

# NASFAA's "Off the Cuff" Podcast – Episode 290 Transcript

## OTC Inside The Beltway: Keeping Track of ED's Updated FAFSA Timeline

Justin Draeger:

Hey, everybody. Welcome to another edition of "Off the Cuff." I'm Justin Draeger.

Karen McCarthy:

I'm Karen McCarthy from NASFAA's policy team.

Tim Maggio:

Tim Maggio, community manager, and that guy from Slack.

Justin Draeger:

Hey, Tim, welcome. Welcome to the podcast again. Karen, right before we started, and Hugh, I want to say hi to you because you're editing and producing this week, right before we started, I asked how you were doing and you mistakenly thought I was asking, "How are you doing?" Like, your mental health, and it's like-

Karen McCarthy:

Yeah, and you were really only asking about how my mic sounded.

Justin Draeger:

Right. I mean, I really thought we were going to open up for a second. I shut that down immediately because that was not what I was... I wasn't ready for that.

Karen McCarthy:

Yeah.

Justin Draeger:

You know, our motto around here is, "Stay busy, feel nothing." I think that's how, despite... And then I asked if you listened to my podcast yesterday because Tim was on... Or not the podcast.

Karen McCarthy:

The webinar.

Justin Draeger:

The webinar. Tim, you were on the webinar. That's not what I actually said. But Karen, you obviously didn't tune in and we send out the invites so all the staff can attend these webinars and you obviously did not attend yesterday.

Karen McCarthy:

I did not. So sorry. I missed it.

Justin Draeger:

What happened? Were you doing something?

Karen McCarthy:

Well, they do.... No. As you mentioned, they do send them out, so it's on everybody's calendar and it has just been so busy. It's kind of like you know when a meeting ends early and you get like, "Oh, my gosh, I have"-

Justin Draeger:

No, not really, but go ahead.

Karen McCarthy:

"... I have 15 extra minutes that weren't previously scheduled." So just very busy and I was looking at my calendar and the scope of the day and then I was like, "Oh, this whole block of time in the afternoon. That's kind of optional, that's not like..."

Justin Draeger:

So you leave the podcast on the calendar and then everybody thinks you're blocked off for that time and then you purposefully skip.

Karen McCarthy:

No. No, that's a... No. I left it. It's on my calendar because it's like a, "Oh, if it comes around and I happen to be in a reasonably good place with my work, then I am happy to join the webinar," and it just didn't-

Justin Draeger:

How often are you reason... What did you just say? You're reasonably up-to-date with your work?

Karen McCarthy:

Yeah, so able to join.

Justin Draeger:

How often does that happen? How often are you reasonably up-to-date with your work?

Karen McCarthy:

I join them every once in a while.

Justin Draeger:

Okay. For the record, you know how it feels abrasive when people just call you and they don't text, they just call?

Karen McCarthy:

It does now. Nowadays, yeah.

Justin Draeger:

Nowadays, that feels abrasive. That didn't use to be the case. Tim, I don't know how old you are. I don't want to be passive-aggressive and get into that-

Karen McCarthy:

But you know what? Wait, wait. It's Tim's birthday.

Justin Draeger:

Oh, that's right. Well, yeah, I did know that. Happy birthday, Tim.

Tim Maggio:

Thanks.

Karen McCarthy:

Yes. Happy birthday.

Justin Draeger:

Yes. Did you know that, Karen, because it was posted in the random channel or how did you know that? In the Slack channel.

Karen McCarthy:

Yeah, I saw it and I was like, "Oh, we're going to have to wish Tim a happy birthday."

Justin Draeger:

You don't keep track. How do you know that, Karen?

Tim Maggio:

Justin was actually the first person on staff to wish me a happy birthday.

Justin Draeger:

Wait, what did you just say, Tim?

Karen McCarthy:

I saw it on Slack.

Justin Draeger:

Because I froze. What did you just say?

Tim Maggio:

I said you were actually the first person to send me a happy birthday on staff yesterday.

Justin Draeger:

That's right. I'm glad we got that on the record.

Karen McCarthy:

Really?

Justin Draeger:

How did you know it was Tim's birthday, Karen?

Karen McCarthy:

I saw on Slack.

Justin Draeger:

In the random channel?

