

Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program

Questions and Answers (Q&As) for Borrowers

Prepared by Federal Student Aid
U.S. Department of Education
March 14, 2012

The following Questions & Answers (Q&As) for Borrowers provide information about the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) Program that is available to borrowers with federal student loans made through the William D. Ford Federal Direct Loan Program (Direct Loan ProgramSM). We have grouped the Q&As into six categories: General Information, Eligible Loans, Qualifying Payments, Qualifying Repayment Plans, Qualifying Employment, and Receiving the Benefit. Following each answer is the date we posted that response. We will include a new date each time we add a question or when we update a previously posted response.

Public Service Loan Forgiveness – General Information

Q1 What is the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) Program?

A1 The PSLF Program was established to encourage individuals to enter and continue in full-time public service employment by forgiving the remaining balance of their Direct Loans after they have made 120 qualifying monthly payments after October 1, 2007 (see [Q13](#)) under certain repayment plans (see [Q21](#)) while employed full-time (see [Q36](#)) by a public service organization (see [Q31](#) through [Q35](#)). (March 14, 2012)

Q2 What are the borrower eligibility requirements for loan forgiveness under the PSLF Program?

A2 You must be employed full-time by a public service organization when you make each of the required 120 qualifying monthly payments on your Direct Loans, at the time you apply for loan forgiveness after making the last of those 120 payments, and at the time you receive loan forgiveness. (March 14, 2012)

Q3 Are loan amounts forgiven under PSLF considered taxable by the IRS?

A3 No. According to the IRS, student loan amounts forgiven under PSLF are not considered income for tax purposes. For more information, you should check with the IRS or your tax advisor. (March 14, 2012)

Q4 Does my income level determine eligibility for PSLF?

A4 Not directly, but your income is a factor in determining your required monthly payment amount under the Income-Based Repayment (IBR) Plan and the Income Contingent Repayment (ICR) Plan, the two PSLF-eligible repayment plans that are the most likely to leave you with a remaining loan balance to be forgiven after you have made 120 qualifying monthly payments. These repayment plans are most likely to result in a balance to be forgiven if your income remains low in relation to the amount of your Direct Loan debt. (March 14, 2012)



START HERE
GO FURTHER
FEDERAL STUDENT AID

Q5 Can I be certain that the PSLF Program will exist by the time I have made my 120 qualifying payments?

A5 The Department cannot make any guarantees regarding the future availability of PSLF. The PSLF Program was created by Congress, and, while not likely, Congress could change or end the PSLF Program. (*March 14, 2012*)

Public Service Loan Forgiveness – Eligible Loans

Q6 If I have FFEL Program loans, Federal Perkins Loans, or Health Professions Loans, can I take advantage of PSLF?

A6 PSLF is available only for Direct Loans. However, borrowers with FFEL, Perkins, or Health Professions loans who are interested in PSLF may consolidate those ineligible loans into a Direct Consolidation Loan and then make 120 qualifying payments on the Direct Consolidation Loan while employed by a qualifying public service organization to receive PLSF. Note that payments you made on the FFEL, Perkins, or Health Professions loans before they were consolidated into the Direct Loan Program do not count toward the required 120 monthly payments. For more information about consolidating into the Direct Loan Program, go to www.loanconsolidation.ed.gov, or call 1-800-557-7392.

If you are a married borrower with a joint FFEL consolidation loan, see [Q11](#).

Also, Perkins Loan borrowers should be aware that certain cancellation and other benefits available under the Perkins Loan Program do not apply to a Direct Consolidation Loan that repaid a Perkins Loan. Your Perkins Loan servicer can provide you with details on any benefits you might be giving up if you include your Perkins Loans in a Direct Consolidation Loan. (*March 14, 2012*)

Q7 Will my interest rate change if I consolidate my FFEL, Perkins, or Health Professions loans into the Direct Loan Program to take advantage of PSLF?

A7 The interest rate on a Direct Consolidation Loan is the weighted average of the interest rates of the loans being consolidated, rounded up to the next higher one-eighth of one percent (with an interest rate cap of 8.25%). This is a fixed rate that applies for the life of the loan. Because of the rounding up, the fixed interest rate on the new Direct Consolidation Loan may be slightly higher than the combined interest rates on the loans you are consolidating. (*March 14, 2012*)

Q8 Are private, non-federal education loans eligible for PSLF?

A8 Private and other non-federal education loans are not eligible for PSLF, nor can they be consolidated into the Direct Loan Program. (*March 14, 2012*)



START HERE
GO FURTHER
FEDERAL STUDENT AID

Q9 Are loans that are in default eligible for PSLF?

A9 No. Defaulted loans are not eligible for PSLF. However, a defaulted loan may become eligible for PSLF if you consolidate or rehabilitate the loan. You can then make qualifying PSLF payments on the new Direct Consolidation Loan or the rehabilitated loan.

To consolidate a defaulted loan, you must first make satisfactory repayment arrangements on the loan. You can do this either by making three consecutive, voluntary, on-time, full monthly payments on the defaulted loan prior to consolidation, or by agreeing to repay the new Direct Consolidation Loan under the Income Contingent Repayment (ICR) Plan or the Income-Based Repayment (IBR) Plan. Any payments made as part of the satisfactory repayment arrangements prior to consolidating your defaulted loans do not count toward the 120 required payments for PSLF.

