

Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) and the Temporary Waiver Period

What is PSLF?

The PSLF Program helps student loan borrowers working in nonprofit or government jobs by forgiving the remaining balance on your loans after you have made 10 years of qualifying payments (120 total monthly payments).

In order to qualify for PSLF, there are normally several requirements that you must meet:

- Be employed full-time by a nonprofit or federal/state/local/tribal government during the time you make each qualifying monthly payment
- Have Direct Loans (or consolidate other federal loans into a Direct Loan)
- Repay your loans under an income-driven repayment plan
- Make 120 qualifying payments

What is the temporary PSLF waiver?

The Department of Education is now offering a time-limited waiver so that student borrowers can count payments from all federal loan programs or repayment plans toward forgiveness. This includes loan types and payment plans that were not previously eligible.

For a limited time (through October 31), you may receive credit for past periods of repayment on loans that would otherwise not qualify for PSLF. If you have FFEL, Perkins, or other federal student loans, you'll need to consolidate your loans into a Direct Consolidation Loan to qualify for PSLF both in general and under the waiver. Before consolidating, check to see if you work for a qualifying employer.

Past periods of repayment will now count regardless of whether you made a payment, made that payment on time, for the full amount due, on a qualifying repayment plan. Periods of deferment or forbearance, and periods of default, continue to not qualify.

When does this time-limited PSLF waiver period end?

The waiver period ends October 31, meaning you must submit a PSLF form – the single application used to review employment certification, payment counts, and processing of forgiveness – on or before October 31 to have previously ineligible payments counted. If you have FFEL or Perkins loans that you have not consolidated into a Direct Loan, you also need to submit your consolidation application by October 31 (You will still get credit for payments made prior to consolidation but must fill out the application form).

Are you taxed on the amount of the loan forgiven?

No – student loan amounts forgiven under PSLF are not considered income for tax purposes.

Is there a cap on how many people (or dollar amount) that will be granted forgiveness under the waiver?

No – anyone who qualifies will be able to have their loans forgiven, there is no cap on number of borrowers or total dollars.

Applying for PSLF

Q&A: Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) and Student Loan Repayment

How do I get started?

To take advantage of the temporary waiver period (and get credit for previous payments that may not have qualified before), you should complete and submit the [PSLF form](#) (formally called the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) & Temporary Expanded PSLF (TEPSLF) Certification & Application). As you work toward PSLF, you should also plan to complete this form annually or when you change employers. If you have already made 120 qualifying payments, you should fill out and submit this same form.

You can use the Department of Education's [PSLF Help Tool](#) to determine whether you work for a qualifying employer for the PSLF or Temporary Expanded Public Service Loan Forgiveness (TEPSLF) programs, suggests actions you can take to become eligible for PSLF, and guides you through the PSLF form and submission process. It's strongly recommended that you read [Become a Public Service Loan Forgiveness \(PSLF\) Help Tool Ninja](#) before getting started.

- We also suggest that you take a look at the [Student Borrower Protection Center's guide to navigating PSLF](#). This page includes helpful short videos walking you through each step, including a program overview, how to identify your student loans for PSLF, consolidating your loans, and certifying your employment.

Approximately how long does the entire process take from applying to forgiveness?

The Department of Education says that most people complete their PSLF Help Tool process in less than 30 minutes (the process must be completed in a single session); you will also need to have your PSLF form(s) signed by your employer(s). Once you have submitted your PSLF form (and consolidation application if needed), it could take several months for the Department to process your applications and update your status.

The entire process to get to forgiveness depends on your own journey but will be at least ten years (120 qualifying payments).

Who else can I contact if I have questions or need help?

Here are some free resources:

- [Department of Education's PSLF Help Tool](#)
- San Francisco's Smart Money Coaching (free one-on-one financial coaching): <https://sfgov.org/ofe/meet-financial-coach>
- Bay Area Legal Aid's Free Legal Advice Line: 800-551-5554 (best for more complicated individual loan questions, not basic PSLF program guidance)
- Additional resources, including short videos, to guide you through the PSLF process from the Student Borrower Protection Center: <https://protectborrowers.org/our-projects/pslf/>

How do you know the PSLF and/or the Temporary Expanded PSLF (TEPSLF) application was received? Will I be notified if it is accepted, or what my status is?