Karen McCarthy:

I think somebody... Darcy tagged you, I think, over in the community. So not even a NASFAA staff member.

Justin Draeger:

How did Darcy know it was your birthday?

Tim Maggio:

I actually don't know. She messaged me on Slack and she was like, "Hey, can I post something in our announcements channel?" I was like, "Uh, what do you want to post?" And she's like, "Your birthday." I was like, "No, I don't know that I feel comfortable with that, but you can do it in FA Chat."

Justin Draeger:

Wow. Well, how did it make you feel? And I'm not just asking about your microphone this time, but how did it make you feel when I posted the day before and was like, "Tim, I hope you have a fantastic birthday tomorrow"?

Tim Maggio:

It felt nice. I mean, you beat everybody in my life. Nobody said, "Happy birthday" to me before Justin, so you win.

Justin Draeger:

Yeah, that's right.

Tim Maggio:

I'll get you a present this year.

Justin Draeger:

Well, you missed my birthday, so too late now.

Tim Maggio:

And I don't know when it is.

Justin Draeger:

Yes, that's right. So don't be making promises that you can't cash in there, Tim. But it was a few weeks ago, so you missed it.

Karen McCarthy:

Oh, I missed it, too.

Justin Draeger:

Yeah, you did too, Karen. Don't worry. I keep a list.

All right. Well, anyway, you missed a great webinar yesterday, Karen. It was an enrichment one, which is... We only do one of those a year, by the way. This was not like rules and regulations. Tim was helpful. He was managing the chat and we had just under 1,000 people who showed up at peak, so it was good. It's a good webinar. Anyway, check it out.

Anyway, I will say, Tim and Dana helped with the webinar, but I want to say honestly, this is the self-loathing part, after almost 90 minutes of speaking, I was so sick and I also did a conference.

Karen McCarthy:

You had another thing, didn't you?

Justin Draeger:

Yeah, I had a virtual conference I did with ILASFAA. Shout out to ILASFAA, which, Karen, when you do a virtual conference, do you have them turn the laptop so you can see the crowd or do you just go and you're looking into oblivion and you don't see anything?

Karen McCarthy:

I don't specifically make that request.

Justin Draeger:

You don't?

Karen McCarthy:

No, I don't. I do prefer that, but I try not to make too many demands. So if they set it up that way, I always say, "Thanks so much for doing that," but I don't ask about it.

Justin Draeger:

I do. I ask them. I say, "Can you turn the laptop around so I can see people." Often, I'll ask them to even keep the sound on so I can hear, but I do ask them to turn around so I can see the reaction of the crowd. I need something.

Tim Maggio:

Have you seen those owl things that can kind of turn their head to look at the crowd?

Justin Draeger:

What?

Karen McCarthy:

No.

Tim Maggio:

There's these webcam things that look like an owl. I saw them at a conference once that will actually-

Karen McCarthy:

Spin?

Tim Maggio:

... turn their head and spin and actually zoom in on people talking at these types of things.

Justin Draeger:

Really?

Tim Maggio:

Yeah.

Justin Draeger:

No kidding. Well, who's talking besides me? What are they zooming in on?

Karen McCarthy:

Well, Q&A.

Tim Maggio:

I guess if you have a Q&A section or something like that.

Justin Draeger:

Okay. Well, by the time I had done back-to-back speeches, I was so sick of not talking, of hearing myself talk. It's kind of how I feel sometimes after the podcast. How do you feel, Karen? You're dressed up again, I see.

Karen McCarthy:

Because I have a virtual presentation this afternoon.

Justin Draeger:

Oh, okay.

Karen McCarthy:

Yeah, yeah.

Justin Draeger:

I thought it was because we put these on Instagram.

Karen McCarthy:

No.

Justin Draeger:

I noticed you started dressing up for these after that.

Karen McCarthy:

No, it's usually when I have something else going on same day.

Justin Draeger:

All right. Anyway, I just get sick of hearing myself. I'm not sick of talking. I'm sick of hearing myself talk. Let's get into the podcast. Karen, I feel like we have a lot to talk about, and Tim, you're here because I think maybe the community's had a lot to talk about. We are, maybe Karen, we are seeing the summit on getting some ISIRs into schools' hands so they can start delivering aid offers to students. This is the dream. This seems almost unattainable at this point, but God help us if we're... We're almost to peak, and this has been a long journey, and maybe I should knock on wood, but I don't want to walk all the way through it because I want to do a countdown, but we should be... They promised first half of March and we are at March 7th today. Most people will probably listen to this podcast on March 8th, Friday, so we should be getting there.