To rehabilitate a defaulted loan, you must contact the holder or servicer of the loan to establish a rehabilitation agreement under which you will be required to make nine on-time, voluntary, full monthly payments within 20 days of the scheduled due date within 10 consecutive months. For more information on the impact of rehabilitation on PSLF, see [Q30](#). (March 14, 2012)

Q10 I consolidated my Direct Loans after I made qualifying monthly payments on those loans while working in a qualifying public service organization. Do the payments made prior to the consolidation count toward the 120 payments required for PSLF, or will I be required to make 120 additional payments on the new Direct Consolidation Loan?

A10 You will need to make 120 qualifying monthly payments on the new Direct Consolidation Loan. Qualifying payments that you made on Direct Loans prior to consolidation do not count toward the 120 required payments for PSLF. (March 14, 2012)

Q11 Can a joint FFEL Consolidation Loan be consolidated into a Direct Consolidation Loan so that one or both borrowers working in qualified public service jobs can qualify for PSLF?

A11 No. The law no longer permits joint consolidation loans to be made, so joint FFEL consolidation borrowers may not reconsolidate their FFEL consolidation loan into a Direct Loan. In addition, since joint consolidation borrowers are jointly and severally liable for repayment of the joint consolidation loan for the life of that loan, one of the borrowers may not individually reconsolidate a joint FFEL consolidation loan into a new Direct Consolidation Loan to take advantage of PSLF. (March 14, 2012)



Q12 Are PLUS Loans eligible for PSLF?

A12 Yes. Like other Direct Loans, Direct PLUS Loans are eligible for PSLF. However, there are additional factors to consider if you are a parent PLUS borrower.

First, a parent PLUS borrower's eligibility for PSLF is based on the parent's qualifying public service employment, not on the employment of the dependent student on whose behalf the parent borrowed.

Second, parent PLUS loans may not be repaid under either the IBR or ICR Plan, the two repayment plans most likely to leave a borrower with a remaining balance to be forgiven under PSLF. The IBR Plan is also not available for Direct Consolidation Loans that repaid parent PLUS loans. However, a Direct Consolidation Loan that repaid parent PLUS loans may be repaid under the ICR Plan. For more information regarding loan consolidation, please see [Q6](#), [Q7](#), and [Q10](#).

Note that PLUS loans made to graduate and professional students may be repaid under either the IBR or ICR Plan. (*March 14, 2012*)

Public Service Loan Forgiveness – Qualifying Payments

Q13 What are the specific loan repayment requirements for loan forgiveness under the PSLF Program?

A13 You must have made 120 separate, on-time, monthly payments (after October 1, 2007) on the Direct Loan Program loans for which you are requesting PSLF forgiveness while employed full-time by a public service organization. Each of the monthly payments must have been made for the full scheduled installment amount within 15 days of the payment due date. Each payment also must have been made under a qualifying repayment plan (see [Q21](#)). (*March 14, 2012*)

Q14 I have been making payments on my Direct Loans since before October of 2007. Will these payments count towards the required 120 payments for PSLF?

A14 No. Under the law that established the PSLF Program, only payments made *after* October 1, 2007 may be counted towards the required 120 separate, on-time, monthly payments for PSLF. (*March 14, 2012*)

Q15 Must the 120 separate, monthly required payments for PSLF be consecutive payments?

A15 No. The payments do not have to be consecutive payments; but you must be employed by a qualifying public service organization at the time you make each of the 120 qualifying payments. (*March 14, 2012*)



Q16 If I pay more than my scheduled monthly student loan payment amount, can that additional amount be counted as more than one qualifying payment for PSLF? For example, if I make a single payment that is equal to three monthly payments, will that amount be counted as three separate payments toward the required 120 separate monthly payments?

A16 No. You must make 120 separate monthly payments. Lump sum payments that exceed the scheduled payment amount do not count as separate payments. There is a limited exception to this requirement for Peace Corps and AmeriCorps volunteers. See [Q19](#).

If you make a payment that exceeds the scheduled payment amount, the excess amount will be used to advance your next payment due date unless you request that the excess amount be applied directly to reduce the outstanding principal amount of your loans. Depending on the size of the excess payment, it is possible that your next due date could be a month or more in the future from the date you made the extra payment amount. If you make subsequent payments while your account is “paid ahead”, those payments will not count toward PSLF.

If you request that your extra payment amount not be applied to future scheduled payments, the excess will be applied toward any outstanding accrued interest and principal without advancing the due date of your next scheduled payment, and any subsequent monthly payments you make (if otherwise qualifying) will count toward the required 120 payments. (*March 14, 2012*)

Q17 If I return to school and qualify for an in-school deferment on my Direct Loans that are in repayment, can I decline the deferment and make qualifying PSLF payments while I am in school?

A17 Yes. You may decline an in-school deferment on your loans that are in repayment status and make payments on those loans while you are in school. If you decline your in-school deferment, any qualifying payments you make will count toward the 120 required payments for PSLF. Remember, you must be employed full-time by a public service organization while you attend school.

The option of declining an in-school deferment also applies to any new Grad PLUS loans you receive when you return to school. Grad PLUS Loans enter repayment after they are fully disbursed (while you are still in school), but are eligible for an in-school deferment while you are enrolled in school at least half time.

