

CHAPTER 1

SEARCHING AND APPLYING FOR SCHOLARSHIPS AND LOANS

Focus your initial energy on local and regional scholarships. Scholarships are given at the regional and local level as well as the national level. The applicant pool for national scholarships is much larger which makes them more difficult to win. State and local scholarships typically have fewer applicants and less competition, and therefore are easier to win. Especially for A-/B+ students!

Utilize as many sources as are available to you for your scholarship search: use the public library, search on the Internet, call the financial aid office of the colleges you are applying to, and call the office or president of any organization you or your family members belong to. Talk to your guidance counselor if you have one.

1. CALCULATE ESTIMATED COLLEGE COSTS

It is useful to estimate what the costs of attending college will be for you when considering what type and how many scholarships to apply for. There are various Internet resources that can assist you in calculating your costs.

➤ WEBSITES

www.collegeboard.com/paying

The College Board offers financial aid calculators, savings plan options, college costs estimates, and loan information.

www.collegefinancingguide.com/estimcosts.html

The College Financing Guide offers a worksheet to estimate what your college costs will be based on a number of factors; this site is geared more toward parents who want to know how much to save to finance their child's education.

2. FILL OUT THE FREE APPLICATION FOR FEDERAL STUDENT AID (FAFSA)

Complete the FAFSA form. It is the same for all students because all of the federal scholarships, grants, and loans that are available require this form. The FAFSA is the Free Application for Federal Student Aid and is the federal document that calculates how much a student is expected to contribute, how much federal aid a student qualifies for, or how much a student family is estimated to contribute. Many scholarships, both public and private, require a copy of the FAFSA with an application.

➤ To get the FAFSA or for more information go to *www.fafsa.ed.gov*.

3. SEARCH FOR SCHOLARSHIPS

➤ Check your local library for printed sources of information about national and local scholarships available. Ask the reference librarian for help.

➤ Inquire with organizations you or your family are involved in. Unions, religious institutions, community groups, volunteer groups, and Greek organizations frequently offer scholarships.

- Use the Internet extensively in your search. Contact schools and use search engines discussed in this directory to find a scholarship that is right for you. (See Chapter 2 of this book for a list of several of the top websites). Also, consider using large search engines like Google.com. Be careful, however: there are many scams on the Internet.
- Speak to your guidance counselor about any scholarships offered to students by your high school and resources that might be available through the guidance office.
- Look in the local newspapers. Newspapers sometimes announce awards recently given to students and inform you of when you can next apply for the same scholarship. Also search the newspaper's website for past scholarship articles.
- Check with the company for whom you, your parents, or your spouse works. Often, companies offer scholarships to their employees and their families.
- Once you have been admitted to a college or university, contact the financial aid office on campus to see if there are any scholarships for which you qualify. Ask for scholarships related to your interests, potential major, or athletics. Oftentimes, you may be considered for need- or merit-based scholarships automatically with your application, but other times a separate application is required.
- **Be patient and keep looking!**

4. APPLY FOR SCHOLARSHIPS

The process of applying for competitive scholarships involves a lot of time, effort, and meticulous work. To assist you, we have compiled advice on the scholarship search from various sources.

- Only apply for scholarships for which you qualify. Read eligibility requirements carefully and assess yourself accurately; otherwise you will waste time and effort. Do not apply for a scholarship with a GPA requirement unless you meet that GPA requirement.
- Check and recheck your application. Have you followed the directions? Is your application complete? Have you included all required documents such as recommendations, essays, and transcripts?
- Understand the goals of the sponsoring group. If you can identify their goals, then you can shape your application to address them and increase your chances of getting the award.
- Ask teachers, guidance counselors, or others you know for help in filling out the application. Ask them to proofread your essay and give you suggestions for improvement.
- The application represents you to an organization that knows nothing else about you. Take pride in yourself when completing your application. Let those things that set you apart from others shine through on the application you submit.
- Be aware of deadlines. Make a calendar for this purpose. **Late applications are not accepted.**