Before we walk through step by step and what will be happening, Tim, I'm curious because the department released their process, but there were no dates attached to it. It was like, "This will happen and then that will happen, then that will happen." Karen's going to walk us through all that in a minute, but can you pull out just a few reactions from the community? What are people feeling about this?

Tim Maggio:

Yes.

Karen McCarthy:

Before Tim goes, I just think it's super interesting that Justin and I don't talk about how people are feeling. We need Tim to tell us, how are people-

Tim Maggio:

I'm a feelings translator.

Karen McCarthy:

Yes, yes.

Justin Draeger:

Yes. Tim, he's our emotion translator. That's right.

Karen McCarthy:

Yeah, yeah.

Justin Draeger:

What are you saying, we're sociopaths, Karen? We look at people and we can't figure out emotions?

Karen McCarthy:

No, no. But Tim is very good at that. That seems like Tim's job, and so yeah, he's very good at it.

Justin Draeger:

Karen, you look at people, they're emoting and you're like, "What is this thing they're displaying?"

Karen McCarthy:

No!

Tim Maggio:

And then I'm so overwhelmed by all of it that I'm feeling it all the time.

Justin Draeger:

Right. Sometimes we will tell you to dial it back. Tim, can you just speak real, what the words are? Because we can't tell.

Tim Maggio:

What's the answer?

Justin Draeger:

Yeah, right. Go ahead, Tim.

Tim Maggio:

So I think, unfortunately, I don't think our community shares the optimism of the summit kind of being right there. And I think that really, the first reactions was there's no concrete information, they're wanting details and they just don't have it. There was some people who said there is some helpful insight in this EA, but it's really missing the mark for them. And really, it's reminding them if we go back to December and we think about how the FAFSA was open for a few hours, those intermittent windows, they're kind of seeing flashbacks of this, of like, "Are we going to get ISIRs and then things are going to be down? And what are all the problems?"

So I think folks are just waiting for, "What next? I can't handle anymore. Please, please stop. Just make it go away." And I think we all want to button that, like we just press and it fast forwards and it's fall of this year.

Justin Draeger:

All right. So Tim, I don't want to put words in your mouth, but is the feeling like empty promises because there weren't any dates attached to it? Or was the feeling more like Soft Launch 2.0? Like there aren't actually going to be any ISIRs that are delivered to schools by March 15th, which would be the first half of March?



Tim Maggio:

I think Soft Launch 2.0 because I think folks are saying... It's March 7th right now. The end of the first part of March is next week, and some schools are getting one to two ISIRs at the beginning of the next week, and I think folks are like, "Is that enough time to really get things out and get things sorted out?" We're seeing with test ISIRs that people are reporting, there's errors in those. A lot of systems are communicating to their folks that they're having to figure things out or tell ED, "Hey, the ISIRs are not formatted correctly in some ways."

So I think there's just a lot of questions, a lot of confusion, and there's still people who are just joining the conversation that's like, "What's going on?"

Justin Draeger:

Yeah, I have actually seen, like out on the FSA whatever, I don't know what listserv it is, Karen, but it's one of the-

Karen McCarthy:

The tech one. FSA Tech? Yeah.

Justin Draeger:

Yeah, and it's more of a technical listserv, not one where you'd ask regulatory questions, but I still see people who are struggling to even find the test ISIRs out on that listserv and they're not understanding they're not going to be delivered through your gateway email. You have to actually go out and get them off of GitHub. So people are definitely at all different levels here.

But okay, Tim, was there any optimism in any of the comments that you found? I don't want you to dig any out. Yeah.

Tim Maggio:

No, I think it's been stomped out. I mean, I think people were clinging on to optimism all the way into February, but now it's gone. I mean, there might be one person out there who's feeling it. If you're listening to this podcast, let us know who you are, but I don't know that they're out there.