If you receive new Direct Subsidized/Unsubsidized Loans when you return to school, you will not be able to make qualifying PSLF payments on those loans while you are in school. Any new Direct Subsidized/Unsubsidized Loans you receive will not enter repayment until the end of the 6-month grace period that begins the day after you cease to be enrolled in school on at least a half-time basis. You cannot make payments under a PSLF-eligible repayment plan until a loan has entered repayment status. Although you could voluntarily make payments on your new Direct Subsidized/Unsubsidized Loans while you are in school or during your grace period, those payments would not count as PLSF-qualifying payments. (*March 14, 2012*)



START HERE
GO FURTHER
FEDERAL STUDENT AID

Q18 May I waive the six-month repayment grace period on my Direct Subsidized/Unsubsidized Loans and begin making qualifying PSLF payments early?

A18 No. Under the law that governs the Direct Loan Program, you may not waive the 6-month grace period on Direct Subsidized and Direct Unsubsidized loans that begins after you cease to be enrolled in school at least half-time. Direct Subsidized/Unsubsidized Loans only enter repayment at the end of the 6-month grace period. Any payments made on a loan during the grace period, when you have no legal requirement to make payments, will be applied to reduce loan principal and will not count as PLSF-qualifying payments. *(March 14, 2012)*

Q19 I'm thinking of serving as a Peace Corps or AmeriCorps volunteer and plan to request a deferment or forbearance on my Direct Loans, since I won't be able to afford to make loan payments while I am serving. If I'm not making payments during my service period, can my Peace Corps or AmeriCorps service and Segal Education Award or Transition Payment count for PSLF?

A19 Yes, under certain conditions. The PSLF regulations provide special treatment for Peace Corps and AmeriCorps volunteers to recognize their service as PSLF-qualifying service. However, Peace Corps and AmeriCorps volunteers must still meet the PSLF requirement to make 120 qualifying payments. Peace Corps volunteers receive a transition payment after completing their period of service, and AmeriCorps volunteers may receive a Segal Education Award after a year of service that they can designate be used toward student loan repayment.

If you use some or all of your Peace Corps transition payment or AmeriCorps Segal Education Award to make a lump sum payment on your Direct Loans, you will receive credit for up to 12 qualifying payments for PSLF. The number of payments for which you receive credit is determined by dividing the amount of your lump sum payment by your scheduled full monthly payment amount, but you may not receive credit for more than 12 monthly payments toward the PSLF payment requirement. *(March 14, 2012)*

Q20 If my scheduled monthly payment under IBR or ICR is zero, does each month during which my required monthly payment is zero count towards the required 120 separate, monthly payments?

A20 Yes. Any month when your scheduled, monthly payment under IBR or ICR is zero will count toward your required 120 monthly payments if you are also employed full-time by a qualifying public service organization during that month. *(March 14, 2012)*



START HERE
GO FURTHER
FEDERAL STUDENT AID

Public Service Loan Forgiveness – Qualifying Repayment Plans

Q21 What Direct Loan Program repayment plans qualify under the PSLF Program?

- A21 The 120 required qualifying payments must be made under one or more of the following [Direct Loan Program repayment plans](#)—
- The [Income Based Repayment \(IBR\) Plan](#);
 - The Income Contingent Repayment (ICR) Plan;
 - The Standard Repayment Plan with a maximum 10-year repayment period (see [Q22](#) and [Q24](#)); and
 - Any other Direct Loan repayment plan, but only payments that are at least equal to the monthly payment amount you would be required to pay under the Standard Repayment Plan with a 10-year repayment period may be counted toward the 120 qualifying payments for PSLF. (*March 14, 2012*)

Q22 I am repaying my Direct Consolidation Loan under the Standard Repayment Plan. Do payments I make under this plan count toward the required 120 payments?

- A22 Generally, no. The Standard Repayment Plan for Direct Consolidation Loans is not the same repayment plan as the 10-year Standard Repayment Plan for Direct Subsidized/Unsubsidized Loans and Direct PLUS Loans, and payments made under the Standard Repayment Plan for Direct Consolidation Loans do not qualify for PSLF purposes.

Under the Standard Repayment Plan for Direct Consolidation Loans, the maximum repayment period may be up to 30 years, depending on the amount of the consolidation loan and the amount of the borrower's other education loan debt. This longer repayment period results in a monthly payment amount that is less than the monthly payment amount required under the 10-year Standard Repayment Plan.

For a monthly payment made under any Direct Loan repayment plan other than IBR, ICR, or the 10-year Standard Repayment Plan to be eligible for PSLF purposes, the payment amount *must not be less than what it would be if the borrower repaid the loan under the 10-year Standard Repayment Plan*. For a Direct Consolidation Loan, the Standard Repayment Plan will result in a scheduled monthly payment that is equal to the monthly payment amount under the 10-year Standard Repayment Plan only if the amount of the consolidation loan and the borrower's other education loan debt is less than \$7,500. (*March 14, 2012*)

Q23 What other Direct Loan repayment plans would give me a monthly payment that is at least equal to the payment that would be required under a 10-year Standard Repayment Plan?

- A23 In some cases, payments made during the later portion of the repayment period under the Graduated Repayment Plan may equal or exceed the payment amount that would be required under a 10-year Standard Repayment Plan. Under the Graduated Repayment Plan, payments start out lower and then gradually increase, generally every two years. (*March 14, 2012*)



Q24 Although payments made under the 10-year Standard Repayment Plan are qualifying payments for PSLF, will I have any remaining balance to be forgiven if I make all my payments under a 10-year plan?

A24 No. Because the 10-Year Standard Repayment Plan requires you to fully pay off your loan within ten years (120 monthly payments), you will not have any remaining loan balance to be forgiven if you make all of your 120 required payments under a 10-Year Standard Repayment Plan.