- It is your responsibility to get your letters of recommendations in on time. Give the materials to the people who are providing the recommendations early and gently remind them several days before the deadline.
- Include your name and address with your application. Have your name and social security number on EACH page, in case the pages get separated.
- Check for spelling and grammatical errors. Your application must be neat and error-free. Neatly handwrite or type the application. Type essays or other written requirements.
- Be sure to keep a photocopy of each application, including all materials that you send.
- Include a cover letter, thanking the organization for the opportunity to apply for their scholarship.
- Include a resume written specifically for scholarship applications (unless you are not allowed to attach extra material); highlight your leadership experience and do not be afraid to brag.
- Make sure the sponsoring organization receives your application. Send your application with a “return receipt requested” or include a stamped, self-addressed postcard in the application materials. If possible, call to verify that it was received.
- Be aware of how the scholarship money is paid out. In some cases, funds go directly to the financial aid office and in some cases a check is given to you. Some financial aid offices will be flexible with how your scholarship money will be spent. Many scholarships are allocated to educational expenses, which include tuition as well as textbooks and housing.

5. USE SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATION RESOURCES

➤ WEBSITES

www.mba360.com/writing-scholarship-essays.html

MBA 360 offers twelve detailed tips for writing a successful scholarship essay.

www.ksu.edu/artsci/scholarship/essay.htm

Kansas State University’s scholarship essay advice is geared toward the more advanced student; it offers students a way to think about the essay-writing process and provides tips for a successful scholarship essay.

➤ BOOKS

Tanabe, G. and Tanabe, K. 2002. *Money-Winning Scholarship Essays and Interviews*. Supercollege, LLC.

This book is by the website company Supercollege.com. They offer examples of good and bad scholarship essays, as well as tips for preparing for scholarship interviews.

Kaplan, B. 2001. *How to Go to College Almost for Free*. 2nd ed. HarperCollins.

Kaplan offers general scholarship advice, as well as a chapter on how to write good scholarship essays.

6. CONSIDER LOAN RESOURCES

There are two primary types of loans for higher education: federal and private. Federal loans usually have lower interest rates and often the interest is not accruing while you are in school. However, private loans may lend you more money or be more flexible with repayment options. Either way, research all options and read all contracts carefully before taking a loan.

Be careful how much you borrow; loans can stack up significantly by the time you graduate. Take only the minimum you need to get through a semester and if you have money left over at the end of the semester, repay the loan or use it the next semester instead of borrowing more. Plan carefully how you will use your loans and follow your budget.

➤ FEDERAL LOANS

Federal loan eligibility is determined by completing a FAFSA form. The FAFSA will determine what type of loan and how much money you qualify for. In Tennessee these federal loans are administered by both the Tennessee Student Assistance Corporation (TSAC) and through individual institutions. The Federal Stafford Loan Program and the Federal Plus Loan Program are both administered by TSAC. The Federal Perkins Loan is administered by individual institutions.

Federal loans are either subsidized or unsubsidized. Subsidized loans are ones in which the government pays the interest for you while you are still in school. These are usually the best deal because you are only responsible for the interest that accrues **after** you graduate. Additionally, subsidized loans have very low interest rates (usually around 4 to 5 percent). Unsubsidized loans have interest accruing from the day you take the loan. Students often qualify for more money, but there is no deferment or grace period with this type of loan. For more information about federal loans, check out these:

- Tennessee Student Assistance Corporation Phone: 1-800-342-1663
Website: *www.state.tn.us/tsac*

- Federal Student Aid Information Center Phone: 1-800-4-FED-AID
Website: *www.ed.gov/studentaid*

➤ PRIVATE LOANS

Many banks and credit unions offer loans for students and their families to finance college. These are often at a slightly higher interest rate (5 to 7 percent in 2003) than federal loans, but may also have more flexible loan terms and repayment options. Check with your local bank as well as several of the large national banks to get the best deal. Taking a loan to finance college is similar to a car or house loan, so shop around and make a deal that suits your situation.

➤ WEBSITES

www.salliemae.com
www.edsouth.com
www.bankofamerica.com/studentbanking