



Open Educational Resources

---

11-29-2022

## Rural Educators' Toolkit for College Readiness

Valerie Lefor

University of North Dakota, [valerie.l.lefor@und.edu](mailto:valerie.l.lefor@und.edu)

[How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!](#)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://commons.und.edu/oers>



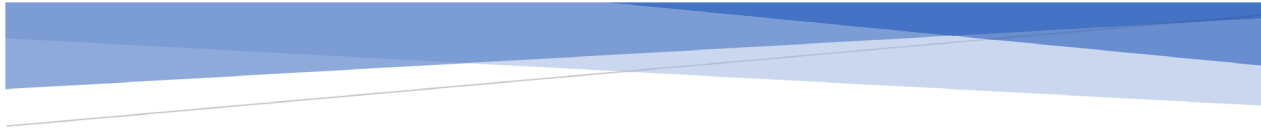
Part of the [Education Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Lefor, Valerie, "Rural Educators' Toolkit for College Readiness" (2022). *Open Educational Resources*. 29.  
<https://commons.und.edu/oers/29>

This Course Material is brought to you for free and open access by UND Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Open Educational Resources by an authorized administrator of UND Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact [und.common@library.und.edu](mailto:und.common@library.und.edu).



**RURAL EDUCATORS' TOOLKIT FOR  
COLLEGE READINESS**

Welcome!

Where do I even start? How do I know that I am giving you or that you are getting accurate information? Why focus on rural students? These are valid questions and I am here to let you know that you are not alone. The road to considering what comes next following high school experiences is a big one. Whether you are a student yourself, a family member, another concerned educator, I want you to know you have a place here. It is okay to not know what you don't know or where to start. Let me help you.

My name is Valerie and I grew up in a really small town in North Dakota. My graduating class was 17 students. The school that I attended was a K-12 school with 250 students' total. Why do I share this with you? I am telling you this because I want you to know that I have lived in a community probably not unlike the you are from. I understand what it is like to have one restaurant in a town and the closest Wal-Mart and movie theater to be almost an hour away. It can be really easy to consider all of the ways in which my small town growing up didn't have the same elements that someone in city had. In fact, If I am being honest, I spent days dreaming about getting out of that place. It felt like everyone know everything. But now that I have been on the other side of it, I have come to learn what was so special about that experience. I have learned that the value of the community and what it means to have values and roots that have shaped me into becoming the person I was meant to be. There was so much that I gained from my experiences growing up in a small place and that is why I strive to be able to give back to those of you in that place now.

The way that this guide is structured is so that each section will start with information for students, followed up by information for family members, and concluding with information for educators/other concerned adults who can assist students in these processes. Note: while the focus of this guide is on preparing for the college experience, it is important to recognize that there are other post high school experiences that may make sense for students.

So, I hope that you will come along with me on the journey. This toolkit has been created to help you consider and think about what comes next.

## **Table of Contents**

### **I. Student**

- 1) Preparing for the Future and Life After High School
- 2) Federal Student Aid
- 3) Postsecondary Accreditation

### **II. Family**

- 1) Preparing for the Future and Life After High School
- 2) Federal Student Aid
- 3) Postsecondary Accreditation

### **III. Educator**

- 1) Preparing for the Future and Life After High School
- 2) Federal Student Aid
- 3) Postsecondary Accreditation
- 4). Example College Prep Syllabus

### **IV. Wrap-Up**

## **Overview and Learning Objectives of the Rural Educator’s Toolkit:**

Upon review of this guide, individuals will be able to:

- Gain exposure to materials for preparation for postsecondary education regarding specific activities actions that students can take in this process to prepare for college
- Enhance their understanding of Federal Student Aid and sources of funding that can help to pay for postsecondary education
- Increase knowledge of postsecondary accreditation by explaining the value of accreditation through:
  - identifying what it means to be a recognized accreditation agency,
  - enhancing understanding of criteria for professional and state certification and licensure,
  - providing the public and the private sector with a basis for making determinations about best options for their future educational journeys

## STUDENT SECTION:

### Preparing for the Future and Life After High School

There are many possibilities that one's life can take following their high school experience. The truth is that it is your life and your decision to make. It is not uncommon to feel some influence on that decision by those around you. Is there an expectation that you will take over the family farm or business? Is the idea of college something that interests you but you wouldn't have a clue on where to start to learn about it, let alone pay for it? Is the military calling your name? Have you envisioned yourself at becoming proficient and mastering a skill that can lead to job? Are you frankly just unsure?