The 10-year Standard Plan is included as an eligible repayment plan for PSLF purposes so that borrowers may receive credit toward the required 120 PSLF payments for payments they may have made under this plan before switching to either IBR or ICR or after leaving IBR or ICR. (March 14, 2012)

Q25 Is it always true that if I repay my Direct Loans under either the IBR or ICR plans I will have at least some of my Direct Loan amount forgiven?

A25 Not necessarily. Since your income is one factor that is used to determine your monthly loan payment amount under both the IBR and ICR plans, your required monthly payment may increase based on changes in your income. If your loan payment increases, in some cases there may be no remaining loan balance to be forgiven after you have made 120 payments, even if you are repaying under IBR or ICR.

Q26 In summary, what are my best repayment plan options to maximize my PSLF benefits?

A26 While payments under certain other repayment plans may be counted toward the required 120 payments, to receive any forgiveness under the PSLF Program, you will have to make most of your loan payments under the IBR or ICR Plan to have any remaining loan balance after 120 payments have been made. (March 14, 2012)

Q27 If I am repaying my Direct Loans under the IBR Plan, what will happen if I am determined to no longer have a partial financial hardship? Will my monthly payments continue to count for PSLF?

A27 Yes. Although you must have a partial financial hardship to initially qualify for IBR, you may remain in the IBR Plan even if you are later determined to no longer have a partial financial hardship. However, your monthly payment will be adjusted and will no longer be based on your income. As long as you remain in the IBR Plan, your monthly payments will count toward the required 120 payments for PSLF. (March 14, 2012)



START HERE
GO FURTHER
FEDERAL STUDENT AID

Q28 What happens if I can't afford to make my scheduled monthly payments under the IBR Plan or the ICR Plan? Are other repayment options available to me if I want to qualify for PSLF?

A28 Payments made under certain other Direct Loan repayment plans may be counted toward the 120 separate, monthly payments required for PSLF. However, the IBR and ICR Plans generally provide the lowest monthly payments of the PSLF-qualifying plans. Therefore, changing from the IBR or ICR Plan to one of the other PSLF-qualifying repayment plans will generally not result in a lower monthly payment.

If you cannot afford to make your scheduled, monthly payment, you should contact your Direct Loan servicer to discuss deferment or forbearance options that would allow you to temporarily stop making your loan payments or temporarily make them for a lower amount. Although you will no longer be making PSLF-qualifying payments during an authorized period of deferment or forbearance, you will avoid becoming delinquent on repayment of your loan. *(March 14, 2012)*

Q29 Do partial payments under a qualifying repayment plan count towards eligible monthly payments?

A29 If you make multiple partial payments that total at least your full scheduled monthly payment amount, and you make those payments no later than 15 days after the scheduled due date for that month's payment, the series of partial payments will count as a one single qualifying, monthly payment for PSLF.

For example, if your required monthly payment under a PSLF-qualifying repayment plan is \$200 and you make a series of four \$50 payments toward your next, immediately due monthly payment amount, with the 4th payment made no later than 15 days after the scheduled due date for that payment, you would receive credit for one qualifying payment. *(March 14, 2012)*

Q30 I am in the process of rehabilitating a defaulted loan. Will my full, on-time, voluntary payments that I make as part of my loan rehabilitation agreement count toward the required 120 payments for PSLF?

A30 No. Payments made on a defaulted loan under a rehabilitation agreement are not payments that are made under a PSLF-eligible repayment plan and therefore are not PSLF-qualifying payments. *(March 14, 2012)*

Public Service Loan Forgiveness – Qualifying Employment

Q31 Which employers are “public service organizations” that are eligible employers for the PSLF Program?

A31 The term “public service organization” covers a broad range of employers, including any federal, state, or local government organization or agency (see [Q32](#)) and most not-for-profit organizations (see [Q33](#) and [Q34](#)). *(March 14, 2012)*



START HERE
GO FURTHER
FEDERAL STUDENT AID

Q32 What public (government) employers qualify as eligible employers for the PSLF Program?

A32 Any federal government, state government, local government, or tribal government entity is an eligible employer for the PSLF Program. This includes the U.S. military, public elementary and secondary schools, public colleges and universities, public child and family service agencies, and special governmental districts (including entities such as a public transportation, public water, or public bridge district, or a public housing authority). The U.S. government has a directory that includes most government agencies and departments at <http://www.usa.gov/Agencies.shtml>.

If you are employed by a private company under a contract with a government agency, see [Q43](#).

If you work for a foreign government or an international intergovernmental organization, see [Q49](#).

Service as an elected member of the U.S. Congress is not qualifying employment for PSLF. (*March 14, 2012*)

Q33 What not-for-profit organizations qualify as eligible employers for the PSLF Program?

A33 Eligible not-for-profit organizations include those that are tax-exempt under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. These organizations include most private, not-for-profit elementary and secondary schools, private, not-for-profit colleges and universities, and thousands of other organizations, agencies, and charities. Your employer will easily be able to tell you if it is tax-exempt under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. The IRS has a searchable database of 501(c)(3) organizations at <http://www.irs.gov/app/pub-78/>.

If your employer is a not-for-profit organization that is tax-exempt under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, but you perform your work outside of the United States, see [Q47](#).

If your employer is a not-for-profit organization but not a tax-exempt under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, your employment may still qualify if your employer meets the conditions specified in the answer to [Q34](#).

If your employer is engaged in religious activities, see [Q54](#). (*March 14, 2012*)



Q34 Can a private, not-for-profit employer that is not tax-exempt under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code qualify as a public service organization for the PSLF Program?

