

PSLF SELF-HELP TOOLKIT

March 2024

What is Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF)?



If you have federal student loans and you work in qualifying employment - like government or non-profit - you may be able to get your student loans forgiven!

PSLF forgives the remaining balance (principal and interest) on federal student loans after you've made payments based on your income for 120 months. In some cases, your monthly payments could be as low as \$0. Progress does not need to be consecutive.

Some months of past non-payment, such as certain types of deferment and forbearance, may also be able to be counted due to flexibilities expiring April 30, 2024.

There are no income ceilings for PSLF, and no limit to how much can be forgiven or how many times you can participate. You may be closer to forgiveness than you thought!

To get forgiveness under PSLF, there are three criteria:

1. Eligible type of loans
2. Eligible employment
3. Qualifying Repayment Plan

Criteria 1: Eligible loan type

All loans that show up at StudentAid.gov are federal loans. They are eligible for PSLF or can be made eligible (through consolidation) for PSLF.

Although you may have been paying a loan servicer like AES, Nelnet, Navient, etc., your federal loans are owned by the Department of Education. Once you start participating in PSLF, your loans will transfer to MOHELA, the loan servicer for PSLF.

Some federal loan types may first need to be consolidated into a Direct Loan to be eligible for PSLF.

- If you have any federal loans that are not Direct Loans, such as HEAL, FFEL, Perkins, etc., they are ineligible for PSLF - but you can consolidate them with your existing Direct Loan (or on their own, if this is all you have) to make them eligible for PSLF.
- If you have Parent Plus loans and need to make more payments to reach the 120 required for PSLF, you may need to consolidate them in order to access a qualifying repayment plan for PSLF.
- Loans that entered repayment at vastly different times *may* benefit from consolidation, also, so newer loans take on a higher payment count.
- **Flexibilities set to expire April 30, 2024 allow consolidation without losing progress** - and allows the consolidated loan to take on the highest payment count of all underlying loans.

Tips: Student loans that do not show up at StudentAid.gov are private student loans and cannot be forgiven under PSLF. After April 30, 2024, you can still consolidate, but your payments will take on the weighted average of payment counts.

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Criteria 2: Eligible employment

PSLF rewards “public service” employment, which means working for a non-profit or government employer. It is not the *type of job* you do, but the *type of organization* that employs you. Employment may count if it is:

- With an eligible organization: <https://studentaid.gov/pslf/employer-search>
- On or after October 1, 2007
- Overlaps with your student loans being in repayment
- Averages at least 30 hours/week for the time period being certified at a single qualifying employer (or totals 30 hours/week across multiple qualifying part-time employers)

To match up your payment history with your employment history, and earn credits towards the 120 months required for PSLF, use the PSLF Help Tool (www.studentaid.gov/pslf) to generate a PSLF Application annually.

- You will need the exact dates of your employment, EIN found on your W2, and employer’s email.
- You do not need to fax/mail the completed form - simply do it all using the Tool, and once your employer signs electronically, it will send itself to MOHELA to be processed. This method is faster and strongly preferred.

Patience is key:

It can take many months for payment counts to update. *Some periods prior to May 1, 2024 in which you did not make a payment may be counted under the IDR Adjustment flexibilities, which are being automatically applied to accounts through July 1, 2024.*

- **Check your MOHELA Payment Tracker** to see your progress towards 120 - the number of “qualifying” payments. Payments listed as “eligible” mean they *could* count if you certify employment for that time period.
- **Check the status of your forms at StudentAid.gov** - log in, click your name, then My Activity, then the form in question.

Tips:

- *Do not certify employment until your loan consolidation has been fully processed - usually two to three months.*
- *If your employer is listed as “ineligible” or “not determined,” but you know it qualifies, do not panic! Follow the steps to submit the PSLF Application to have it reviewed. You can later file for [Reconsideration](#) if you believe there is an error.*
- *If you’re submitting multiple part-time jobs to add up to 30, submit the forms together.*
- *You may get a letter that says you have not YET reached 120 payments, but this is not a denial letter. It simply updates your counts.*

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Criteria 3: Qualifying repayment plan

Payments must be made on a qualifying repayment plan to count for PSLF - such as one of the Income-Driven Repayment Plans (IDR).

An IDR uses your income, family size, and other factors to determine how much you must pay each month. Your payments may be as low as \$0 under an IDR. Recertify income annually by your IDR anniversary date.

There are four types of IDR: SAVE, PAYE, ICR, and IBR.

You may not be eligible for all of them, but everyone with a federal student loan is eligible for at least one of the IDRs. To maximize forgiveness under PSLF, choose the one with the lowest monthly payment.

Enroll in an IDR and compare plans at <https://studentaid.gov/manage-loans/repayment/plans/income-driven>

Tips:

- *If your income decreases or family size increases, avoid taking a deferment or forbearance. Instead, recertify your income on your IDR immediately to get a lower payment for the next 12 months.*
- *If your income has decreased since your tax return, use “alternative documentation of income,” like a paystub, to show the change and get a new payment amount calculated.*
- *Look for strategies to reduce your AGI, like contributing to tax-deductible retirement plans, to lower your student loan payment*
- *The 10-Year Standard Repayment Plan is eligible, but not recommended because there would be nothing left to forgive after 10 years (120 months) of payments. Note that your account may say “Standard” aka “Level” repayment plan, but actually be more than 10 years or be the Standard Plan for Consolidated Loans; these do not qualify.*

More Help

U.S. Department of Education Federal Student Aid

[PSLF resources](#) [Help Tool Ninja](#) [Loan Simulator](#) [Consolidation](#) [Help](#)

MOHELA (loan servicer for PSLF)

<https://www.mohela.com/>

Other loan servicers

<https://studentaid.gov/manage-loans/repayment/servicers>

FSA Ombudsman - start a case

<https://fsapartners.ed.gov/help-center/fsa-customer-service-center/service-centers-for-students/office-of-the-ombudsman-fsa>

FSA feedback - make a complaint

<https://studentaid.gov/feedback-center/>

Consumer Financial Protection Bureau - make a complaint

<https://www.consumerfinance.gov/complaint/>

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