All of these are valid considerations. The important thing at this moment is that you are asking these questions and are considering what comes next. If you are early to the process, there are many steps that you can take along the way to help you prepare for what comes next.

Here are some tips and tricks that can help you to learn more:

- 1) Talk with people about what they do and how they decided what on their professions and paths. This may be your family members, teachers, coaches, and friends that can give you valuable insights.
- 2) Understand what classes are offered at your school, what options are available to you, and how that relates to your future goals. For those thinking about college, there may be variations of [Advanced Placement](#), [Dual Enrollment](#), or [International Baccalaureate](#) classes that could be considerations for classes. These classes are advanced offering beyond the high school level that allows for students to possibly earn college credit. For those thinking about career pathways consider career and technical education offerings such as those in agriculture education, family consumer science, or related to other occupations.
- 3) Consider if there are other community opportunities for you to learn about career fields and potential college majors. In my small town, we had a partnership with the local ambulance to give students exposure to learning what it means to be an Emergency Medical Technician (EMT). Not only was this helpful for the community to have extra assistance and volunteers, it benefited the student to be able to explore if a medical career was something of interest to them.
- 4) Join a club or an organization, sports team, or volunteer for something that interests you. My small town that centered on agriculture had very active [FFA](#) and [4-H](#) organizations. Other schools have [Family, Career, Community Leaders of America](#) (FCCLA), [Future Business Leaders of America](#) (FBLA), or [Distributive Education Clubs of America](#) (DECA) that can help you to learn leadership, problem solving, and critical thinking skills.
- 5) Have fun. While considering your next steps is important, so is the experience that you have while you are going through it.

## Federal Student Aid

College can be expensive. Have you considered the way in which you and/or your family will have money to pay for college? Taking time to consider some information ways that you may pay for your expenses is important. This is where federal student aid may be beneficial for you. There are several different types of federal funding that may be available for you including grants (money you do not have to pay back), loans (money you do have to pay back), work-study (money you earn through working). There may also be other nonfederal sources for money for college including state or institutional aid and scholarships (money you also don't have to pay back). Some people create educational savings plans, sometimes called [529 plans](#) to anticipate costs of college. There are several [checklists](#) that can guide you on key steps you can take throughout your school years to understand and plan for paying for college.

In order to apply for federal student aid, one must apply using the [Free Application for Federal Student Aid](#) or the FAFSA. It is important to note that this is always free, you should never have to pay to complete or have someone complete this form for you. There is some [help](#) that you access that will assist you understanding the process for completing this form. In order to be able to apply for federal student aid, you should verify that you are eligible, more information on that can be found on this [website](#).

Another resource that may be interesting to you is College Navigator. [The College Navigator website](#) allows you to look at institutions that you are considering and allow you to do a comparison between them. There is key information that allows for you learn about the various programs, level of award, and institution type. Many institutions will list the average tuition and fee costs. This will allow you to gain some insights into different possibilities for furthering your education.

When thinking about possible majors, consider the jobs that you may wish to get as a result of gaining additional education on that topic and what career field you may want to go into following college. Look on [websites](#) to learn about the expected salary for the field you are choosing. For example, you may wish to look at considerations for on the [Career Exploration and Skill Development website](#). Considering the projected salary in conjunction with the cost of attendance at your school and what funding is expected from your family, will help you to enhance your financial literacy of the amount of money that you may be able to take in loans.

## Postsecondary Accreditation

If you started to think about colleges, one thing that you may want to consider is the accreditation status of the institution that you are thinking of attending. Accreditation is a formal review process established to represent quality of an institution or program. An accreditation status helps one to know whether that school meets standards set by a third-party entity, the accreditation agency. Different agencies establish these standards to help the institution or program to have guidelines that they need to meet

There are two types of postsecondary accreditation: institutional and programmatic. Institutional accreditation is a status given to the entire entity, whereas programmatic accreditation is given for a specific programs or field. For example, [University of North Dakota](#) has institutional accreditation from the [Higher Learning Commission](#) (HLC) and the nursing program has programmatic accreditation from the [Commission on the Collegiate Nursing Education](#) (CCNE). In order for the school to be able to give federal student aid dollars to its students, it must have institutional accreditation from an agency recognized by the US Department of Education.