A34 Yes. If the not-for-profit employer provides one or more of the following public services:

- Emergency management,
- Military service,
- Public safety,
- Law enforcement,
- Public interest law services,
- Early childhood education (including licensed or regulated childcare, Head Start, and state-funded pre-kindergarten),
- Public service for individuals with disabilities and the elderly,
- Public health (including nurses, nurse practitioners, nurses in a clinical setting, and full-time professionals engaged in health care practitioner occupations and health care support occupations),
- Public education,
- Public library services, or
- School library or other school-based services.

However, if the organization is a labor union or a partisan political organization it is not an eligible PSLF employer. If your employer is engaged in religious activities, see [Q54](#).

If your employer operates outside the United States or is a foreign charity that operates within the United States, please see [Q48](#). (March 14, 2012)

Q35 What types of public service jobs will qualify me for loan forgiveness under the PSLF Program?

A35 The specific job that you perform does not matter, as long as you are employed by an eligible public service organization. For example, if you are a full-time employee of a public school system, your employment would meet the requirements for PSLF, regardless of your position (teacher, administrator, support staff, etc.).

If your organization engages in religious activities, see [Q54](#) and [Q55](#) for more information regarding whether your employment qualifies. (March 14, 2012)



START HERE
GO FURTHER
FEDERAL STUDENT AID

Q36 What is considered full-time employment for PSLF?

A36 If you only have one employer, you must meet your employer's definition of full-time. However, for PSLF purposes, that definition must be at least an annual average of 30 hours per week.

If you are a contract employee, see [Q37](#).

If you have more than one employer, see [Q38](#).

See [Q52](#) for information regarding the treatment of vacation and leave time. (*March 14, 2012*)

Q37 If I work for an eligible PSLF employer under a contract for a period of employment that is less than a full year, will my employment be considered full-time for PSLF?

A37 Yes, in some cases. If you have an employment contract or other period of employment of at least 8 months, an average of 30 hours per week over that period of employment is considered full-time.

For example, if you are a teacher with an annual contract for a term of 8 or 9 months, and you work an average of 30 hours per week during that period of employment, it is considered full-time employment for PLSF purposes. (*March 14, 2012*)

Q38 I am working for more than one employer during the same period of time, but am not employed by any one of them on a full-time basis. Will my combined employment be considered full-time for PSLF?

A38 Yes. If you have more than one employer during the same period of time, full-time employment is an annual average of at least 30 hours per week, determined by adding together the annual average number of hours per week for each employer. Each employer must qualify as a public service organization for the employment to be included in determining whether you are employed on a full-time basis.

For example, if you worked for Public Service Organization A for an annual average of 10 hours per week and you concurrently worked for Public Service Organization B for an annual average of 20 hours per week, this would equal a combined annual average of 30 hours per week. (*March 14, 2012*)



Q39 Will the Department of Education track my qualifying employment and qualifying payments while I am working toward meeting the 120 months of required payments for PSLF?

A39 Yes, but only if you periodically submit the *Employment Certification Form* that has been developed by the Department of Education and is available at www.studentaid.ed.gov/publicservice. You are encouraged to submit the *Employment Certification Form* to the Department of Education's PSLF servicer, FedLoan Servicing (PHEAA), annually while you are working to fulfill the employment and payment requirements for PSLF so that you will receive feedback on the eligibility of your employment and payments for a specified employment period.

The PSLF servicer will review each *Employment Certification Form* you submit to confirm that your employer qualifies as a public service organization. If it is your first submission of an *Employment Certification Form*, all of your Department-held loans will be transferred to the PSLF servicer, which will then verify that the loan payments you made during the period covered by the *Employment Certification Form* are qualifying payments. After reviewing your *Employment Certification Form*, the PSLF servicer will tell you how many qualifying payments you have made toward the required 120 payments.

See [Q41](#) for guidance on keeping records of your qualifying employment. (*March 14, 2012*)

Q40 After I submitted the Employment Certification Form, I was notified that I would now have a different servicer for my federally held student loans. Why did my servicer change?

A40 One of the Direct Loan servicers (FedLoan Servicing/PHEAA) has been assigned responsibility for administering PSLF for all Direct Loan borrowers. As a result, if you submit an *Employment Certification Form*, all of your loans held by the Department of Education (including any of your loans that are not eligible for PSLF, such as FFEL Program loans that have been purchased by the Department) will be transferred to FedLoan Servicing. (*March 14, 2012*)

Q41 What kind of documentation do I need to keep to show that I worked for a qualifying PSLF employer while making the required 120 payments on my Direct Loan(s)?

A41 The PSLF servicer will confirm that your employer is a qualifying public service organization based on the information provided on the *Employment Certification Form* that you submit. In some cases, the PSLF servicer may require additional documentation about your qualifying employment. Therefore, you should keep records that identify your employer, demonstrate that your employer meets the definition of a public service organization, show your dates of employment with that employer, and demonstrate that you were a full-time employee.

Examples of such documents include, but are not limited to, IRS W2 forms and paystubs.

You should retain as many documents supporting your qualifying employment as possible. (*March 14, 2012*)



Q42 Is Peace Corps or AmeriCorps service considered qualifying employment for PSLF?

A42 Yes, if you are serving as a full-time Peace Corps or AmeriCorps volunteer.

During their service periods, Peace Corps and AmeriCorps volunteers are generally not required to make monthly payments on their student loans because the volunteers are eligible for a deferment or forbearance on those loans. A volunteer who declines the deferment or forbearance and continues to make monthly payments while serving would be treated like any other borrower working to qualify for PSLF.