Justin Draeger:

Yeah. And I understand it. I think that speaks to just sort of maybe a little bit of distrust too because if things were going amiss, one of the things I've heard from some of the people we keep in close contact with, which tend to be rapid-response people, board members, former board members of our thousands of members, these are the people that we talk to the most often, the fact that the department didn't come out until January 30th to tell us that the ISIRs, which clearly weren't going to be delivered, that that was the date, I mean, I think that did end up burning a lot of bridges because the feeling is, "Well, they're not going to tell us until March 15th that there's something wrong." So I do think that sort of burned out a lot of goodwill.

That said, I am not always... Karen, yesterday in the webinar we did a little poll and the poll was, "Do you see yourself as an optimist, pessimist, or realist?" And we had probably, I'm trying to remember, Tim, but it was like maybe 20% or 30% optimist. Most people saw themselves as a realist and a small percentage saw themselves as a pessimist. What would you say you are, Karen? Optimist, realist, or pessimist?

Karen McCarthy:

Ah, let's see.

Justin Draeger:  
Should I just tell you?

Karen McCarthy:  
You're going to tell me what I am, how you view me?

Justin Draeger:  
Yeah, how we all view you.

Karen McCarthy:  
How do you all view me? As like what?

Justin Draeger:  
Well, what do you think you are? Just what do you think you are? Don't ask me any more clarifying questions. Just answer the question.

Karen McCarthy:  
Well, I would say a realist, but you probably-

Justin Draeger:  
Yeah, I think that's probably fair. Tim, what are you?

Karen McCarthy:  
I'd say I'm an optimist.

Justin Draeger:  
Yeah, I think you're an optimist. I think that's fair. And I tend to lean into pessimism. I think pessimism and realism are two sides of the same of coin though. I think realism and pessimism tend to be pretty... They're like cousins. In fact, at SASFAA somebody told me that realists are just medicated pessimists, and I don't want you to think too much about that, but it made me laugh because realists tend to... They're pretty grounded and maybe they're full of a little bit of skepticism, like realists and skeptics are probably pretty close.

But I guess my point is that if you're a skeptic or a realist, I tend to lean that direction myself. However, we have started to see some signs of life that make me maybe feel a little bit more optimistic. So I want to walk through the two EAs, these electronic announcements, and try to line them up.

So Karen, walk us first through the series of steps, and then I want to go through the second EA, which sort of told us the trigger, the very first step is about to happen. So let's first walk through all the steps and then we'll try to go backwards in our timeline.

Karen McCarthy:  
Okay. So steps without any dates, just what they kind of laid out?

Justin Draeger:

Yeah, what are the steps, and then we'll try to assign some dates to this.

Karen McCarthy:

Yeah. So as you already mentioned, that first EA where they... And this was the big EA that they had told us they were working on that was going to be about the ISIR release. What's going to happen? What schools can... Schools, and I say schools, but I mean schools and states, anybody who's getting ISIRs, what they can expect, when they can expect it to happen.

And so when I was just jotting notes this morning of what were the big things in the EA, right at the top is, "No dates." So we've already covered that. There were no dates attached to when any of these things were going to happen, but the steps that they laid out and the timeline, you can talk about how all that fits together, is the first thing that they were going to need to do was to take the FAFSA system down. And I don't remember, I think they just called it an outage. I think in my notes, I have it written down as, "A pause." They were going to have to take it down so that they could install, implement whatever it is that they need to do to get the ISIRs ready to go out. So they have to do some systems work. It requires them to take the whole thing down temporarily while they do that.

And then it will come back up. And then what they wanted to do, what they said they were going to do was reach out to a few dozen schools to send them one to two individual ISIRs, just really one to two. And they were going to be in touch with those schools to make sure they could access them. How is it working? Everything looking okay? Are there any issues that we need to fix? And that that would take a few days.

And then assuming if there are any issues that they need to fix, I mean, I'm assuming minor issues they can fix quickly, blah, blah, all of that. Once that is good to go, then they would turn on the faucet a little bit higher and more broadly start sending out ISIRs to all of the schools and states from there. And they would then gradually open the flow of those ISIRs over, they did say, two weeks, a two-week period of time that would take them to get all of the backlogged FAFSAs out to the schools in the states.