There are several accreditation agencies that do not have recognition from the US Department of Education and that may mean that they do not need to. For example, the [Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology](#) (ABET) is known for their accreditation of Engineering programs and graduation from an ABET accredited program is essential for many engineering jobs. ABET doesn't have a connection to the federal government. However, if you want to attend school for engineering and receive federal student aid, be sure that the ABET accredited program resides in an institution that has an institutional accreditation from a recognized agency. As a student, it is important to pay attention to requirements for your field for job statuses and to know the accreditation status of those institutions and colleges that you plan to attend.

You can find a list of recognized accreditation agencies by the US Department of Education by visiting their [accreditation website](#).



## **FAMILY SECTION:**

### **Preparing for the Future and Life After High School**

There are many possibilities that your child may consider following their high school experience. You may have some ideas about what that may be, but it is important that they know that you support them on this process. Some students may be considering college, others may want to take over the family business/farm, yet others will seek career or [military pathways](#). All of these are valid considerations and it is okay. The important thing at that you can do at this point is help your child to consider all of their options.

The following are some ideas for assisting your child:

- 1) If possible, start to think about or continuing saving for your child's future. If your child selects a college pathway, it will be important to consider options for financing that future. Explore [529 plans](#), scholarships, institutional and state level aid, and [federal student aid](#).
- 2) Talk with your child about your own experiences and help them explore their interests in future options. Be open to possibilities and allow for a space for asking questions.
- 3) Support your child in their schoolwork and engage their teachers, coaches, and other trusted adults to develop insights into how they are doing. Encourage your child to explore taking [different types of classes](#) and ones that are meaningful to them.
- 4) Encourage your child to join a club, sports team, or to [volunteer](#) in the community. By allowing your child to be involved in activities like these they will enhance their skills, abilities, and explore interests that can change their future pathways. For example, a student who joins a sports team may learn skills related to teamwork and collaboration. These skills can be useful later in life.
- 5) Enjoy this time with your child.

### **Federal Student Aid**

Are you concerned about paying for your child's educational expenses? I encourage you to read the student section about federal student aid. In this section, I will further give you some information that may be helpful for you.

One particular useful tool is the [Federal Student Aid Estimator](#). This is a valuable tool as it will help you to estimate the cost of expenses for you student to attend a career school or college following high school.

It was also explained that the [Free Application for Federal Student Aid](#) (FAFSA) is a form that the student can complete to be eligible for federal student aid. This information is transmitted to the schools that are listed on the form. The school will review the student's information and will

put together an ‘award package’ that will help them know what types of aid (grants, loans, work-study) that the student is eligible for. Depending on the student’s age, they may be considered a dependent student. If that is the case, the student will need to provide parental information along with their own information apply for aid. You can learn more about what it means to be [dependent vs independent student](#).

Some institutions of higher education participate in other programs that can help to support the student while on campus. The [federal TRIO programs website](#) (n.d.) indicates that their programs are targeted to serve and assist variety of students including “low-income individuals, first-generation college students, and individuals with disabilities to progress through the academic pipeline from middle school to postbaccalaureate programs.” The [Upward Bound program website](#) (n.d.) states that it “provides fundamental support to participants in their preparation for college entrance. The program provides opportunities for participants to succeed in their precollege performance and ultimately in their higher education pursuits.” These programs are usually offered at the college or university to assist students and their families in their college experience-both in gaining access and in staying enrolled.

Additional Resources may be found on the [Consumer Financial Protection Bureau website](#), the [CSS Profile Website](#), and [National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators website](#). (NASFAA).

