

SEARCHING FOR SCHOLARSHIPS

Everyone needs money for college. While searching for it may seem illusive at times, take heart – financial assistance is available. An often-seen statement is that “billions of dollars in privately funded scholarship awards go unused because students and families do not know of the availability or where to apply.” To date, the claim of “billions of dollars” has not been substantiated, but it is plausible that scholarship dollars are not awarded because people don’t apply.

It takes a great deal of persistence to search for scholarship monies that are outside the realm of the state and federal governments and colleges and universities. However, possibilities exist for students who know what the search involves and how to maximize the potential for positive results.



Go the Traditional Route First

Upon acceptance to a college, check with the college admissions office about scholarships. Also check with the college financial aid office for a comprehensive listing of all types of aid the institution has for its students including scholarships offered by the department of the student’s major field of study. Conduct a Web search of private foundations as many of them sponsor college scholarships promoting the foundation’s specific interests.

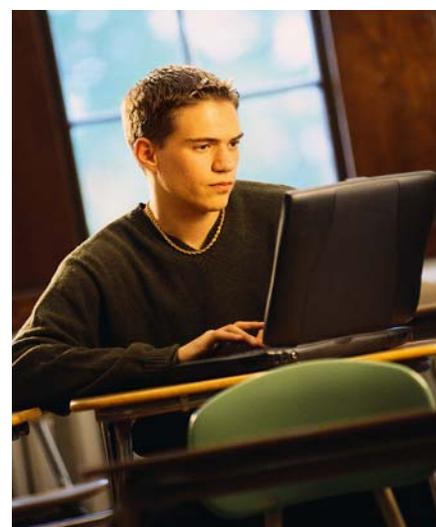
Apply for local scholarships such as those sponsored by organizations in the student’s surrounding community or state. Typically the pool of applicants is smaller which increases the chance of being selected as an award recipient. Students should contact their high school guidance counselor for a list of locally sponsored scholarships.

Explore funding through community sources and private agencies. Consider the following:

- Determine possible academic majors, then contact professional organizations pertaining to the academic major for information about awards available for postsecondary education.
- Check with local businesses and the parents’ places of employment for scholarships.
- Check with local civic and social clubs or organizations for scholarships.
- Students of a minority racial/ethnic background are encouraged to explore funding through community organizations. Check with the school minority affairs office for specific sources.
- Students affiliated with a religious group could check with the appropriate religious group for possible awards.

Scholarship Search Services

Scholarship search services became particularly abundant in the 1990s. During that time and since, a number of them have been shut down by the U.S. Department of Justice. Those that did not



make unlawful guarantees or promises have maintained their service. Periodically, these companies review their database listings to keep the information current.

Searching for scholarships other than those awarded by the federal government, state government, or colleges and universities is typically a tedious process. It is up to the student to contact the sources sponsoring the scholarships, obtain the application, write the essay, gather the necessary letters of recommendation, and meet the application deadline. The mission of the student engaged in a scholarship search could be titled, “leave no stone unturned.” The scholarship search process requires students to:

- Start searching and apply early in their junior year of high school.
- Apply for the scholarships that most fit the student’s talents, skills, achievements, and interests.
- Be organized.
- Be mindful of deadlines and meet them.
- Write the required essay and have someone else read it for clarity and proofread it for grammar and punctuation.
- Follow the process through to completion.



The Application Process

Online scholarship search services help students locate scholarships, grants, and fellowships that are found separate from federal, state, and institutional sources. This is a personalized search that links the student to a scholarship database. The search service will conduct a matching process of the student’s personal profile to the award criteria set by the sponsoring organization of the scholarship or grant. The student profile is a questionnaire requesting information about the student’s background and interests. Examples of the information requested are:

- High school activities
- Community or voluntary service involvement
- Academic or career interests
- ACT / SAT score
- Grade point average, etc.

Within a few days of submitting the profile online, the student receives a list of the scholarships or grants for which they are eligible to apply, or have been matched with, based on the information provided on the questionnaire and qualifying award criteria. Next, the student needs to sort through the list, and go online and read the qualifying criteria for the awards. It is recommended that the student first apply for the scholarships with the qualifying criteria that they most closely meet. This will help the student focus on the scholarships they have a better chance of winning. Many of the awards require that the student write an essay. Hopefully, the closer the match, the easier it will be for the student to write an essay about a topic on which they are knowledgeable or are interested.