Justin Draeger:

Okay. So just to recap, one, take the system down and basically turn on the conversion so that ISIRs can go out to schools. Number two, you send it out to a few dozen schools. And those schools, as we understand... Well, we'll get into that. But a few dozen schools, they only get one to two ISIRs. If there's any fixes that need to be made, you make those fixes. Number three, they more broadly then start sending out to all schools, but it's going to be a very low amount, and you're going to see if there are any issues there. And then number four, you start increasing the dial, you ramp it up, and that ramp up will be anywhere from 1,500 to 25,000 ISIRs going to schools every single day until you've cleared the backlog. And the department estimates that'll take two weeks, which is faster than I had anticipated that they would clear the backlog. We're talking about a 4.5 million to 5 million FAFSA backlog at this point.

And after all of that's done, then we're talking more or less real-time processing. So we're talking three-to-four-day max processing, and somewhere around step three or four, it's first in, first out, is that right? So it's the ISIRs that came in first will be the ISIRs that are processed and going out first?

Karen McCarthy:

Yes.

Justin Draeger:

And it won't be institutionally. The order won't be determined by institution. It's determined by the FAFSA filers.

Karen McCarthy:

Yes.

Justin Draeger:

And so any school that they had listed on their FAFSA, all those schools will receive that individual's ISIR-

Karen McCarthy:

At the same time.

Justin Draeger:

... at the same time. Okay. All right.

Karen McCarthy:

Yeah. We did say on the... We've had a few questions about the volume estimates because they said, "Any individual school will be receiving between 1,500 to 25,000 ISIRs in a day." And even our communications team, before we pushed out this article, I said, "Is that number right? Because that seems like a really big range. Are we sure we're not missing a zero in there?"

And how they explained it when they verbally gave us a heads-up that all this was coming is that they said it's completely school-based, that some schools are just a lot smaller and don't have as many students who are listing them on their FAFSAs. And other schools have so many thousands and thousands of students that are putting there. So it's nothing that ED is controlling on their end, that, "We're only going to send you 1,000 and we're going to send somebody else 20,000." It's just based on the volume and how the applications are.

Justin Draeger:

Yeah, because the way we've been thinking about this was how many FAFSAs can the department process in a day? They didn't give us that number. What they instead gave us was how many ISIRs a school can expect in a day, which is that big range.

Karen McCarthy:

Right.

Justin Draeger:

The other thing the department said they were going to do in some way was notify the community how much of the backlog is left. Now, they didn't say how frequently they were going to do that, but basically it's some sort of notification that says, "This is how much of the backlog we've cleared or is left. This is how much of the backlog is cleared or is left." And they're going to do that periodically, presumably over that two week period, right?

Karen McCarthy:

Right. I assume that will be on their FAFSA updates page or something like that.

Justin Draeger:

Okay. All right. So that's the process. I think we've broken it down into four steps basically. So Karen, barring anything going sideways with any of those steps, let's back it off because the second electronic announcement we received did actually have the date for step one, and that is supposed to take place tomorrow in the middle of the night, right?

Karen McCarthy:

Yeah. And this is the outage time when they're going to take the whole system down to do their installing, converting, whatever verb you want to put in there. They did say it will be... I don't want to say tomorrow because most people will be listening to this on Friday.

Justin Draeger:

Okay. All right, yeah.

Karen McCarthy:

Yes. But it will be Friday. They said 3:00 AM to approximately noon eastern time.

Justin Draeger:

Okay. So tomorrow, the whole thing goes down for at least planned, and you would assume the department built in extra time, so they probably gave us the maximum time that they assume, maybe it's a little less, maybe it ends up being a little bit more, but from 3:00 AM to noon. So we're talking approximately nine hours here. This is when that first step is supposed to be accomplished. So step one is supposed to be done on March 8th.

After March 8th and over the weekend then, these few dozen schools who have already been notified, as we understand it because we've heard from schools, these few dozen schools have already been notified that they have signed up to be these testers. And those schools have agreed to get back in touch with the department and be in communication with them. They'll receive one to two ISIRs, and the department will be watching those ISIRs, make sure they're delivered. The schools will make sure they can receive them and download them, and they'll be in communication to make sure there are no issues. And that should take a few days. So presumably over the weekend into Monday.

Karen McCarthy:

Yeah. I mean, I'm assuming that once they bring the system back up, that the department, in an ideal world, will send these one to two ISIRs to the schools over the weekend. The schools will get them on Monday morning and then the back-and-forth process will happen. "How did it go? Any problems?" All of that.