### **Postsecondary Accreditation**

Accreditation statuses are of vital importance for the institutions or colleges that you student is considering attending. It would be helpful for you to pay attention to what the status of any schools that your child is looking at. You can start by reviewing the information that is included in the student section of this guide. When a particular institution or college is at risk of losing accreditation, that information is required to be reported to the [Database of Accredited Postsecondary Institutions and Programs](#) (DAPIP). I encourage you to search for the schools and find out if any specific concerns with the schools that are being considered. If you notice that an institution or college has listed that they are have been placed on probation, school cause, or something similar that may be a reason to pause for concern. Sometimes an accreditation agency will take an action against an institution to help monitor or allow it pay attention to a particular situation. In more extreme cases, adverse actions are taken. This will be a method of bringing attention to the school that there is a significant issue that needs to be addressed or they may lose their accreditation status. Research the reason for that action and try to understand if this is something that one should worry about.

Another aspect that you can help your student to do is to inquire about accreditation when learning about the institution and program in their college search process. Many accreditation agencies require that information to be visible on their webpages. By looking at this information, that will help you to know that a third party has reviewed the program or institution. Also be on the lookout for potentially any recruitment tactics that seem too good to be true. Be aware of guarantees of jobs following graduation and other misleading advertising. These are few and far

between, but it is important to conduct due diligence when looking at future career opportunities for your child.

The Higher Learning Advocates have created a [document](#) that explains accreditation in greater detail.

## EDUCATOR SECTION:

### Preparing for the Future and Life After High School

As an educator, there are many expectations that are placed on you. When you are part of a rural school district, you may have multiple roles that you are filling. Let me thank you for the contribution that you make to your student whether directly in the classroom, as an advisor, concerned adult, or coach. The young people in your life are shaped by your guidance and direction. In an effort to maintain a balance between the different aspects that you already have and the additional assistance that you can provide to your student.

Here are a few thoughts that may help:

- 1) Share your own journey with your students. Let them know and understand why you value education and how it has shaped your own journey. Students are looking for positive role models and you have an opportunity to be that.
- 2) Ask questions of your students to learn about their [interests, passions, and dreams](#). Share (when appropriate) with family members and help to guide them on pathways that allow for exploration of these ideas. For example, asking students to think about career fields that they are interested in, as well as about the impact that they would like to make on others.
- 3) Recognize the value of student organizations, sports, and [volunteering](#). Provide skill-based learning and opportunities for practicing/exploring those skills. Let students make mistakes and help them to learn from those experiences. For example, a student participating in sports will allow them to learn about teamwork.
- 4) Promote academic pathways that help the student to be successful in their future. Set high expectations, but recognize that each student is unique.
- 5) Provide emotional and positive support for your student.

### Federal Student Aid

There are many resources that exist for those who want to learn about federal student aid and to share with others about it. One key resource that is available is the [FSA Toolkit for Counselors](#). While this is geared at those who may have a more formal role in conducting sessions about federal student aid, it is not limited to only those. The toolkit also helps to talk about ways in which any educator can conduct further outreach by hosting events, giving you specific resources to host those events, and information that you can use on social media. The Federal Student Aid office has created Public Service Announcements that can be shared, as well as gives a place where you can find some College Access Organization Best Practices. There are many opportunities in resources and training materials on this website as well. The site contains training offered by the [US Department of Education](#), as well as training offered by state agencies and nongovernment organizations.

Some organizations worth exploring to get additional information include the [National Association for College Admission Counseling \(NACAC\)](#)., [the American School Counselor Association](#)., [the National Council for Community and Education Partnerships](#), and [The Institute of College Access and Success \(TICAS\)](#).

At the end of this guide are other curriculum materials that may be suited for the classroom including a sample syllabus that can be used to discuss college readiness with students and some lesson plans that can be incorporated into the classroom. You never know what might spark an interest in a student. By having access to materials that can help the student to make informed decisions, you are creating a place for them to have knowledge for deciding on a future pathway that makes sense and is informed.

Another idea may be to consider partnering with a [local group, state entity, or college](#) nearby to find out what information that they already have available for students. If you are able to connect with these groups, you may be able to leverage their expertise related to this field. Many groups are anxious to connect with students. It may be that you are serving as that missing connector between them and the student or family members.

### **Postsecondary Accreditation**

Just like federal student aid, it is possible to host events that talk about postsecondary accreditation with your students. Conducting outreach to host an event, make a presentation, and sharing through social media can help students and parents to gain valuable insights into accreditation processes. An Overview of Accreditation Higher Education in the United States can be found at [this website](#).