Volunteers who receive a deferment or forbearance and who do not make monthly payments during their period of service may still receive credit for their PSLF-qualifying service and for making qualifying payments if they use their Segal Education Award or Peace Corps transition payment to make a lump sum payment on the eligible loan(s) for which they are seeking forgiveness. See [Q19](#) for more information. (March 14, 2012)

Q43 I am employed full-time by a for-profit, private company, doing work for a government agency or for an otherwise qualifying PSLF not-for-profit organization under a contract my company has with the agency or organization. Does this employment qualify for PSLF?

A43 No. You must be directly employed full-time by the public service organization. (March 14, 2012)

Q44 I know that employment with a public school qualifies for PSLF. What about employment with a private school?

A44 Most private elementary and secondary schools and private colleges and universities are not-for-profit entities that are tax-exempt organizations under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. If a private school has this status, it would qualify as a public service organization for PSLF purposes.

If the private school, college, or university is not tax-exempt under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, it may also be a qualifying public service organization as a not-for-profit organization offering public education. However, employment with a for-profit private school, college, or university is not eligible employment for PSLF purposes.

If you are employed by a parochial or other religious school, see [Q54](#) and [Q55](#) for more information regarding whether your employment qualifies for PSLF. (March 14, 2012)

Q45 Do I need to have the same job while making all of the required 120 payments for PSLF and still be eligible for forgiveness?

A45 No. As long as you can provide documentation demonstrating that you were employed full-time by one or more public service organizations during the period of time you made each of the required 120 separate, monthly payments, and at the time you apply for and receive loan forgiveness. (March 14, 2012)



Q46 If I receive my pay in the form of a stipend, will my employment qualify for PSLF?

A46 The form of payment you received from your employer does not matter. What matters is whether you made each of the required 120 separate, monthly payments on time while you were employed full-time by a public service organization. For PSLF purposes, you are considered an employee of an organization if you were hired and paid by that organization.

However, the source of the stipend may be relevant for purposes of determining whether you were employed by a qualifying public service organization. See [Q51](#) for more information. (*March 14, 2012*)

Q47 If I am employed by a not-for-profit organization that is tax-exempt under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, but I perform this employment outside of the United States, would the employment qualify under the PSLF program?

A47 Yes. Full-time employees of organizations that are tax-exempt under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code may perform their work anywhere. (*March 14, 2012*)

Q48 I am a full-time employee of a foreign not-for-profit organization that does not operate in the United States and is not a 501(c)(3) organization under the Internal Revenue Code. Will my employment with this not-for-profit organization qualify for PSLF?

A48 No. If your public service organization does not operate in the U.S. and is not a not-for-profit, tax-exempt organization under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, your employment would not qualify for PSLF purposes.

However, if you work for a foreign not-for-profit organization that is not tax-exempt under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, but which operates within the United States, your employment may qualify if it meets the conditions specified in the answer to [Q34](#).

See [Q56](#) for the definition of “the United States” for PSLF purposes. (*March 14, 2012*)

Q49 Does employment by a foreign government or international, intergovernmental organization (e.g., the United Nations, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, Organization of American States, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, etc.) qualify as public service employment?

A49 No. Only U.S. federal, state, local and tribal government organizations, agencies, or entities qualify as public service organizations for purposes of PSLF.

However, if you work for the United States delegation to an international, intergovernmental organization, such as the U.S. mission to the United Nations, then your employment qualifies because you are employed by the Federal government, not the international, intergovernmental organization. (*March 14, 2012*)



- Q50 Does full-time volunteer service for a public service organization qualify for PSLF?**
- A50 No. Unless you are an AmeriCorps or Peace Corps volunteer, you must be a full-time employee who is hired and paid by a public service organization. (*March 14, 2012*)
- Q51 I am serving a fellowship with a qualifying public service organization. Does this qualify as eligible employment for PSLF?**
- A51 It depends on the particular terms of your fellowship. If your fellowship is one in which you are considered an employee who is hired and paid by the public service organization, the fellowship would qualify. However, if you are not considered an employee of the public service organization, then your work will not qualify for PSLF. (*March 14, 2012*)
- Q52 Are vacation or leave periods considered when determining whether I am a full-time employee?**
- A52 Employer-provided vacation or leave time is equivalent to hours worked in determining whether you meet the full-time employment requirement. This includes leave taken for a qualifying condition under the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993. (*March 14, 2012*)
- Q53 I am the only official that can certify my employment. Can I certify my own qualifying employment?**
- A53 Yes, you may self-certify your own employment if you are the only employee of the organization that can do so. However, the Department reserves the right to request additional documentation concerning your employment for this organization, such as earnings statements, IRS W-2 forms, your application for tax exempt status, or any other documentation required to be filed with the IRS on a period basis regarding the conduct of the organization. (*March 14, 2012*)
- Q54 I am employed full-time by a qualifying not-for-profit organization that engages in religious activities. Does my employment qualify for PSLF?**
- A54 It depends on how much of your job is related to religious activities. When determining full-time public service employment you may not include time spent participating in religious instruction, worship services, or any form of proselytizing. (*March 14, 2012*)
- Q55 I am employed full-time by a qualifying not-for-profit organization that does not engage in religious activities, but some of my job responsibilities are of a religious nature. Does my employment qualify for PSLF?**
- A55 It depends on how much of your job is related to religious activities. When determining full-time public service employment you may not include time spent participating in religious instruction, worship services, or any form of proselytizing. (*March 14, 2012*)



Q56 I am employed full-time by an eligible public service organization in one of the islands that have a legal relationship with the United States. Will that employment qualify for PSLF purposes?