Scholarship search databases contain hundreds of thousands of scholarship and grant resources to which the student could potentially be matched. Remember that these databases are available to students throughout the nation. Thus it is very important that students be mindful of meeting the application requirements and the submission deadlines. It is feasible that over 100,000 students are applying to a sponsor that has 250 scholarships available. Not completing the application or missing the submission deadline will eliminate a student who would otherwise qualify. The sponsors use this as one way to narrow the pool of applicants for review.

Scholarship Search Web Sites

The following list represents a few of the potentially useful scholarship search Web sites where students may conduct a scholarship search. This is not an exhaustive list of Web sites. However, these sites have been operating for quite some time without legal problems. Some of them use the same database of scholarship information, and some of them have links to other financial aid-related sites. In addition, these sites offer students and families other useful information for college planning.



Finally, students need to be aware that scholarship search services are business entities and lending institutions sponsor many of them. Therefore, students may receive information from lending institutions regarding the types of loans they offer. Students are not obligated to respond to any of these notices.

Start searching today and follow all the steps toward a successful outcome.

www.michigan.gov/studentaid

www.internationalscholarships.com

www.mapping-your-future.com

www.collegeboard.com

www.scholarshipsforhispanics.org

www.thomsonpeterson.com

www.uncf.org

www.ncaa.org

Scholarship Scams – “If it sounds too good to be true . . .”

In the process of putting together plans to pay for college, be careful not to get involved with unscrupulous companies that use high-pressure sales techniques and methods. Remember the old adage: “If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.” Use caution and check into the company’s business practices before giving out any personally identifying information or signing a contract.

How does a student know whether or not they have received information that may constitute a scholarship scam? Following are examples of wording that the U.S. Department of Education and the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) caution borrowers to be suspicious of:

- “The scholarship is guaranteed or your money back.”
- “You can’t get this information anywhere else.”
- “I just need your credit card or bank account number to hold this scholarship.”
- “We’ll do all the work.”

- “The scholarship will cost some money.”
- “You’ve been selected by a ‘national foundation’ to receive a scholarship” or “You’re a finalist” in a contest you never entered.

If students or parents attend a seminar sponsored by a company offering financial aid consulting services, or a company offers to assist with searching for scholarships or with filing the FAFSA, the FTC suggests following these steps:



- Take some time. Don’t be rushed into signing a contract or paying any money at the seminar. Avoid high-pressure sales pitches that require buying now or risk losing out on the opportunity. Solid opportunities are not sold through nerve-racking tactics.
- Investigate the organization. Talk to a guidance counselor or financial aid advisor before spending the money. The same help may be available for free.
- Be wary of “success stories” or testimonials of extraordinary success – the seminar will promote only those that state they are satisfied with the products and services received.
- Be cautious about purchasing from seminar representatives who are reluctant to answer questions or who give evasive answers to questions. Legitimate business people are more than willing to give out information about their service.
- Ask how much money is charged for the service, the services that will be performed, and the company’s refund policy. Get this information in writing. Keep in mind that despite stated refund policies, the money given to an unscrupulous operator might never be recouped.

If the student thinks they have received information that could be a scam or have been contacted by someone who uses statements similar to the ones above, contact the FTC. The FTC works for the consumer to prevent fraudulent, deceptive, and unfair business practices in the marketplace and to provide information to help consumers avoid them. The FTC enters Internet, telemarketing, identity theft, and other fraud-related complaints into Consumer Sentinel, a secure, online database available to hundreds of civil and criminal law enforcement agencies in the U.S. and abroad.

In 1996 the FTC initiated Project ScholarScam as a continuous project to prevent and prosecute scholarship fraud. The project includes a comprehensive consumer education campaign.

Following Project ScholarScam, in 2000 Congress enacted The College Scholarship Fraud Prevention Act. According to the provisions of the act, Congress requires that the U.S. Department of Education, the FTC, and the Department of Justice (DOJ) submit a consolidated report assessing the type and number of fraudulent scholarship incidents reported since enacting the law. Together, the three federal agencies continue to monitor new targets and provide educational materials to protect consumers against fraudulent practices. The FTC and the DOJ coordinate their efforts to take civil/criminal actions when appropriate.



To file a complaint or to get free information on consumer issues call 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357) or TTY at 1-866-653-4261, or visit the Web site at www.ftc.gov. Consumers may also check the reputation of scholarship search services or any other financial aid services by contacting the Better Business Bureau at www.bbb.com or the Michigan Attorney General’s Office at www.michigan.gov/ag.