

DATA RETRIEVAL TOOL CURRENTLY UNAVAILABLE

March 30, 2017

Privacy Concerns Force Data Retrieval Tool to Remain Offline; Students, Parents and Borrowers Should Use Other Options to Provide Financial Data on Applications

To protect sensitive taxpayer data, the IRS and FSA announced today the Data Retrieval Tool on fafsa.gov and StudentLoans.gov will be unavailable until extra security protections can be added. While we are working to resolve these issues as quickly as possible, students and families should plan for the tool to be offline until the start of the next FAFSA season.

Since the tool was disabled in early March due to security concerns, the IRS has been working closely with FSA to safely return the tool to service. “We know this tool is an easy way for students and families working on applications to access their financial data,” said IRS Commissioner John Koskinen. “While this tool provides an important convenience for applicants, we cannot risk the safety of taxpayer data. Protecting taxpayer data has to be the highest priority, and we will continue working with FSA to bring this tool back in a safe and secure manner.”

“We have heard from students, parents, and the financial aid community that applying for aid is harder without the DRT,” said James W. Runcie, Federal Student Aid chief operating officer. “We will do all we can to help students and families successfully submit applications while the tool is unavailable and remain committed to protecting applicants’ personal information.”

Options Remain Available for Students, Parents and Borrowers

While the Data Retrieval Tool is unavailable, FSA and the IRS remind applicants that online applications are still available and are operable.

The income information needed to complete the FAFSA and apply for an income-driven repayment (IDR) plan can be found on a previously filed tax return.

Students and parents completing a 2016–17 and 2017–18 FAFSA should manually enter 2015 tax information (not 2016). Borrowers applying for an IDR plan should submit alternative documentation of income to their federal loan servicers after they complete and submit the online IDR application. The process for submitting the alternative documentation of income is explained to borrowers as part of the online IDR application. While the Data Retrieval Tool is unavailable, a borrower may submit a paper copy of his or her tax return, copies of pay stubs or other acceptable forms of documentation explained online during the application process.

If a copy of the tax return is not readily available, the applicant may be able to access the tax software used to prepare the return or contact their tax preparer to obtain a copy.

If necessary, a summary of a previously filed tax return, called a tax transcript, may be viewed and downloaded from www.irs.gov/transcript at Get Transcript Online, with the proper identity verification. Additionally, [Get Transcript by Mail](#) can be accessed online, or the taxpayer can call 1-800-908-9946, and a transcript will be delivered to the address of record within five to 10 days.

IRS Takes Additional Steps to Protect Taxpayers

The IRS is working to identify the number of taxpayers affected by questionable use of the Data Retrieval Tool. Identity thieves may have used personal information obtained outside the tax system to access the FAFSA form in an attempt to secure tax information through the DRT. The IRS continues to review the

extent to which this contributed to fraudulently filed tax returns. The IRS has identified instances where our strengthened fraud reviews stopped questionable tax returns by filers who also accessed the DRT.

As the IRS identifies taxpayers with personal information at risk through misuse of the data tool, it is marking and locking down those taxpayer accounts to provide additional protection against an identity thief filing a fraudulent tax return. As an internal review continues, the IRS also is finalizing plans to notify affected taxpayers by mail about possible identity theft concerns. The scope of affected taxpayers is still being determined.

Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and U.S. Department of Education Office of Federal Student Aid (FSA) Statement about the IRS Data Retrieval Tool (DRT)

March 9, 2017

The IRS Data Retrieval Tool on fafsa.gov and StudentLoans.gov is currently unavailable. We are working to resolve the issue as quickly as possible. However, at this time, the IRS anticipates the online data tool will be unavailable for several weeks.

This does not limit families' ability to apply for aid. Applicants have other options while the data tool is unavailable. Applicants filling out the *Free Application for Federal Student Aid* (FAFSA) and applying for an income-driven repayment (IDR) plan can manually provide the requested financial information from copies of their tax returns. The online FAFSA and IDR application remain operational, and applicants can continue filing the FAFSA or applying for an IDR plan as they normally would.

As part of a wider, ongoing effort at the IRS to protect the security of data, the IRS decided to temporarily suspend the Data Retrieval Tool (DRT) as a precautionary step following concerns that information from the tool could potentially be misused by identity thieves. The scope of the issue is being explored, and the IRS and FSA are jointly investigating the issue. At this point, we believe the issue is relatively isolated, and no additional action is needed by taxpayers or people using these applications. The IRS and FSA are actively working on a way to further strengthen the security of information provided by the DRT. We will provide additional information when we have a specific timeframe for returning the DRT or other details to share.

Additional information for applicants:

The DRT provides tax data that automatically fills in information for part of the FAFSA as well as the IDR plan application.

The online FAFSA and IDR application remain operational. You can continue filing the FAFSA or applying for an IDR plan as you normally would.

The income information needed to complete the FAFSA and apply for an IDR plan can be found on your tax return. If you did not retain a copy of your tax return, you may be able to access the tax software you used to prepare your return or contact your tax preparer to obtain a copy.

If you are unable to get a copy of your tax return, you may visit www.irs.gov/transcript to view and download a summary of your tax return, called a tax transcript, at [Get Transcript Online](#). You must verify your identity to use this tool. You also may use [Get Transcript by Mail](#) or call 1-800-908-9946, and a transcript will be delivered to your address of record within five to 10 days.