Similarly, there are lots of resources that exist and training that can help to support students to learn about accreditation. Information from the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) can be found on [their website](#). The [National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity](#) (NACIQI) meets twice a year to review the status of accreditation agencies for recognition with the US Department of Education.

There may be additional training offered by local, or state agencies or nongovernment organizations that would offer additional insights into these processes for your students. Many of which may be offered virtually. Additional information may be included in the curriculum materials for trainers below.

## Example College Prep Syllabus

The following is a sample syllabus that help students to learn more about the topics covered in this Toolkit:

### COLLEGE PREP SYLLABUS SAMPLE

(Instructor Contact Information)

(Location and Hours)

#### COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course has been designed to offer insights and prepare for a college pathway. Students will explore their own interests to help them to identify potential programs and schools that may be of interest to them. Students will then use that information to learn about the cost of attendance and the mechanisms for paying for college. Finally, students will review the accreditation status of each of the institutions or programs selected.

#### COURSE PHILOSOPHY

To prepare students to become life-long learners and upstanding citizens who utilize effective written and oral communication to obtain college readiness.

#### COURSE OBJECTIVES

Upon completing this course, the students should be able to:

- consider a variety of institutions and programs for future college pathways
- engage in activities that help to build an understanding of how to pay for school
- have developed a comprehension of postsecondary accreditation
- compose a variety of written compositions with a clear understanding of college considerations
- evaluate, synthesize, and present ideas with supporting information and
- listen and respond to the ideas of others while contributing original ideas during conversations and in group settings

#### BEHAVIORAL EXPECTATIONS

Students are expected to behave in a manner that is appropriate for an academic environment by maintain respect for teachers and fellow students. Students should be on time for class and complete required assignments.

#### INSTRUCTIONAL RESOURCES

Please note that the following resources are not exhaustive. The instructor reserves the right to add other readings as needed. \*There is no textbook assigned to the College Prep course and materials will be introduced from various resources throughout the years such as:

- Student Aid Website: [studentaid.gov](http://studentaid.gov)
- US Department of Education Accreditation Website: [www.ed.gov/accreditation](http://www.ed.gov/accreditation)

#### GRADING POLICY

The College Prep program goal is to support student learning. Grades will be calculated the following ways:

- 25% Tests and Major Projects

- 25% Reflection Assignments
- 50% Daily Assignments and Participation

#### LATE WORK POLICY

Work is considered late when it is not submitted on its original due date during the scheduled class period. Late assignments will be lose 10% of grade for each day late and will not be allowed to be submitted after being 5 days late.

#### MAKEUP WORK POLICY

It is the responsibility of the student to obtain missed work before an extended absence period (typically three days) or upon student's return to school.

#### SEMESTER TOPICS TO BE COVERED

Learning Styles Inventory

Academic Resumes Updated

Sample College Essays

University/College Research

Postsecondary Terminology

Federal Student Aid: Grants, Loans, and Work-study

Scholarships and Postsecondary Accreditation

## **Example Activity: Postsecondary Accreditation**

### **Fact Vs. Myth**

**The goal of postsecondary accreditation is to ensure that institutions of higher education meet acceptable levels of quality.**

Fact  
Myth

**Accrediting agencies are private educational associations that develop evaluation criteria and conduct peer evaluations to assess whether or not those criteria are met.**

Fact  
Myth

**The US Department of Education accredits colleges and universities in the United States.**

Fact  
Myth

**There are two types of accreditations: institutional and specialized, sometimes called programmatic.**

Fact  
Myth

**The accountability triad includes private accreditation agencies, the federal government, and the institutional oversight.**

Fact  
Myth

**The University of North Dakota is fully accredited from the Higher Learning Commission, as well 34 school or college level accreditations.**

Fact  
Myth



# **Postsecondary Accreditation Answer Key**

## **Fact Vs. Myth**

**The goal of postsecondary accreditation is to ensure that institutions of higher education meet acceptable levels of quality.**

**Fact**

Myth

**Accrediting agencies are private educational associations that develop evaluation criteria and conduct peer evaluations to assess whether or not those criteria are met.**

