

Beyond the Sparkle: Finding AI's Real Value at Work

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The real value sits beneath the sparkle

PROMPTS

One request
One output

PROJECTS

Shared context
Connected work

SKILLS

Reusable process
Consistent output

Today: break down the work, find the right opportunity, and build a repeatable solution.

THE SETTING

Responsible use comes first



Responsible AI use in financial aid



- ◆ **Protect** Keep student and institutional data out of unapproved tools.
- ◆ **Verify** Check facts, requirements, dates, calculations, and links before use.
- ◆ **Disclose** Follow institutional expectations for transparency and documentation.
- ◆ **Own** People remain responsible for decisions, approvals, and communications.

AI may support the work. Financial aid professionals remain accountable for the result.

JOB DECOMPOSITION

**A job description is the rough
stone**



Financial Aid Counselor: the source description



- ◆ Provide consistent, high-quality customer service on the FAFSA and financial aid options.
- ◆ Support financial aid administration, including need analysis, aid offers, reconsideration, cost of attendance, verification, loans, SAP, and R2T4.
- ◆ Use financial aid systems, websites, and data reports for processing.
- ◆ Collaborate with financial aid, enrollment management, and campus partners.
- ◆ Represent the office during campus and community outreach.



“Provide consistent and high-quality customer service on the FAFSA.”

- ◆ What starts the work?
- ◆ What information arrives?
- ◆ What actions can we observe?
- ◆ Where does judgment occur?
- ◆ What output completes the work?

The job decomposition lens



TRIGGER

What starts the work?

ACTION

What does the employee do?

OUTPUT

What gets created or communicated?

HUMAN ROLE

What needs review or approval?

INPUT

What information is received?

DECISION

Where does judgment occur?

RISK

What could go wrong?

FAFSA inquiry: observable work



Receive the student's question



Locate applicable approved guidance



Identify the question being asked



Draft a response



Review the information supplied



Check accuracy and clarity



Identify missing information



Send, document, or escalate [VALIDATE]

OPPORTUNITY SELECTION

**Cut the work before choosing
the tool**



Tasks, decisions, and judgment



GOOD SUPPORT CANDIDATES

- ◆ Draft a first version
- ◆ Organize supplied information
- ◆ Create a checklist
- ◆ Adapt approved content by audience
- ◆ Review readability and tone

KEEP PEOPLE IN CONTROL

- ◆ Interpret unusual circumstances
- ◆ Determine eligibility
- ◆ Approve exceptions
- ◆ Resolve conflicting guidance
- ◆ Send high-impact communications

The opportunity filter



REPEAT

Does the work happen
often?



STRUCTURE

Can we describe the
inputs and output?



RISK

What happens if the
output is wrong?



JUDGMENT

Does the work require
discretion?



REVIEW

Can a person verify it
efficiently?

The best first projects combine frequent work, clear inputs, useful outputs, manageable risk, and practical human review.

Workshop: decompose one responsibility



Choose one responsibility from your own role.

- 1 What triggers the work?
- 2 What inputs do you receive?
- 3 List each observable action with a concrete verb.**
- 4 Mark every decision or judgment point.
- 5 Name the final output.
- 6 Identify risk and required human review.

If someone cannot observe or check the action, decompose it again.

FAFSA COMPLETION

Build one project around a real outcome



The FAFSA completion project



GOAL

Help more students complete the FAFSA through coordinated events, communication, and follow-up.