A56 Yes. In addition to the 50 states and the District of Columbia, full-time employment with an otherwise eligible public service organization in American Samoa, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, Guam, the Virgin Islands, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, and the Republic of Palau qualifies. These locations are considered part of the United States for PSLF purposes. (*March 14, 2012*)

Q57 What if I make made my 120th qualifying payment while working for a qualified public service organization, but then leave that job to work for a for-profit corporation before applying for the PSLF benefit. Am I still eligible for PSLF?

A57 No. To be eligible for forgiveness, you must be employed full-time by a qualifying public service organization at the time you made each of the 120 qualifying payments, at the time you apply for loan forgiveness, and at the time you receive loan forgiveness.

Therefore, if you left your job at a public service organization after meeting the PSLF qualifying criteria but before you apply for loan forgiveness, you would not be eligible for forgiveness since you need to be working for the public service organization at the time you apply for and receive forgiveness. However, if you then find employment at another public service organization, you could regain eligibility. (*March 14, 2012*)

Public Service Loan Forgiveness – Receiving the Benefit

Q58 What do I do after I have made all of the 120 qualifying payments?

A58 You will need to submit an application for Public Service Loan Forgiveness.

Please note that the earliest any borrower could qualify for Public Service Loan Forgiveness is October of 2017. Therefore, there is no application for forgiveness yet. The application is under development and will be released closer to the time when the first borrowers will qualify for forgiveness. (*March 14, 2012*)



START HERE
GO FURTHER
FEDERAL STUDENT AID

Q59 When I have made my 120th qualifying payment while working for a qualifying public service organization and am ready to submit my loan forgiveness application, do I need to submit any other documents to the PSLF servicer?

A59 Yes. Even if you had submitted *Employment Certification Forms* to the Department's PSLF servicer during the entire period when you were making your 120 qualifying payments, you will need to submit one additional *Employment Certification Form* to verify your current full-time employment with a qualifying public service organization at the time you submit your PSLF application.

If you did not submit any *Employment Certification Forms*, or if you did not submit *Employment Certification Forms* for some of your employers or for only some of the time, you will need to provide one or more *Employment Certification Forms*, as necessary, to cover your entire period of qualifying public service employment (including your current employment) at the time you submit your loan forgiveness application.

Q60 I made some qualifying payments when I worked for a qualifying public service organization in the past, but I have not made 120 payments, and it is unlikely that I will be employed by a public service organization again in the future. Can I qualify for partial forgiveness based on the number of qualifying payments that I made?

A60 No. There is no partial loan forgiveness. To receive loan forgiveness under the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program, you must make all 120 qualifying payments while providing qualifying public service. (*March 14, 2012*)

Q61 When I submit my application for loan forgiveness after making the 120 required monthly payments, how long will it take the Department's PSLF servicer to process my application and forgive my remaining loan balance?

A61 We estimate that in most cases it will take approximately 30-60 days to process a PSLF application. Processing times may vary depending on factors such as whether documentation of employment was previously submitted for review or only at the time of application for loan forgiveness, the number of employers, gaps in employment or payment history, and any required follow-up with the applicant. (*March 14, 2012*)

Q62 What will happen if the Department's PSLF servicer denies my PSLF application for loan forgiveness?

A62 If the Department determines that you are not eligible for loan forgiveness, you will be notified of this determination and will be provided with the reason you were determined to be ineligible. The Department's PSLF servicer will then resume billing on your loans. The Department will grant forbearance of payments of principal and interest to cover the period when collection activity was suspended during the application processing period. Interest that accrues during a period of suspended collection activity may be capitalized if you are not granted forgiveness.

Capitalization means that we add accrued interest to the unpaid principal amount of your loan. Capitalization increases the unpaid principal balance of your loan, and we will then charge interest on the increased principal amount. (*March 14, 2012*)



START HERE
GO FURTHER
FEDERAL STUDENT AID

Q63 I am a teacher and I plan to apply for federal Teacher Loan Forgiveness after completing five years of qualifying teaching service. Will I also be able to qualify for PSLF?

A63 Yes. However, you may not receive a benefit under both the Teacher Loan Forgiveness Program and the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program for the same period of teaching service. For example, if you make payments on your loans during your five years of qualifying employment for Teacher Loan Forgiveness and then receive loan forgiveness for that service, the payments you made during that five-year period will not count toward the 120 payments required for PSLF. (March 14, 2012)

Q64 If I am employed by an eligible public service organization and receive a student loan repayment benefit from my employer under the Federal Student Loan Repayment Program or under another employer-based student loan repayment program, can I also receive PSLF based on the same employment?

A64 Yes. You may receive benefits under both an employer loan repayment plan, including the Federal Student Loan Repayment Program, and the PSLF Program for the same period of qualifying public service. A monthly payment made by your employer to cover the amount of your required monthly student loan payment under a qualifying PSLF repayment plan will count toward the 120 qualifying payments required for PSLF.

If your employer makes a single lump sum payment that covers multiple monthly student loan payments, it will only count as one qualifying monthly payment, and may affect whether future payments qualify. See [Q16](#) for more information.