Justin Draeger:

Okay. And then step three is that the department then starts with, if you're looking at a dial, the dial will be set to low. And so then it goes to all institutions, first in, first out, but we're talking a very low volume. And talk to me about some of the logic behind that, Karen, why do you start low here before you start ramping up?

Karen McCarthy:

Yeah, we did have... Somebody commented over in our communities that they were, I think, trying to think of some promising positive things to say about this plan. And one was that they preferred that they start the flow at a low level in case there are any issues, that this person said, "I don't want 25,000 ISIRs and then they have to reprocess them all, and it's 25,000 of them that I now have," that they kind of preferred that the dial gets turned up pretty slowly at first.

Justin Draeger:

Okay. So the idea here is we're going to start low because if something is wrong and we have to reprocess, we don't want to reprocess massive numbers of these. So we start low. And so presumably, that could start happening middle-ish, I'm using some very untechnical terms here, but middle-ish of next week. So that could be Wednesday, Thursday-ish of next week.

Karen McCarthy:

If those few test ISIRs, that process goes well with those few dozen schools, that's kind of what I'm thinking. If it doesn't and there are some minor issues, that gives them a couple days to resolve any minor issues. And somebody did, I think a reporter, asked me recently, "But what if there are major issues?" I was like, "I'm not really... Trying not to think of that," but yeah.

Justin Draeger:

Well, yeah. If there are major issues, then there are major issues. I mean, then they have to fix the major issues.

I guess the question is... Let me pose the question this way, Karen, because this gets back to what Tim was talking about and raising some of the issues from our members. Let's say everything goes according to the plan. You have steps one, two, three, four, and let's say we get to step three by Thursday or Friday of next week. Okay?

Karen McCarthy:

Wait, what do you have on your list? What do you have as step three?

Justin Draeger:

Step three is it's going to all schools, but just not in large volumes yet.

Karen McCarthy:

Okay.

Justin Draeger:

Okay?

Karen McCarthy:

Okay.

Justin Draeger:

So ISIRs are going out, but we're on the lowest dial setting. I guess my question to you is has the department met the letter and spirit of what they promised?

Karen McCarthy:

Yeah, so I think this kind of, for me, conjures up the Soft Launch 2.0 feedback in that I feel like the community will not give the department that much slack because this is like deja vu all over again with what happened with the launch of the FAFSA. And yes, they did get it up on December 30th for an hour and all of that, which I know we've all tried to move beyond.

So yeah, I mean, you could say they did, but I just don't feel like, maybe Tim can chime in here from the feelings' perspective, that it's a lot.

Justin Draeger:

Tim, you're going to be our personal, whatever that movie was where they were the emotions, I guess you're our collective manager.

Karen McCarthy:

Oh, yeah.

Tim Maggio:

Oh, Inside Out?

Justin Draeger:

Yeah, you're our Inside Out.

Karen McCarthy:

Yes, that's what I'm thinking of. Yes.

Justin Draeger:

You just go to every meeting with Karen and then you can be that thing.

Tim Maggio:

Your anger translator, your happiness translator.

Justin Draeger:

Yeah, right.

Tim Maggio:

Yeah, you got it.

Karen McCarthy:

And you know that whole saying, "Behind every mad, there's a sad." Like, are people angry? Are people sad? Yeah, all of that.

Justin Draeger:

All right. Here's why I feel like it's a little bit of splitting hairs, and hear me out before people react too strongly. I feel like it's a little bit of splitting hairs six one way, half-dozen the other because in my mind, I thought they would have... I actually get and understand the slow ramp-up because I do think if there are issues with the ISIRs, we only want a small number out before we have to take corrective action. We don't want to just open the dam, all the ISIRs are flowing out, and then holy smokes, we've got a huge issue and now we have to reprocess. And I just think some schools will get the message, some schools won't, eight offers go out, then we have a mess, and then we have second transactions and third transactions and it's just a mess. So I actually get the small number and the ramp -p and that makes sense to me.

Originally, when I thought about clearing the backlog, I thought this was going to take potentially three, and I was worried that we might even get into three and a half, or God help us, like four weeks.

Karen McCarthy:

Yeah, I mean, almost 5 million FAFSAs is a lot to get out. Yeah.