AUDIENCE

Students and families

ACTIVITIES

FAFSA Night, reminders, partner outreach, follow-up

INPUTS

Dates, locations, deadlines, staffing, approved guidance

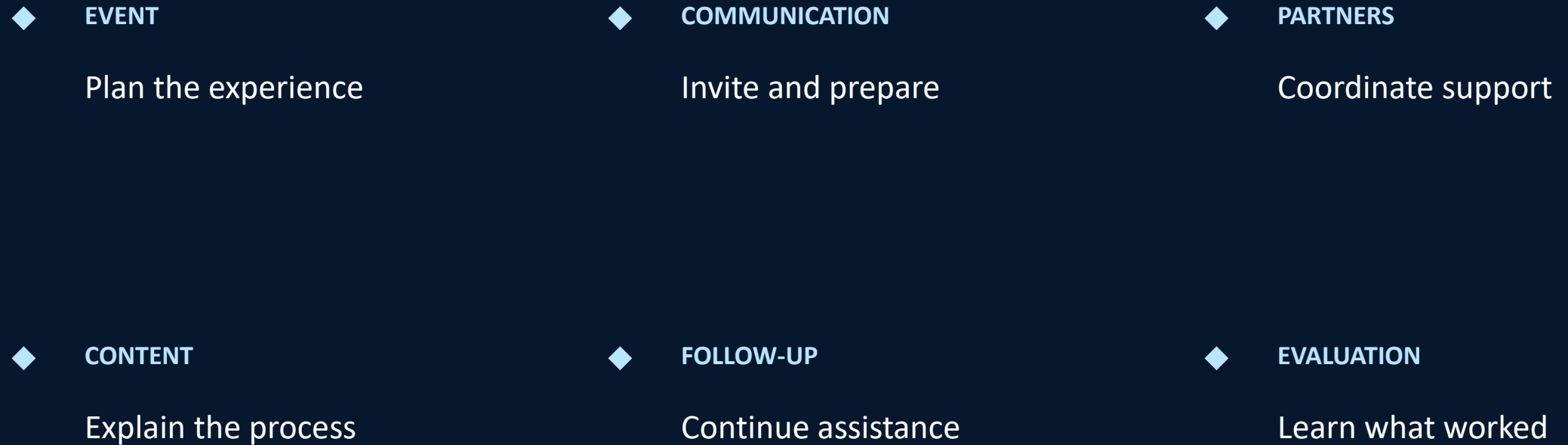
OUTPUTS

Event plan, messages, checklists, FAQs

MEASURES

Attendance, engagement, FAFSA completion [VALIDATE]

One project, connected workstreams



Shared project knowledge keeps the work aligned.

From prompt to project to skill



PROMPT

A single request for a single output

Draft an invitation to FAFSA Night.

PROJECT

Shared context for connected work

Use our dates, resources, audience, and approved guidance.

SKILL

Reusable instructions and quality checks

Build event plans consistently and flag missing information.

Skill blueprint: FAFSA Night Event Planner



REQUIRED INPUTS

- ◆ Event date and location
- ◆ Audience and capacity
- ◆ Available staff
- ◆ Campus or community partners
- ◆ Institutional deadlines
- ◆ Approved resources

EXPECTED OUTPUTS

- ◆ Planning timeline
- ◆ Staff assignments
- ◆ Supply and technology checklist
- ◆ Event agenda
- ◆ Family preparation instructions
- ◆ Follow-up plan and risk checklist

Event Planner: core instructions

Create a FAFSA completion event plan using only the information and resources provided.

- ◆ Identify missing information instead of inventing it.
- ◆ Separate institutional requirements from general recommendations.
- ◆ Include owners, deadlines, dependencies, accessibility, and privacy safeguards.
- ◆ End with a clear human review checklist.

Skill blueprint: Email Communication Generator



MESSAGES IT CAN CREATE

- ◆ Initial invitation
- ◆ Family invitation
- ◆ Registration confirmation
- ◆ Preparation reminder
- ◆ Day-before reminder
- ◆ Missed-event follow-up
- ◆ Completion reminder

QUALITY GUARDRAILS

- ◆ Use plain language
- ◆ Preserve approved dates and instructions
- ◆ Avoid eligibility promises
- ◆ Flag missing or conflicting information
- ◆ Exclude sensitive student data
- ◆ Draft for staff review

TEST AND REFINE

Pressure reveals the quality of the cut



Three tests before the skill shines





STANDARD

A typical on-campus FAFSA Night with complete information.



INCOMPLETE

An event request with the location, staffing, or deadline missing.



HIGH RISK

A request containing sensitive student information or asking for an eligibility decision.

LOOK FOR

- ◆ Accurate use of supplied guidance
- ◆ Clear flags for missing information
- ◆ Appropriate refusal or escalation
- ◆ Usable output and visible human review

Your reusable FAFSA completion toolkit



◆ EVENT PLANNER

Builds the plan

◆ EMAIL GENERATOR

Creates coordinated drafts

◆ FAQ BUILDER

Uses approved guidance

◆ CONTENT REVIEWER

Checks clarity and risk

◆ FOLLOW-UP PLANNER

Continues outreach

◆ EVALUATION ASSISTANT

Organizes results

THE FINAL CUT

Human brilliance still sets the standard

Break down the work. Find the right opportunity. Build narrowly. Test carefully. Keep people accountable.

Questions?

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