Setting the stage for verification:

Please refer to the latest Application and Verification Guide (AVG) for 2013-2014 (Pages 119 and 120) that provides information on definition of homelessness and unaccompanied youth, verification, determining eligibility, treatment of homelessness by the financial aid office, etc.

- **Verification** not required- You are not required to verify the answers to the homeless youth questions unless you have conflicting information. A documented phone call with, or a written statement from, one of the relevant authorities is sufficient verification.
  
  - AVG Guide 2013-2014, page 120

- Verifications will most likely happen in the financial aid office for the purposes of independent student status for the FAFSA.

- If you are not in the financial aid office, establish a contact there so you can make direct referrals.

- Become familiar with verification processes and what questions you can ask.
  
  - See “Sample Questions” below

- Contact the homeless education liaison at the school district, if this is appropriate
  
  - See “McKinney-Vento K-12 Statewide Liaison” list (can also be found at: [http://nchespp.serve.org/profile/NC](http://nchespp.serve.org/profile/NC))

- Create a process for verification that is sensitive to the unique needs of these youth.
  
  - Conduct the interview within the same day of their college/university visits if at all possible.
  
  - Do not interview the youth in front of others.
  
  - If they do not have paperwork, work with them.
  
  - Let them use items that may not be readily available to them, such as the phone or fax machine.
  
  - When at all possible, use verification forms from other institutions, if they have verified in the same school year.

- Minimize using the word “homeless.” Instead, use words like:
  
  - “McKinney eligible”
  
  - “Instable, transitional or crises housing”

Having the verification conversation:

- Get the facts. What is the youth’s situation?

- Explain who you are to the student and why you are asking for the information:
  
  - “Hi, I am Mary. I am the Single Point of Contact for youth on their own who are in crisis housing situations. I need to ask you some questions to determine if you meet the criteria for ‘independent student’ status. Some of these questions may seem personal but I need to ask them to see if you qualify. I will not share your information with anyone else, unless I first get your permission.”

- In verifying, it is important to remember the student must be both homeless and unaccompanied.

- To be verified as homeless, the student must meet the McKinney-Vento Act definition of homeless. The Act defines “homeless youths” as “individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate primary nighttime residence.”
• Lacking any one of these three conditions would make a youth eligible for homeless education programs. In other words, if the residence is not fixed, regular, and adequate, it is considered a homeless situation.

• The law lists several situations as specific examples of homelessness. The list of examples included in the definition is not exclusive; rather, it is meant to address some of the more common situations of homelessness.

• These examples include:
  o Sharing the housing of others due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or similar reason
  o Living in motels, hotels, (inadequate) trailer parks, camping grounds due to lack of adequate alternative accommodations
  o Living in emergency or transitional shelters
  o Abandoned in hospitals
  o Awaiting foster care placement
  o Living in a public or private place not designed for humans to live
  o Living in cars, parks, abandoned buildings, bus or train stations, etc.
  o Trailers provided by FEMA after natural disasters
  o Living in the student dormitory if the student would otherwise be homeless.

• Determining whether a particular youth fits the definition of homeless is a case-by-case analysis. The easiest way to make a determination of homelessness is to:
  (A) see if the student’s situation fits into one of the specific examples of homelessness listed in the law; and if not,
  (B) consider if the student is in another situation that would fit the definition of homelessness by not meeting the fixed, regular, and adequate standard.

• Below are sample questions you can ask to help determine if a primary nighttime residence is not fixed, adequate and regular (which determines homeless verification):
  o Tell me about where you are living. Is this a permanent arrangement or just temporary?
  o Are you looking for another place to live?
  o Do you plan to move out soon?
  o Why are you staying in your current place?
  o Where were you living right before this place? Why did you leave?
  o Where would you go if you couldn’t stay where you are?
  o Are you staying with friends/relatives just for a little while?
  o Could your friends/relatives ask you to leave if they wanted to?
  o Are you all sharing the home equally, or are you more like guests in the home?
  o Do you stay in the same place every night?
  o Do you move around a lot?
  o How long have you been at that place? How long do you plan to stay?
  o How long did you live in your last place?
  o How many people are living in the home? How many bedrooms/bathrooms does it have?
  o Are you sharing a room? How many people are staying in one room?
  o Are you sleeping in a bedroom, or a public area, like a dining room?
  o Does the home have heat/electricity/running water? Do the windows have glass panes?
  o What condition is the home in? Does it keep out rain and wind? Is it safe? Is it warm and dry?
  o Where would you be living if you were not living in your dorm room?
• The McKinney-Vento Act defines “unaccompanied youth” as a youth not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian.
• An unaccompanied youth may have periodic contact with his/her parents (or guardians) but they are not supported by them.
• Below are sample questions you can ask to help determine if a youth is unaccompanied (not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian):
  o Do you live with your parents/guardians?
  o How often do you interact with your parents/guardians?
  o Do your parents/guardians financially support you in any way?
  o Do your parents/guardians help pay rent or other bills?
  o How long have you been on your own?
  o How are you supporting yourself?

Enhancing success:
• Verifying is only the first step. Youth who are homeless may have different needs such as housing, clothing, school supplies, meals, and health care.
• They may have mental health needs or academic needs.
• They may need nothing more than the verification needed to complete the FAFSA without parental signatures.
• In determining the appropriate services for a particular youth, consider what barriers to education can be removed.
• Find out what resources and programs are available in your campus and community that can support unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness.
• Work closely with financial aid, admissions and student services to build a team of people in these and other areas that can offer further support.
  o Such as housing, academic advising/support services, student life, financial literacy, mental health, learning disability services, self-advocacy, etc…
  o See “Recommended Practices” sheet
• Connect students with mentor and peer support groups.
• Create a resource list with names and numbers that you can give to students.
• Discuss with youth the process after successful verification and include a timeline for major steps. Is there anything they should be watching for? Any important points in the next part of the process that they should be prepping for?
• Below are sample questions and recommended discussion points to determine if the youth has other needs:
  o What is the best way to communicate with you? (e-mail, phone, etc…)
  o Where do you plan to go during breaks? Do you need housing during this time?
  o Do you have other needs?
  o Provide youth with a list of resources for other basic needs (food bank, clothing, school supplies)
  o Provide your name and contact number in case the youth needs assistance in the future