After you submit your PSLF form with employment certification, the Department of Education (DOE) will review your form to ensure that it's complete and to determine whether your loans and employment qualify for the PSLF program. DOE will notify you via email if the form is incomplete, or to ask for any

Q&A: Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) and Student Loan Repayment

additional information – they will also notify you if they verify that your loans and employment qualify for PSLF, or if you have been approved for forgiveness following 120 qualifying payments.

However, it will take time for DOE to review your form, especially during the waiver period when many submissions are expected. So it could be several months until your status is updated (you won't necessarily know by the October 31st waiver deadline, especially if you submitted close to the deadline). You can log into your studentaid.gov account to track your loans there as well. [Here is more on the process.](#)

Watch out for scams! You should not receive a phone call, and you should never provide sensitive personal information (like social security number or bank account information) via email or phone.

If I previously applied for Public Service Loan Forgiveness and was denied, do I need to find my paperwork and resubmit that, or just start a new application?

If your previous application was denied because you had the wrong loan type—i.e., you did not have a Direct Loan—then you must reapply. The Department will re-review every account for which it has received employment certification for a Direct Loan Borrower and will award new credits to those borrowers as applicable on a rolling basis.

On the PSLF form, should you check "I believe I qualify for forgiveness" if you haven't been on the correct type of payment plan, but are applying during the waiver period?

If you believe that you have worked for 120 months for a qualifying employer while your loans have been in repayment—i.e., not in default, forbearance, or deferment—then you likely qualify for forgiveness and can check that box. It does not matter if you are applying through the waiver process.

If I have worked for the city for over 10 years, and been paying my loan the entire time (except during the COVID payment pause) will I get automatic credit?

All borrowers must submit a form to the US Department of Education certifying their employment with a qualifying employer, such as the city, in order to get credit. If you have not submitted a form, you should do so. If you have non-Direct Loans, you will also have to consolidate them to include them in the loan forgiveness. No borrowers will get complete automatic forgiveness—at some point you need to have indicated your interest in PSLF by filing a form with the government.

I just started working for the City & County. How long do I have to work to qualify for PSLF?

You must make 120 qualifying payments (monthly payments made while working for a public service employer like the City & County, another government office, or a nonprofit) to qualify for forgiveness. These qualifying payments don't need to all be consecutive, or with the same employer; as long as they add up to 120 qualifying payments you will be qualified for PSLF.

It is a good idea to certify your employment annually using the [PSLF form](#). If you're on an income-driven repayment (IDR) plan, you can make it a habit to submit your form at the same time of year as you renew your IDR plan.

Is there an income limit for loan forgiveness? When I checked into this program in the past, I was told I made too much money.

There are no income limits for the PSLF program. However, if your income is high relative to the balance of your student loans, you might not qualify for an income-driven repayment (IDR) plan.

Q&A: Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) and Student Loan Repayment

If you can't get on an IDR plan, you won't be able to take advantage of the PSLF program because you'll pay off all of your loans under the standard 10-year repayment plan by the time you would qualify for PSLF. In other words, you'll have no balance left to forgive by the time you would qualify.

Loan types and consolidation

How do I find the details about my loans?

You can manage your federal student loans by signing into your account at www.studentaid.gov, or creating an account if you haven't yet done so. The slides from the Student Borrower Protection Center used for the January 19th PSLF webinar have more information walking you through managing your loans and getting started with PSLF through the studentaid.gov website.

Do Direct Loans include subsidized and unsubsidized loans?

Yes. There are both subsidized and unsubsidized Direct Loans. For the purpose of PSLF, the important factor is whether they are Direct or not. It does not matter whether they are subsidized.

Do Parent PLUS loans qualify?

Parent PLUS loans do not directly benefit from the waiver. They must be consolidated with another qualifying loan to be included in PSLF loan forgiveness during the waiver. Parent PLUS Loans can qualify for PSLF under the regular program but must be [consolidated](#) to access the necessary income-driven repayment plans.

If you have older loans, such as FFEL, do you need to consolidate into a Direct Loan – and will you get credit for past payments?

Yes! But please note: consolidated loans will receive credit for past payments ONLY if [consolidated](#) during the waiver period, i.e., before October 31, 2022. Normally when a borrower consolidated, the count resets to zero qualifying monthly payments for their new loan. This is why the current temporary waiver is such an important opportunity for so many borrowers with older loans.

I just consolidated FFEL loans into a Direct loan but chose the Standard repayment, as I am 13+ years into payments/public service. My payments (once they restart in May) would be really high under IDR.

