to wear clothing from their colleges in the days and weeks leading up to your ICAM event(s). Students should be encouraged to ask all faculty and staff about their college experiences.

Follow up.

Check with students after the event(s) to be sure they take the necessary steps to complete the application process:

- If they were unable to submit their application during the event, be sure they submit it.
- Be sure all students send the appropriate supporting documentation to the college:
 - Fee waiver forms
 - High school transcripts
 - Official test scores

Timeline with Checklist

<u>Time Before Event</u>	<u>List of Tasks/Activities</u>	<u>Checklist</u>
6 weeks prior	Print and review this guide.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Establish a school team to assist with your Illinois College Application Month (ICAM) planning and preparation.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Add your ICAM event to your school's and district's master calendar.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Reserve the computer facilities for your event.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Begin recruiting volunteers for your event.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Arrange a schedule for your event, including which groups or classes of students will participate.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Encourage students to begin some college research and to think about what is important to them as a prospective student.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Encourage teachers to begin connecting lessons (and advisory interactions, if applicable) to your ICAM event.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Inform parents of your school's ICAM event, and let them know that their students may need help to prepare. Use or modify our sample Parent Communication on page 13.	<input type="checkbox"/>
5 weeks prior	Confirm computer facilities are reserved and that your school's technology coordinator is available for troubleshooting on the day(s) of the event.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Find partners and/or donors to provide lunch and snacks to volunteers.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Provide eligible students with application fee waiver information.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Confirm that your school's information is listed correctly on the ICAM website.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Continue recruiting volunteers.	<input type="checkbox"/>
4 weeks prior	Create a schedule for your volunteer coverage, taking into account the availability of your volunteers, as well as some breaks and time for lunch.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Recruit additional volunteers to fill any holes in your volunteer coverage schedule if needed.	<input type="checkbox"/>

3 weeks prior	Customize a <i>Volunteer Confirmation Communication</i> . Send it to your volunteers to give them the details of your event as well as when and where to meet.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Remind teachers, counselors and administrators of the ICAM schedule and ensure all seniors will have the opportunity to participate.	<input type="checkbox"/>
2 weeks prior	Be sure you have received the ICAM materials you need.	<input type="checkbox"/>
1 week prior	Make an announcement encouraging school staff to wear college clothing the day of the event.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Make an announcement to remind students that the event is next week, and remind them that they will need to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Know where they want to apply. 2) Have a plan for application fees (students w/o payment info may save completed applications and submit from home). 3) Write required essays or personal statements and bring to the event. Gather the information needed to complete applications.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Send a reminder email to your volunteers confirming their role, the time they have committed to volunteering, as well as where volunteers can park.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Day(s) of your Illinois College Application Month Event(s)!	Welcome volunteers and thank them for their support! Make sure they know what their role is for the day, and provide them with a schedule of the day as well as lunch information and a map of the building. Let them know where they can secure personal items.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Welcome each group of seniors to your Illinois College Application Month event. Remind them that their goal is to apply for admission and that there are volunteers available to help them.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	ENJOY YOUR EVENT!	<input type="checkbox"/>
Week after your event(s)	Designate one or two people to follow up with any students that were not able to complete their applications and ensure they either have completed or are on track to finish their college applications.	<input type="checkbox"/>

Sample Parent Communication

Dear Parent(s)/Guardian(s),

<INSERT THE NAME OF YOUR HIGH SCHOOL> is excited to announce that our school has been selected to hold an Illinois College Application Month (ICAM) event. Our event will be held on <INSERT YOUR SCHOOL EVENT DATE AND TIMES HERE>.

During our ICAM event, all of our seniors will be given the opportunity to apply to college in a group setting with school staff and professional volunteers. Volunteers, many of whom will be staff from local colleges, businesses and community organizations, will be on hand to assist students as they work on their application(s) for college admission.

In preparation for the event, your student will be asked to complete college research to ensure they have at least one college in mind that will be a good match for them. In addition, students will be asked to gather the information that they will need to complete an application for college admission and may need your assistance. This information may include the following:

- Date of birth
- Residency information, such as driver's license information or date of move to Illinois
- Citizenship information
- Immediate family military information
- Previous high school information
- Social Security Number, if applying for federal and state financial aid

Students may either submit their application(s) during the event or save it to submit at a later time. On the day of our event, we will encourage students who do not have access to a payment method at school to save their application to submit at home, if possible. As another option, in the past, some students have elected to purchase a prepaid gift card, such as a Visa gift card, in an amount sufficient to cover their application fee and to bring that to school. Students who may qualify for an application fee waiver, such as the College Board or ACT fee waiver, should discuss this option with their counselor prior to the event to obtain the necessary paperwork.

If you should have any questions regarding this exciting program, please do not hesitate to call <INSERT COUNSELOR NAME HERE> at <INSERT COUNSELOR PHONE NUMBER HERE>. Thank you in advance for your support of this initiative to make college a part of your student's future!

Sincerely,

<INSERT SCHOOL COUNSELOR NAME HERE>

Sample Media Communication

<INSERT YOUR HIGH SCHOOL NAME> to hold Illinois College Application Month event.

