

Mastering the Process of College Scholarships

Sound Advice from

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If you have ever attended an annual high school awards night, you have undoubtedly witnessed the handful of students each year that come away with the lion's share of awards and scholarships. Are they the best and the brightest in their class? Perhaps, but they are also the ones who probably had the best scholarship strategy.

Applying for scholarships is a lengthy process, with many moving parts. Beyond the obvious fact that every extra scholarship dollar can help you and your family, the process is also a way to develop invaluable life skills. Mastering the ability to organize, prioritize, write well, and most of all, be able to sell yourself will serve you well in whatever field you choose to pursue.

Start the process early - Many scholarships have early application deadlines and multiple screening steps, so the time to start sourcing potential scholarships is now.

Search locally – Local scholarships are numerous, and are often relatively small in value. However, they often are your best chance at success because there are fewer applicants. Local financial institutions, service organizations, clubs, businesses, and churches are all potential sources for community scholarships.

Ask for advice from school counselors– As today's economic realities take their toll on school staffing, many high school counselors are responsible for a huge number of students. Nonetheless, they can be a great scholarship resource, and are usually very eager to help those students who ask for scholarship advice. Your counselor may be able to lead you to scholarships you don't know about, or find scholarships that aren't very competitive, or ones that are not heavily advertised. It's not uncommon for some scholarships to have only one applicant. Needless to say, those sound like pretty good odds.

Check with specific colleges – Most colleges offer school-specific scholarships. Defining what scholarships they offer may even provide the tipping point between deciding on one school versus another.

Read the requirements carefully – Scholarships come in just about every shape, size and structure imaginable, so before you apply, make sure that you are actually eligible. Read the fine print. This will allow you to avoid wasting precious prep time. And, be careful to follow the application instructions down to the last detail. Any errors in your application can mean immediate denial. If you are not sure about something in the scholarship application, don't hesitate to ask. Once you are certain you have followed all of the instructions and requirements, have a trusted friend proofread it for you prior to submittal.

Submit your “package” professionally – A great way to make a good first impression is to submit a scholarship application via certified mail or better yet, FedEx, making your application look professional and stand out from others. If possible, try to follow up with a phone call or email to confirm that your information was received.

As you work your way through the process, don't be discouraged by the redundancy or by the substantial time commitment. Look at it as a job. The time you spend on developing and implementing a carefully planned scholarship strategy may not pay off for months, but when it does, and when your name is the one called as the scholarship recipient, the financial rewards of your efforts will make it all worthwhile.

To find out more information, including advice on just about every aspect of the process, go to www.scholarshiphelp.org.