If you have 13+ years of qualifying work and your loans were in repayment during that time—i.e., not in default, deferment, or forbearance—then your loans should be forgiven. Any additional/extra payments you make on your new Direct Loan will be returned to you. Standard plan payments will count for PSLF, should you need additional months.

I incurred my debt prior to the PSLF program, so was not aware that changing from the standard to extended payment plan would be disqualifying. Will extended payment plans be eligible?

Yes – but please note: the extended plan is ONLY eligible now because of the waiver, and only for a limited time. If you do not have a Direct Loan, you must consolidate your loan before October 31, 2022, and if you must also submit a form certifying your employment by that deadline. If you do, you will get credit for the time spent in any payment plan, as long as your loans were not in default, deferment, or forbearance. After the waiver, however, you must be in either the standard plan or an income-driven plan to continue to accrue more credit toward loan forgiveness.

Q&A: Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) and Student Loan Repayment

My loan is from the Department of Education from 2012, but it doesn't say "Direct Loan" - how do I find out if it was a Direct Loan? I'm current repaying with another company, not directly to the Department of Education.

If your loan does not say Direct Loan, then you must consolidate it by the waiver deadline. It sounds like you might have a FFELP or Perkins Loan. You can check studentaid.gov or ask your servicer to confirm.

Once you consolidate to the correct loan type, and certify your employment, do you need to go through another application process for loan forgiveness? Or are you automatically in line to receive credit?

Certifying your loan is what tells the Department of Education that you want PSLF loan forgiveness. If you have enough credit for forgiveness, once you certify your employment there is nothing else you need to do. If you do not have enough, the Department will send you a notice telling you how many credits you have of the 120 that are required for loan forgiveness. At that point you should continue to certify your employment on an annual basis until you reach 120. The year that you think you will have 120, you can indicate on the form that you are applying for forgiveness.

Does this include loans consolidated prior to 2007? I consolidated in 2003 (with Nelnet) over 30 years. I've worked more than 10 years in government since 2007.

If your existing Consolidated loan is a Direct Consolidation Loan, then it will already be eligible. But you can only receive credit toward 120 payments beginning after October 2007, which is when Congress created PSLF. If your existing consolidation loan is not a Direct Loan, you must consolidate it again. If you do so before the October 31, 2022, deadline and also certify your employment by that deadline, you will get credit for all of the past work and payments you have made.

If my dad is a government employee and the loan is in his name, can he qualify for forgiveness?

If the loans were taken out for his own education, then he can qualify using his own work, through the waiver and under the normal program rules. If the loan is a Parent PLUS Loan taken out for your education, then it does not qualify under the waiver but could qualify under the regular rules, but your father would have to consolidate the loan to access the income-driven repayment plans needed for PSLF. Because Parent PLUS loans do not receive the waive benefits, he would not get credit for past work on the new loan.

Can you add a spouse to the program?

Your spouse (or family member, friend, etc) must qualify for forgiveness of their loans through PSLF by making 120 payments while working for a qualified public service employer. So you can't add them to your own forgiveness application, but do share this information and encourage everyone you know to take action on their own PSLF application, especially during the waiver period.

If loans were obtained before 2007, would they qualify for PSLF just as long as they are Direct Loans?

Yes. The same is true for non-Direct Loans obtained before 2007, as long as they are consolidated during the waiver. The only relevance of 2007 is that that is when Congress created PSLF, so borrowers can only start to get credit from that date forward.

Q&A: Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) and Student Loan Repayment

What if I consolidated in September 2021? Can I still qualify?

Yes. Loans that were consolidated before the waiver announcement can still get credit. Be sure to certify your employment so that the government can give you the correct amount of credit.

Are there any downsides to consolidating? Like if we don't end up qualifying for some reason.

If you have an interest rate reduction benefit on your non-Direct Loan, you will lose that when you consolidate. Also, if you have been working toward income driven repayment (IDR) forgiveness, you will lose past credit accrued toward the 20 or 25 years needed for forgiveness under those programs. This is why we recommend that borrowers confirm their employment qualifies and that they did not have long periods of default, deferment, or forbearance that would not count for PSLF.

How do we find out if the loan is held privately?

If your loan is listed on studentaid.gov, it is a federal loan. You can look at your loan details to see who the owner is, and if any owner is NOT the Department of Education, that is a privately-held federal loan. If you have loans that do not appear on studentaid.gov, those are private loans.

What if I have loans that are older than 2007 and have already paid the loans from 2007 and later?