<INSERT CITY, DATE HERE> -- <INSERT YOUR HIGH SCHOOL NAME> is excited to announce that it has been selected to participate in Illinois College Application Month, an annual event sponsored by the <INSERT YOUR HIGH SCHOOL NAME> and the Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC).

<INSERT NAME OF YOUR HIGH SCHOOL>'s event will be held on <INSERT YOUR HIGH SCHOOL EVENT DATE>. During the Illinois College Application Month event, seniors will receive hands-on assistance from volunteers, many of whom are from local colleges and universities, businesses and community organizations, as they navigate the college application process. Assistance will also be provide by ISAC through the ISACorps, a group of recent college graduates trained in assisting students plan, apply, and pay for college. The goal is for each student to successfully complete at least one college admission application during the event.

Additional information about the Illinois College Application Month program can be found online at www.collegechangeseverything.org/appmonth.

For more information about <INSERT NAME OF YOUR HIGH SCHOOL>'s event, please contact <INSERT SITE COORDINATOR NAME> at <INSERT SITE COORDINATOR TELEPHONE NUMBER/EMAIL ADDRESS>.

Sample Volunteer Recruitment Letter:

Dear <Insert Potential Volunteer Name Here>,

<Insert the Name of Your School Here> is excited to announce that we are participating in Illinois College Application Month (ICAM) 2014. ICAM is an event during which Illinois high school seniors are provided the opportunity to apply to college while receiving assistance from college and community volunteers.

<Insert the Name of Your School Here> will be hosting this event on <Insert The Day of Your ICAM Event Here> from <Insert Times Here>. In order to make this even a success, *we need your help!* Volunteers are needed to help our students navigate the college application process with the goal of completing at least one application for admission during the event. This exciting and valuable event will provide you the opportunity to impact the lives of our students in a meaningful way by:

- Guiding seniors through the college application process
- Answering any questions students have as they work on their application(s)
- Sharing college experiences
- Inspiring seniors to bigger and better things

Please strongly consider this chance to assist our school in this important initiative. This event is not a college recruitment event but is an excellent opportunity for you to assist Illinois high school students as they embark on their college journey. If you are interested in volunteering to help during our event, please contact me directly using my contact information provided below.

Thank you and I hope to see you on <Insert Date of Your Event Here>!

Sincerely,

<Insert Your Name and Contact Information>

Sample Student Preparation Checklist:

Student College Application Month Checklist

- | | | |
|---|--|--------------------------|
| Explore Postsecondary Schools | Check out colleges and universities you are interested in attending and make a list of schools to which you would like to apply. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Find the Application Deadlines | While you are researching colleges, find out what deadlines, if any, campuses have for applications. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Identify Application Fee(s) | Many colleges require an application fee when you submit an online application. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Admissions Essays | Many colleges require one or more essays in a college application. Bring your essay(s) with you preloaded on a disc or flash/jump drive you can use to copy and paste into your online application(s). | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Locate your Social Security Card | Some colleges require that you provide your Social Security Number if you are also applying for state and federal aid. Locate your Social Security Card and make sure you know your Social Security Number if you need it for your college application(s). | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ACT/SAT Score(s) | Colleges may ask whether you have taken the ACT or SAT and will want to know your scores on these exams. Bring your scores or write down your scores so you have this information when you are completing your application(s). | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Optional Activities:

Illinois College Application Month optional activities are a fun way to get your students excited about applying to college. The activities listed below are a way to generate excitement in your school and help foster a college-going culture. We hope you consider one or more of the following optional activities, or make up your own!

- **Host an Alumni Panel** – Invite recent graduates of your high school who are currently enrolled in college to share their experiences with selecting a college, completing their applications, and their freshman year experience. Consider inviting multiple students to participate in a panel discussion.
- **Host a College Visit** – Invite local colleges to visit your school, and provide general information including the majors offered, their admission requirements, application process, cost of attendance and financial aid options.
- **Incorporate College Essay Writing into Assignments** – Encourage English teachers to incorporate college essay writing as part of the curriculum or as extra credit. This will allow students to complete a sample college essay and receive feedback from their teacher prior to submitting their college applications.
- **College Wallfiti** – Create a wallfiti (like graffiti) by hanging large pieces of bulletin board paper on a wall in your school. Provide markers in multiple colors, and encourage students to write their dreams and goals related to attending college. The College Wallfiti can be displayed all month as a way to increase excitement and foster awareness of the variety of colleges to which students can apply.
- **College Geography**—Put up a map of Illinois or the US and have students indicate with pins or small paper pennants where they have applied. In the spring, the map can turn into a map of where students will be attending college.
- **College Spirit Day** – Encourage faculty and staff to show off their school spirit. During College Spirit Day faculty and staff should wear their college clothing (jerseys, t-shirts, hats, etc.). Ask teachers to take a couple of minutes before or after class to talk about the college they attended and the benefits of college generally. Encourage students to ask questions, particularly of faculty and staff who attended colleges they are considering attending.

Contact Information:

Abel Montoya

Director of Outreach Operations

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847-831-8295

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