Justin Draeger:

Right. So I was genuinely not vocalizing these concerns, but I was starting to get concerned of just how long it would take to clear the backlog. I was pleasantly surprised the department went on the record and said, "Well, we'll clear this in two weeks."

Karen McCarthy:

I know. I heard people saying two weeks, and then I went back, I was like, "Did they actually say two weeks," to look at the words in the announcement. And they do, officially in that announcement, say two weeks.

Justin Draeger:

They did say two weeks. So to me, if you've got to step three where, even if it's very slow, it's a trickle on middle-ish to late next week, but they clear in two weeks by the end of March or even April 1 or 2, that's still faster than I thought it would take to clear the backlog.

Karen McCarthy:

Yes.

Justin Draeger:

So that's why I'm sort of like, "Well, look, it's six one way, half-dozen the other because even if I thought they were going to start by March 10th or March 12th or March 13th, I still thought it would take longer to clear the backlog."

Karen McCarthy:

Okay. But Justin-

Justin Draeger:

Okay, here we go.

Karen McCarthy:



... that's because you... Well, here we go. No, you had that insider info. You had that concern kind of lingering that I think a lot of our members did not have that same concern because they don't have all of that information that you have.

Justin Draeger:

The backlog.

Karen McCarthy:

What our members have is basically what ED has said to them and what ED is still currently, on all their websites, telling their students is that, "Your school will receive your information by mid-March."

Justin Draeger:

Right. And I hear that 100%. So the communication is once again disjointed because schools will start to receive a trickle. They'll receive... Most schools will receive most IISRs in the latter part of March, and they still won't get aid offers out.

Now, the schools that are sort of in the know bought themselves some time. So when I look around at institutional websites of the four-year schools, most schools I see are not promising aid offers till... I look at, for example, flagship publics, and they're promising April aid offers or mid-April aid offers, which depending on how this goes, could still be ambitious because we said, "If there are major issues..."

What we need our federal colleagues to do is, if there are major issues, to come out with it quickly.

Karen McCarthy:

Right, which... Yeah.

Justin Draeger:

And even if I'm being gracious, okay, let's be gracious for a moment. If the feds are-

Karen McCarthy:

Let's be gracious.

Justin Draeger:

Let's be gracious.

Karen McCarthy:

We're intentional about being gracious because otherwise...

Justin Draeger:

Because otherwise we're monsters. If we're being gracious, if the feds are saying, "Look, we're not withholding information because we're trying to manage PR before stakeholder relations," what if they're withholding information because they're saying, "we're trying to nail down new timelines before we come out with information," if we're being gracious? And I'm not sure that that graciousness is fully earned, but if we're being gracious, I guess what we would say is, "We need to know the problems even if you haven't nailed down all the solutions just yet," because schools have to tell their students what's going on. We need to know if there are problems sooner rather than later.

Tim Maggio:

Well, not just their students either. They're dealing with the campus partners who also have heard first half of March, and they're going to have to explain, "Well, we don't have everything yet." It just keeps moving the deadline a little bit further down. And then we've also got schools who are starting their aid year in the summer. So we've really got a compressed deadline for some folks.

Justin Draeger:

Yeah. So we've been doing, every week, we've been coming back mostly with shuffling things around outside of our normal order because we think these updates are important for our community as they've been thinking about the FAFSA and all things FAFSA. So we came back this week to do an update on this rollout. We're going to continue to obviously update NASFAA members and stakeholders through Today's News, and we'll continue to do this through the podcast as well.

Tim, a big thank you for keeping us up to date on member reactions and comments in our communities. And if people aren't part of our communities, how can they join?

Tim Maggio:

Email me at [MaggioT@NASFAA.org](mailto:MaggioT@NASFAA.org).

Justin Draeger:

Okay. So you can reach out there and we'll put a link to our communities page in the show notes, so you can check that out there.

Karen, big thank you to you, your team, and really, the entire NASFAA staff and team who are staying up to date on all things FAFSA and pushing that out for NASFAA members to stay up to date.

Remember to subscribe to our podcast, remember to leave a review if you haven't in a while. That helps other people find the podcast. Thank you to all of you, particularly in our financial aid and partner communities who are doing everything you can to help students and families stay up to date on this really challenging period of time with everything in flux, and we'll talk to you again very soon.