It does not matter if the loan was from before 2007. It only matters whether it is a Direct Loan. If it is not, it must be consolidated. You can receive credit toward loan forgiveness beginning in 2007, even if the loans are older.

On Navient it says that we can consolidate FFEL loans into the Direct Lending program to gain eligibility, but that past payments made towards FFEL will not be considered qualifying payments. Does that mean the 10 years, 120 payments restart?

Normally yes, but this is exactly what is fixed temporarily by the waiver. If you consolidate and file your employment certification before October 31, 2022, you will get credit for past work and will not have to restart the 120 payments. If you wait until after October 2022, you will have to restart.

Employment questions and certifying for PSLF

Where should City employees submit their [PSLF form](#) for employer certification?

You should submit your PSLF form (previously known as an Employer Certification Form, or ECF) to your department's HR staff for verification.

You can use the Department of Education's PSLF Help Tool to fill out your form, but to complete the process you will need to print the PDF document that the tool generates, sign it, have HR sign it, and then submit the form to FedLoan Servicing, as instructed on the printed PDF document.

Digital signatures are acceptable but must be hand-drawn (from a signature pad, mouse, finger, or by taking a picture of a signature drawn on a piece of paper that you then scan and embed on the signature line of the PSLF form) to be accepted. You can't currently use DocuSign or similar software.

Q&A: Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) and Student Loan Repayment

How often should you certify employment? I saw somewhere that it was recommended to do it annually.

The Department of Education recommends certifying employment annually – and we agree that this is a good practice. At minimum, it's a good idea to certify when you change employers. However, you can certify employment for your qualifying payments at any point. If you do not submit the PSLF form with your employment certification annually, then at the time you apply for forgiveness, you will be required to submit employment certification for each employer you worked for while making the required 120 qualifying monthly payments.

Does qualifying employment for PSLF need to be all with the same employer, or does it add up if we've worked at another qualifying organization?

Qualifying employment does not need to be all with the same employer, you can add all of the qualifying payments with any public service employer (typically nonprofit or government employers) together to reach your 120 qualifying payments for loan forgiveness.

Do you need to certify employment for all qualifying employers or just your current one? How do you get previous employer signatures (and what if a former employer is no longer in business)?

You must certify employment for each employer, by having them fill out a separate PSLF form. Employment can be certified by an official who has access to your employment or service records and is authorized by your employer to certify your employment – for City & County employees, you should take your form to your department's HR staff for certification.

You should contact any previous employers and ask them to whom you should send the form for signature. If your previous employer no longer exists or you cannot get a response, there is a box you can check on the certification form to indicate that you were unable to get the employer's signature. You should make every effort to contact your employer before checking that box, but if you need to you should check the box and submit the form as normal.

Can you tell us where we can get a list of qualifying employers?

The [PSLF Help Tool](#) includes a large (and still expanding) database of qualifying employers. The tool suggests that you first read "[Become a Public Service Loan Forgiveness \(PSLF\) Help Tool Ninja](#)" – and we agree! There is a lot of detail there about finding qualifying employers.

In brief, it is highly suggested that you use the federal Employer Identification Number (EIN) to search for your employer. Get this from box b of your W-2, or ask your employer what EIN they will report on your W-2 (don't hunt for this on the internet, it can be inaccurate!). You can also search manually by typing in an employer name. The EIN for City and County of San Francisco is 94-3248335.

The nonprofit agency I worked at previously does not show up when I check for qualifying employers on the www.studentaid.gov PSLF Help Tool. What are the next steps that I can take?

If the employer doesn't show up, don't worry. The Department of Education will review your submission and use your submission to add your employer to their database when their review is complete. They recommend two things when doing your manual entry:

1. Enter your employer name exactly as it appears on your W-2.

Q&A: Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) and Student Loan Repayment

2. Upload a copy of your W-2 when prompted to upload documentation (this will save DOE—and you—a lot of time in their review).

Do independent contractors who work for a non-profit or government agency, so are paid by them, qualify?

If a qualifying employer has sent or will send you a Form W-2 (Wage and Tax Statement) at the end of each tax year, you are employed by the qualifying employer for the purposes of PSLF.

For example, if you were hired by a government contractor and the contractor issues your Form W-2, you are employed by the contractor. In this case, although you may be doing work for a qualifying employer (a government agency), you are not an employee of the qualifying employer.

The specific job that you perform doesn't matter, as long as you're employed by a qualifying employer. For example, if you're a full-time employee of a public school system, your employment qualifies regardless of your position (teacher, administrator, support staff, etc.).

