**Best Practices Guide:**

Supporting Students with Next Steps Idaho, Scholarship Idaho & Apply Idaho Accounts

Overview of Platforms

| **Platform** | **Purpose** |
| --- | --- |
| **Next Steps Idaho** | College and career planning platform for students (grades 8–12). Includes inventories, planning tools, and postsecondary pathways. |
| **Apply Idaho** | Free common application to Idaho’s colleges and universities. Launches each fall (typically Oct 1). |
| **Scholarship Idaho** | Portal for state scholarships like the Idaho Opportunity Scholarship and Idaho LAUNCH. Opens in the fall with deadlines typically in spring. |

Ideal Student Timeline for Engagement

| **Grade** | **Timeframe** | **Action** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **11** | Fall–Spring | Create Next Steps Idaho account and explore discovery tools |
| **12** | October | Create Apply Idaho account, learn about Apply Idaho schools |
| **12** | Fall | Host college application events; participate in Idaho College Month (Oct.) |
| **12** | Fall-Spring | Submit college applications via Apply Idaho |
| **12** | Fall-Spring | Create Scholarship Idaho account and apply for state scholarships |

**Step-by-Step Account Creation & Strategy**

Step 1: Start with Next Steps Idaho

**Best Timing:** Beginning of junior year (or earlier)

1. **Purpose & Prep**
	* Introduce students to the platform as a *career and college exploration tool*.
	* Emphasize it as the foundation for their future preparation, planning, and overall discovery center related to college, career, and scholarships.
2. **Account Creation**
	* Guide students to Next Steps Idaho and create an account using a **personal email** (their school email will be their secondary backup verification).
	* Encourage them to write down their email and password.
	* Follow all instructions and complete each text box of the account creation process.
3. **Engagement Activities**
	* Use the "Self-Assessment" tools (Career Cluster, Work Values, etc.) during their junior year.
	* Have students build a career plan and explore postsecondary pathways.
	* Encourage saving career interests, college lists, and scholarships to their dashboard.
	* Students should utilize the college discovery center to learn about Idaho schools in preparation for the Apply Idaho application (junior &senior year).
4. **Tip for Counselors**
	* Set aside time during advisory or classroom guidance to walk through features.
		1. Many students may have engaged with Next Steps Idaho during middle school or junior high. Still, it will be important to reinforce what tools they will engage with related to Apply Idaho and Scholarship Idaho.
		2. College discovery is recommended to take place early on in their high school journeys. It important students use the College Discovery Center on Next Steps Idaho to learn about the programs, resources, and general information about the Idaho institutions they will see during their Apply Idaho application.
	* Use lesson plans or guided activities from the Next Steps Idaho Educator Toolkit and Curriculum/Resources pages.

Step 2: Move to Apply Idaho

**Best Timing:** October-December (application opens October 1)

1. **Account Access**
	* Students can access Apply Idaho from the Next Steps Idaho website
		1. Click on their profile icon and then select the Apply Idaho external pop-up to log into
		2. At this time we do not have a single-sign on platform.
	* Students will create an Apply Idaho account. They can use the same email and password as their Next Steps Idaho account.
		1. IMPORTANT: Students should not utilize their school email address for this account.
2. **Before Application**
	* Utilize the Apply Idaho checklist – share with students.
		1. Students should know their mailing address, parent information, EDUID number, etc. for personal information populated into the application.
	* Confirm students are aware of their unweighted GPA and ACT/SAT scores for them to confirm in the application.
		1. This information is shared with the state over the summer from your school district.
	* Help students review their college list on Next Steps Idaho and assist students with learning about the Apply Idaho schools.
3. **Application Process**
	* Students will create their account following the guided instructions on the account creation page.
		1. Note- all textboxes are case-sensitive and should have no extra characters entered.
		2. Students cannot use nicknames or other names outside of their legal first and last name during the account set-up.
	* Walk through the application pages: personal info, academic history, selecting institutions, supplemental questions, and final review.
	* Students have access to an application guide on the Next Steps Idaho website.
	* Emphasize this is a free application students are using to send one application to the Idaho colleges of their choosing. *(Students can apply to any participating college regardless of their Idaho Campus Choice status.)*
4. **Post-Submission Tips**
	* Ensure students check email regularly for follow-up from institutions.
	* When students receive an acceptance, they will then make their decision on which institution they eventually plan to enroll in.
5. **Tip for Counselors**
	* Host "Apply Idaho Days" in the fall — invite reps from Idaho colleges for on-site application support. This can be the same as any college application event.
	* Participate in the Idaho College Month challenge and utilize support from the Apply Idaho manager regarding the application process.
	* Use Counselor Suite Idaho to review with students their Idaho Campus Choice status as well as which institutions they applied to.

Step 3: Complete Scholarship Idaho

**Best Timing:** Fall of Senior Year (after college applications)

1. **Account Creation**
	* Students can access Scholarship Idaho from the Next Steps Idaho website.
	* Encourage using the *same personal email and password* as Next Steps and Apply Idaho for consistency.
	* Students will need to know their EDUID and Social Security Number (SSN).
	* Students will receive a verification email to verify their account after they complete the account creation. This is required to submit scholarships.
2. **Gather Materials**
	* Students will need:
		+ FAFSA completed (Idaho Opportunity Scholarship)
		+ High school transcript (unofficial is fine initially) – if required for the scholarship
		+ Essay and recommendation letter(s) – if required for the scholarship
3. **Application Steps**
	* Create an account and complete the general profile. Verify account.
	* Choose scholarships to apply for (e.g., Idaho Opportunity Scholarship).
	* Upload documents and complete each application’s specific requirements.
	* Utilize the Scholarship Idaho application guide located on the Next Steps Idaho website.
4. **Important Dates**
	* Track and share state scholarships with the Aid Tracker on Next Steps Idaho.
	* Remind students to check their email often for updates and awards.
5. **Tip for Counselors**
	* Host FAFSA workshops to support students in applying for financial aid.
		+ Utilize FAFSA support to also assist with scholarship applications.
	* Provide a checklist and sample responses for common essay prompts.
	* Provide samples of resumes for scholarship applications.

General Best Practices for Counselors

* **Email Consistency**: Always have students use personal, non-school email addresses that they will keep post-graduation.
* **Password Management**: Encourage a system (e.g., password tracker or vault) to store account info.
* **Use Group Sessions**: Create workshops or set class time for supporting students with these platforms.
	+ Work with your district IT to ensure Next Steps Idaho, Apply Idaho, and Scholarship Idaho are not blocked from school laptops.
	+ For event support with either FAFSA, Scholarship Idaho, Next Steps Idaho, or Apply Idaho, you can contact the program managers and regional coordinators.
		- College and Career Access Team: <https://boardofed.idaho.gov/board-facts/staff-contact-us/>
* **Follow Up**: Use reminders, calendar invites, or school announcements to nudge students at key deadlines.
* **Integrate with School Work**: Connect platform tasks with classroom assignments (e.g., use Next Steps assessments in career units).
* **Utilize Best Practice Guide**: This guide has set the order for the best approach to engaging students with each platform and tips to support each account.