

College Planning Brown Bag: Scholarships 101

FINDING SCHOLARSHIPS

Start Early! Most scholarships are available to HS seniors and have deadlines ranging from September - May of senior year, so start searching and compiling a list of scholarships during sophomore/junior year.

Research Opportunities

- Family – What organizations are you or your family members affiliated with?
- Community – Ask local businesses and organizations if they offer scholarships
- Colleges – Check with admissions officers and financial aid officers at the colleges you're considering
- Online – Use local and national search tools. Search by geographic area, professional organizations, your field of study, personal characteristics, or any background or attributes that describe you (i.e. heritage, left-handed, neurodiverse, etc.)

Increase Your Odds

- Do what you're passionate about – service, arts, athletics, etc.
- Apply to as many scholarships as possible
- Keep a résumé or record of all activities, including hours spent, leadership positions held, awards won
- Do not ignore small scholarships – the pool of applicants is usually smaller, which increases your chances

Understand Scholarship Criteria

- Is a completed FAFSA (or CSS Profile) required?
- “Financial Need” can mean a lot of different things.
- “First Generation” typically means that neither of your parents completed a 4-year degree
- “Diversity” does not always mean racial/ethnic diversity
- “Overcoming Adversity” does not have to mean overcoming something catastrophic

RECOMMENDATIONS

Many scholarships ask applicants to provide letters of recommendation. Be sure to determine who the recommendation(s) should come from – a teacher, coach, mentor, counselor, employer, religious leader, etc. are common recommender types for scholarships.

Requesting a Recommendation

- Give recommenders plenty of time (at least 2-4 weeks) to prepare & send a recommendation
- Choose your recommender thoughtfully – if a scholarship focuses on a special skill set, ask someone who has seen you exercise that skill

Provide Information Upfront

After they agree to write a recommendation, provide them with the following information:

- Your full name and contact information
- Name of scholarship and organization providing it
- Where/how to send recommendation
- Information about the scholarship and selection criteria
- A copy of your résumé/activities list, including any awards you've received

Follow Up

- Touch base with you recommenders 1-2 weeks before the recommendation is due to ensure they do not need any additional information, know how to submit their recommendation, and will be able to meet the deadline
- Do not forget to thank your recommender... a thank you note goes a long way!

APPLYING TO SCHOLARSHIPS

Stay organized, add important dates to your calendar, and follow ALL directions.

Write a Powerful Essay

- Grammar, punctuation, and spelling matter
- Tell a story – powerful essays bring the reader in and they'll remember you
- Brag a little – scholarship providers do not know you and want to know why they should award you a scholarship. What makes you special or unique?
- Do not reinvent the wheel – scholarships might have similar essay prompts, so adapt and reuse your essays!
- Proofread EVERYTHING – carefully review your applications and essays before submitting

RECEIVING A SCHOLARSHIP

Communication is key!

Submit Necessary Documentation

Ask the scholarship organization what they need from you to pay your scholarship. Common items may include:

- Address – it's likely the scholarship organization will be sending the funds directly to your college's Financial Aid Office and will need to be provided with that address/contact information
- College Student ID Number – you'll be assigned a unique ID# at the college you plan to attend, which helps the scholarship organization ensure the funds are matched with your financial aid account at your college
- Acceptance Letter – some scholarship organizations require proof of acceptance before sending funds
- Copy of Schedule/Transcript – some scholarship organizations require proof of enrollment before sending funds

Communicate with the Financial Aid Office

- You must notify your college's Financial Aid Office of any outside scholarships you've received
- All scholarships must be evaluated by your college's Financial Aid Office to determine if any adjustments need to be made to your financial aid award package

Determine Renewability

Is your scholarship renewable? If so, what do you need to do to renew it? Is there a certain GPA required to maintain the scholarship, or another application to fill out? Do you need to send the scholarship organization a copy of your transcripts? What are the deadlines?

Follow Up

Send a thank you note to the scholarship organization! You never know when someone will be on another selection committee.

AVOID SCHOLARSHIP SCAMS

These are major red flags:

- Guaranteed! – no organization or individual can guarantee a scholarship
- Cost to Apply – scholarship applications should not cost more than a postage stamp.
- Paid Search Service – some people charge money to find and apply to scholarships for you. You can find the exact same scholarships they find, and are solely responsible for filling out applications. Use your integrity.
- NEVER PROVIDE anyone's bank account information, credit card information, social security numbers...

COMMON ESSAY QUESTIONS

Why do you want to be a _____?

What do you consider to be the single most important society problem today and why?

Describe how you have demonstrated leadership ability both in and out of school.

Discuss a special attribute or accomplishment that sets you apart.

Describe your most meaningful achievements and how they relate to your field of study/future goals.

How will your study of _____ contribute to your immediate or long-term goals?

Why are you a good candidate to receive this award?

Pick an experience from your own life and explain how it has influenced your development.

Who in your life has been your biggest influence and why?

Where do you see yourself 10 years from now?

Why do you want to earn a college degree?

From a financial standpoint, what impact would this scholarship have on your ability to earn a college degree? Share any special personal or family circumstances contributing to your need for financial assistance.

Choose a person you admire and explain why.

OUTSIDE SCHOLARSHIP SEARCH SITES

OSAC – www.oregonstudentaid.gov

Fast Web – www.fastweb.com

College Board – <https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/scholarship-search>

UP Database – <https://webapps.up.edu/opportunities/opportunities>

Naviance Student – Colleges > Scholarships & Money (specifically: *Scholarship List* and *National Scholarship Search*)