Should we wait to certify employment until after we consolidate, or can we certify employment at the same time as going through the consolidation process?

You should consolidate first, and then submit your employment form. You do not need to wait the one or two months for your new consolidation loan to be finalized to then certify your employment. You can submit the employment certification any time after the consolidation application, but before the waiver ends after October 2022.

What payments count – including COVID forbearance

Payments have not been required during the pandemic forbearance period; does this time "count" for PSLF?

Yes, each month during this special emergency COVID forbearance period (which began in March 2020 and currently is set to expire at the end of April) will count toward the 120 total payments required for Public Service Loan Forgiveness – as long as you were employed by a qualifying (government or nonprofit) employer during this time.

Payments I made while working in the private sector do not qualify even if I now work in the public sector, correct?

That is correct – payments only qualify for PSLF during the time you are working for a qualified (i.e. government or nonprofit) employer. Again, you can add together payments made while you worked for multiple different qualifying employers, and these payments do not need to be consecutive.

Is it possible to make extra payments to reach 120 payments?

No, the Department of Education will not count any extra payments, only monthly qualifying payments are counted.

Is the extended IBR payment plan ok?

Yes. Any income-driven repayment plan counts.

Q&A: Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) and Student Loan Repayment

If I've already made the required 120 payments toward PSLF/TEPSLF, should I still need change my repayment plan to an IDR plan?

If you have already made the 120 payments, then you should expect your loan to be forgiven. However, if you enroll in an IDR plan and make extra payments above 120, the government will return the extra payments to you.

If we have made more than 120 qualifying payments, will the government both forgive the remaining balance and pay back payments we made over the 120?

The government will return extra payments only if those payments were made on a Direct Loan. If you made 130 payments on an older loan and you consolidate the loan during the waiver and certify your employment, your loan will be forgiven but you will not get a refund of the 10 payments.

If there was a period of a couple years where someone was working part-time (20 hours/wk), but continued payment during the part time, do those payment qualify?

No, you must be working full-time for a qualifying employer for payments to count. For PSLF, you are generally considered to work full-time if you meet your employer's definition of full-time or work at least 30 hours per week, whichever is greater. If you are employed in more than one qualifying part-time job at the same time, you may meet the full-time employment requirement if you work a combined average of at least 30 hours per week with your employers.

I made a good number of payments that are being considered "ineligible" because they say I didn't have a payment due... but all of these payments were made through direct debit automatic monthly payments. They were made during periods in which my new income driven payment amount was being determined. Do I have any recourse in getting these payments to count?

During the waiver, any MONTH during which your loan was not in default, deferment, or forbearance will count as a month toward 120 for loan forgiveness. The waiver does not look at actual payments made, just loan status. You should get credit for those months during the waiver, but will need to resolve this timing issue going forward.

Do payments for loans you have already paid in full count toward the required 120 payments for PSLF if they were also direct loans?

Yes, these payments should count.

Under normal circumstances, they would only count if you were working full-time for a qualified employer AND had Direct Loans (or had already consolidated into a Direct Loan) AND were making payments through an income-driven repayment (IDR) plan. During the current waiver period through October 31, you can go get credit for past payments even if you didn't have Direct Loans or weren't in an IDR plan (though you do have to consolidate into a Direct Loan before the 10/31 deadline).

My loans were in forbearance while I participated in an Americorps program. I made 2 lump sum payments during this time using my Americorps award money (total of \$5500 I believe) – is there any way to get this to count as more than 2 payments?

If the payments were made from your Segal Education Award and were made within a year of your service ending, the Department should award you as many credits as those lump sum payments would

Q&A: Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) and Student Loan Repayment

have covered, with a cap of 12. For example, if the payments were equal to 4 months of regular payments, then you would get 4 credits. This is true under the regular PSLF rules.

If my loans were still in deferment because I had just graduated, and then I got my government job during the pandemic while all federal loans were deferred, have my nearly two years of work in public service counted towards my 10 years since I've never made a payment? Or do I need to make a payment to bring my loan status to being in "repayment" to make my time in my current position count towards the 10 years?

The payment pause since March 2020 is a special kind of forbearance that counts toward PSLF loan forgiveness. Your loans do not need to be in "repayment" to count for PSLF if they are in this special forbearance, currently set to end after April 2022.

Does any payment made qualify, even those not in an income driven repayment plan? Specifically, I want to know about whether a graduated payment plan will qualify.