**Fact**

Myth

**The US Department of Education accredits colleges and universities in the United States.**

Fact

**Myth**

**There are two types of accreditations: institutional and specialized, sometimes called programmatic.**

**Fact**

Myth

**The accountability triad includes private accreditation agencies, the federal government, and the institutional oversight.**

Fact

**Myth**

**The University of North Dakota is fully accredited from the Higher Learning Commission, as well 34 school or college level accreditations.**

**Fact**

Myth

## **V. Wrap-Up**

I hope that this guide has been helpful to you. In summary, the information that was provided in this guide addressed resources for students, parents, and educators. Information was shared about college preparation, about paying for college, and postsecondary accreditation. Educators were provided with a sample syllabus that could be utilized to offer a class related to college preparation. There are many resources that are constantly being developed and shared related to these topics, so I further encourage you to take some time and see what information is available.

If you have any suggestions or ideas for improvements, please feel free to reach out to me. I wish you the very best whether that is in your own personal journey, your child's journey, or with the students you are helping to support!

## References

4-H Organization. (2022). [www.4-h.org](http://www.4-h.org).

Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology. (2021). <https://www.abet.org/>.

American Association of Colleges of Nursing. (n.d.). <https://www.aacnnursing.org/CCNE>.

American School Counselor Association. (n.d.). Retrieved from:

<https://www.schoolcounselor.org/>

Career Exploration and Skill Development Website. (n.d.). <https://youth.gov/youth-topics/youth-employment/career-exploration-and-skill-development>.

College Board (n.d.). AP Courses and Exams. <https://apstudents.collegeboard.org/course-index-page>.

Consumer Financial Protection Bureau website. (n.d.).

<https://www.consumerfinance.gov/paying-for-college/>.

Council for Higher Education Accreditation. (n.d.). [www.chea.org](http://www.chea.org).

CSS Profile Website. (n.d.). <https://cssprofile.collegeboard.org/>

Database of Accredited Postsecondary Institutions and Programs. (n.d.).

<https://ope.ed.gov/dapip/#/home>.

Distributive Education Clubs of America. (2022). <https://www.deca.org>.

Federal Student Aid. (n.d.). Dependency Status. <https://studentaid.gov/apply-for-aid/fafsa/filling-out/dependency>.

Federal TRIO website. (n.d.). <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/trio/index.html>

Flynn, Kathryn (2021). What is Dual Enrollment?

<https://www.savingforcollege.com/article/what-is->

[dualenrollment/#:~:text=Dual%20enrollment%20allows%20high%20school,money%20o  
n%20total%20college%20costs.](#)

Free Application for Federal Student Aid. (2022). <https://studentaid.gov/h/apply-for-aid/fafsa>.

Future Business Leaders of America. (2022). <https://www.fbلا-pbl.org/>.

Higher Learning Advocates. (2018). *101: Accreditation*. <https://higherlearningadvocates.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Accreditation-101-FINAL.pdf>.

Higher Learning Commission. (n.d.). <https://www.hlcommission.org/>.

Military Pathways. (2022). <https://www.military.com/author/military-pathways>.

National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity. (n.d.).  
<https://sites.ed.gov/naciqi/>.

National Center for Education Statistics. (2022). College Navigator Website.  
<https://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/>.

National FFA Organization (2022). [www.ffa.org](http://www.ffa.org).

National Family, Career, and Community Leaders of America. (2022). [www.fcclainc.org](http://www.fcclainc.org).

Seigel, D. (2022). The Complete List of IB Courses and Classes.

<https://blog.prepscholar.com/the-complete-list-of-ib-courses-and-classes>.

The Institute of College Access and Success (TICAS). <https://ticas.org/about-us/>.

US Department of Education's College Prep Checklist. (2021).

<https://studentaid.gov/sites/default/files/college-prep-checklist.pdf>.

US Securities and Exchange Commission. (2018). An Introduction to 529 Plans.

<https://www.sec.gov/reportspubs/investor-publications/investorpubsintro529htm.html>

University of North Dakota. (2022). [www.und.edu](http://www.und.edu).

Upward Bound website. (n.d.). <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/trioupbound/index.html>.

Volunteer.gov Website. (n.d.). [www.volunteer.gov](http://www.volunteer.gov).