More information about the Federal Student Loan Repayment Program may be found on the U.S. Office of Personnel Management's Web site at <http://www.opm.gov/oca/pay/studentloan/>. (March 14, 2012)



START HERE
GO FURTHER
FEDERAL STUDENT AID

Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program

Questions and Answers (Q&As) for Employers

Prepared by Federal Student Aid
U.S. Department of Education
March 14, 2012

The Questions & Answers (Q&As) for Employers that follow provide information about the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) Program that is especially relevant to employers. We have grouped the Q&As into three categories: General Information, Forms, and Qualifying Employment. Following each answer is the date we posted that response. We will include a new date each time we add a question or when we update a previously posted response.

Public Service Loan Forgiveness – General Information

Q65 What is the PSLF Program?

A65 The PSLF Program was established to encourage individuals to enter and continue in full-time public service employment by forgiving the remaining balance of their William D. Ford Federal Direct Loan Program loans (Direct LoansSM) after the Direct Loan borrower has made 120 qualifying monthly payments (after October 1, 2007) while employed full-time by a public service organization. (March 14, 2012)

Public Service Loan Forgiveness – Employment Certification for Public Service Loan Forgiveness Form

Q66 What is the "Employment Certification for Public Service Loan Forgiveness Form" and why am I being asked to complete it?

A66 To be eligible for loan forgiveness under the PSLF Program, a borrower must make 120 qualifying payments while employed full-time by a qualifying public service organization. The *Employment Certification for Public Service Loan Forgiveness Form* collects employment information that is needed to determine whether your organization and the employee meet the employment eligibility requirements for PSLF. (March 14, 2012)

Q67 Am I allowed to release information regarding my employees to the Department of Education or my employee's Direct Loan servicer for PSLF purposes?

A67 Yes. The PSLF *Employment Certification Form* includes the borrower's authorization for you to release information about the status of the employee (e.g. full-time, part-time) and the period of employment that you are certifying. (March 14, 2012)

Q68 What will the information on the *Employment Certification Form* be used for?

A68 The information that you and your employee provide on the *Employment Certification Form* will *only* be used to determine whether your employee's work qualifies for the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program.



- Q69 Do I have the right to obtain information about my employee’s student loans (e.g., the outstanding loan balances, payment status, etc.)?**
- A69 No. The Privacy Act of 1974, as amended, generally prohibits the Federal government from releasing any personal information it retains to third parties. (*March 14, 2012*)
- Q70 My employee (or former employee) submitted to me only an *Employment Certification Form*. Is there also an application for loan forgiveness that needs to be completed and submitted?**
- A70 Borrowers may not apply for loan forgiveness until after they have made 120 separate monthly qualifying loan payments while being employed full-time at a qualifying public service organization, and only payments made after October 1, 2007 count toward the required 120 separate, monthly payments. The earliest date that any borrower will be eligible to apply for PSLF is October 2017. Therefore, no application is currently available. However, the Department developed the *Employment Certification for Public Service Loan Forgiveness Form* so that Direct Loan borrowers could submit information on a periodic basis (recommended annually) so that confirmation of qualifying PSLF employment could be provided to the borrower. (*March 14, 2012*)
- Q71 The *Employment Certification Form* asks for an employment end date, but the employee for whom I am providing the information is currently employed by my organization. Do I leave this field blank?**
- A71 No. If the employee will continue working for your organization after you certify the form, report the employment end date as the date on which you sign the form. You may not certify an employment ending date that is after the date you sign the form. (*March 14, 2012*)
- Q72 I completed an *Employment Certification Form* for one of my employees last year. Why am I being asked to do so again this year?**
- A72 The Department recommends that borrowers obtain certification of qualifying public service employment on an annual basis. This will make the final PSLF application process easier for the borrower. (*March 14, 2012*)

Public Service Loan Forgiveness – Qualifying Employment

- Q73 My organization recently lost its 501(c)(3) status and I just had an employee ask me to complete the ECF. Can I complete the form?**
- A73 Yes, you may complete the form but you may not certify an employment end date beyond the date when your organization lost its 501(c)(3) status. However, your organization may meet the eligibility requirements for other private not-for-profit organizations that provide certain public services, as explained in [Q34](#). If your organization qualified as an eligible public service organization for the borrower’s full period of employment despite the loss of its 501(c)(3) status, you should complete a separate ECF for the period of employment after your organization’s loss of its 501(c)(3) status. (*March 14, 2012*)

Q74 My organization is an otherwise qualifying religiously affiliated not-for-profit organization. Does my employee's work qualify for PSLF?

A74 It depends on how much of your employee's job is related to religious activities. When determining full-time public service employment your employee may not include time spent on participating in religious instruction, worship services, or any form of proselytizing.

When an authorized official signs the *Employment Certification Form*, the official is certifying that the number of hours worked on the form do not include any of the activities above. (March 14, 2012)

Q75 My organization is an otherwise qualifying not-for-profit, but my employee's job duties include participating in religious activities. Does my employee's work qualify for PSLF?

A75 It depends on how much of your employee's job is related to religious activities. When determining full-time public service employment your employee may not include time spent on participating in religious instruction, worship services, or any form of proselytizing.

When an authorized official signs the *Employment Certification Form*, the official is certifying that the number of hours worked on the form do not include any of the activities above. (March 14, 2012)

Q76 May my part-time employees take advantage of PSLF?

A76 Yes, if the employee works for another qualifying public service organization concurrently with your organization and works a combined annual average of at least 30 hours per week.

You do not need to determine whether your employee meets this requirement as long as you appropriately certify that the individual is a part-time employee and provide the annual average number of hours worked per week at your organization. (March 14, 2012)