Due to the waiver period only, any past months will count toward PSLF as long as your loans were not in default, deferment, or forbearance, regardless of the specific payment plan they were in or if you even made a payment. Going forward, however, the regular rules will require you to be in either the standard or IDR plans. Some graduated plan payments may count toward PSLF, but not all.

If you have consolidated federal loans with a private lender do they still qualify?

No, unfortunately once you consolidate/refinance your federal loans with a private lender, you no longer have access to PSLF.

What if Navient fraudulently steered me to forbearance before I consolidated?

Currently the waiver does not give credit for forbearance, no matter the cause. If you were steered into a forbearance, please [file a complaint with the CFPB](#). These complaints will help the government decide whether an additional program is needed to help borrowers in this situation.

On the face sheet of the PSLF help tool, the qualifying payments shows "0" – does that mean anything for the waiver?

Until you certify your employment, your payment count may appear as 0. All borrowers who want to access PSLF should be sure to take advantage of the waiver before the deadline, and if there are issues they can be resolved after the deadline.

If I qualify for the Temporary waiver but I am not currently enrolled in an income-based repayment plan, do I need to change my repayment plan to income-based before the October waiver deadline to reach for my remaining loan payments?

The waive should give you credit for past months even if you were not in an IDR plan, separate from the TEPSLF. You should take advantage of the waiver to get credit for past months, and make sure you are in a qualifying IDR plan going forward until you get loan forgiveness.

What if you don't have records of payment going back 10 years? I have been working in public service since 2009, but records only go back to 2013.

Q&A: Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) and Student Loan Repayment

The Department of Education should have your complete payment history. All that you need to do is consolidate your loan if necessary and certify all of your eligible employment. If the Department does not have your complete records, [file a complaint with the FSA Ombudsman](#).

Does this also apply to parent plus loans (parent with 30 years of public service employment)? Does it matter if the dependent is currently working as a public servant (5 years)?

Parent PLUS Loan cannot directly benefit from the waiver. They can be included in a consolidation with other loans taken out for your own education, and receive the benefits indirectly, but cannot themselves get waiver credit.

Parent PLUS Loans can qualify under the regular PSLF rules, but must be consolidated to access the necessary IDR plans. If you consolidate Parent PLUS Loans they will not be credited for past work, so your 120 will start at 0.

PSLF is only for your own loans. It does not benefit a parent or child if one of the two of them works in public service. It matters whether the borrower themselves works in public service.

If you are on an IDR plan, and your income changed, but your loan amount remained the same, do those payments count towards the 120 payments?

IDR payments count toward the 120 payments required for PSLF regardless of the amount you are required to pay.

So if I had 6 years of payments towards my undergrad loans and 1 year towards my grad student loans, I can consolidate and have both be credited with six years of repayment?

Correct. If you do this before the waiver deadline.

I've already consolidated my loans but my previous employer was not included as verified - we only need employer verification not loan payment proof, correct?

You do not need to prove your past payment history. The Department of Ed has that information. All you need to do is ensure you have the right loan type and then certify all past employment.

I need to reconsolidate my loan to a direct service loan. I'm still not clear on the payment plan to pick. "Income driven?"

If you are consolidating your loan and need to make sure future payments are eligible for PSLF, for most people an income-driven repayment plan is the best option (e.g., IBR, ICR, PAYE, REPAYE). [Here is more information](#) to help you pick the plan that is right for you.

My monthly IBR payment is based on my combined household income because my spouse and I filed our taxes jointly. This results in higher household income and a higher monthly payment. Is there any way my monthly payments can be based only on my annual gross adjusted income instead of our combined household income?

If you're trying to maximize the benefits of PSLF, it makes sense to minimize your monthly student loan payments as much as possible. The less you pay now, the greater the amount that will be forgiven. If you're a married couple working towards PSLF, you may be able to reduce your monthly payments now by filing your taxes separately; however, by filing separately you may also be taxed at a higher rate.

Q&A: Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) and Student Loan Repayment

The only way to know for sure which is the better option is to compare each scenario. To do this, you'll need to work with a tax advisor (unless you're personally handy at tax numbers) to see what the difference in your tax liability will be if you file separately or jointly, and then discuss with your student loan servicer what the difference in monthly payments could be if you file jointly vs. separately.

This is NOT tax advice! You may need to consult a professional to explore these scenarios. The bottom line is that income-driven repayment doesn't take into account the cost of living in the Bay Area, so is unfortunately not as beneficial to those with higher household incomes.