

Need Help Finding College Scholarships?

Dear Student,

In your Universal Encouragement Program guidance survey, you indicated an interest in finding scholarships to help pay for college.

Scholarships can help pay for college or eligible career training programs, and they generally do not require repayment if you meet the award's conditions. You do not have to be a straight-A student or an outstanding athlete to find opportunities. Scholarships may recognize financial need, community service, leadership, career interests, creative talents, personal experiences, or other qualifications.

Start early—and keep looking.

Some scholarships are available before senior year, and many require time to prepare essays, gather records, or request recommendations. If you are in middle school, begin learning about opportunities and keep a record of your activities, projects, and accomplishments.

During high school, make scholarship research part of your college planning. Continue looking after graduation, too; some awards are available to students already enrolled in college.

Begin with your school and community.

Visit the counseling office to ask about local scholarships and application deadlines. Other places to check include:

- Community foundations, civic organizations, and local businesses.
- Employers and labor unions connected to your family.
- Religious, cultural, and community organizations.
- Professional associations related to careers that interest you.

You can also use [Dollars for Scholars' chapter finder](#) to see whether a local chapter serves your community.

Check each college's scholarship requirements.

Visit the financial aid and scholarship pages of every college you are considering. Ask:

- Are students automatically considered through their admission application, or is a separate scholarship application required?
- Is there an earlier admission deadline for scholarship consideration?
- Are there awards offered by particular departments or programs?

- Must I submit the FAFSA or another financial aid form?
- Is the scholarship renewable, and what requirements must I meet to keep it?

Do not assume that the regular admission deadline is also the scholarship deadline. Some colleges require an earlier application for full scholarship consideration.

Use reliable online resources.

These are useful starting points:

- [**BigFuture Scholarship Search**](#): Explore scholarships and guidance on paying for college.
- [**CareerOneStop Scholarship Finder**](#): Search awards by criteria such as location and level of study.
- [**Federal Student Aid: Scholarship Basics and Tips**](#): Learn where to look and how scholarships fit into your financial aid plan.
- [**BigFuture: How to Find and Apply for Scholarships**](#): Practical advice for organizing your search and applications.

A database helps you discover possibilities; it does not guarantee eligibility or an award. Always confirm current requirements and deadlines on the scholarship sponsor's official website.

Choose opportunities that fit you.

Read the eligibility rules before spending time on an application. Check grade level, residency, financial need, intended field of study, and any other requirements.

Prioritize scholarships that match your qualifications and interests. Smaller awards can be useful alongside other assistance. Treat scholarship drawings as extra possibilities rather than the foundation of your college budget.

Prepare your application materials.

Keep an organized folder with:

- A résumé or list of activities, employment, volunteering, and responsibilities.
- Examples of projects, achievements, or leadership.
- Any required transcript or other school records.
- Essay drafts and copies of completed applications.
- Deadlines, submission confirmations, and follow-up instructions.

Ask permission before naming someone as a reference. Give recommenders several weeks when possible, along with the scholarship's requirements and deadline. Family responsibilities and paid work can demonstrate important strengths, so include them when relevant.

Write an essay that sounds like you.

Answer the actual question and follow the word limit. Use specific examples to show what you have learned, why your goals matter, or how you have contributed to others.

For example, instead of simply saying, “I am dependable,” describe a responsibility you carried out and what it taught you.

Ask a teacher, counselor, or trusted adult to review your draft for clarity and errors while preserving your own voice. You may adapt an earlier essay, but revise it to fit each scholarship’s prompt and follow its rules about outside assistance.

Understand what an award covers.

Before accepting, check whether the scholarship is a one-time award or renewable, which expenses it covers, and which colleges or programs are eligible.

Report outside scholarships to your college’s financial aid office and ask how they affect your overall aid package. A scholarship may change other assistance, so find out how it changes your actual cost.

Use free help and protect your information.

You do not need to pay to search for scholarships. Be cautious of promises of a guaranteed award in exchange for an upfront fee. Use official application sites, and ask your counselor if a request for personal or financial information seems questionable.

Scholarships are one part of paying for college. When you are preparing to enroll, also complete the FAFSA and investigate grants and college aid. **State and college financial aid deadlines may be earlier than the federal FAFSA deadline**, and scholarship deadlines may be different again.

Please make an appointment with the counseling office. Bring your interests, possible colleges or training programs, and any scholarships you have found. We can help you identify suitable opportunities and develop a manageable application plan.

Sincerely,

Your Counselor