

5 Tips You Need To Know to Secure Scholarships

1. Start Locally— Since the odds of winning local awards are much greater than those in a statewide or national competition, start here. In fact, some local scholarship programs receive fewer than 100 applications per year. Do you belong to a church group or a local chapter of a national club? Do either of your parents work for a large company? Do you participate in a hobby in the community or volunteer at a non-profit organization? Many local groups and organizations offer scholarships; you just have to be on the lookout and inquire about them. Students can locate available opportunities by checking with their high school guidance counselors, college staff or faculty members (if you are currently a student, you likely have access to an advisor or counselor. Take advantage!), or check your local resources like newspapers, radio, television, small businesses and community portals. Also check with your prospective schools—don't forget to go to their website and do some research, and even give their financial aid office a call.

2. Consider Smaller Awards— Many students ignore or avoid scholarships that are valued under \$500; they may feel as though these programs are not worth their time, but these awards do add up! Smaller scholarships can help cover the cost of books, supplies and other expenses that may not be covered by the larger awards. Many providers often disburse smaller scholarship awards directly to the students, as well. Even if you spend two hours on a \$300 scholarship, you will be paid \$150 for each hour of your time. Not bad!

3. Remember, More Work = Less Applicants—Unfortunately, many students do not want to spend much time on scholarship applications. Once an essay word count reaches the 1,000 mark, or multiple essays or reference letters are required, the number of applicants drops quite a bit. Students who apply for programs that require little to no work may be battling against 50,000 or more students for one scholarship, whereas those who take the time to submit to a more substantial program may have a 1 in 500 shot of winning. Much better odds! Don't be afraid to put some work into your scholarship hunt – the rewards will be worth it!

4. Focus on Your Interests—Think of the activities, cultures, identities and hobbies that you resonate with; many scholarships focus on a unique identifier. For example, if you spend a considerable time volunteering at the Humane Society, you may find it more rewarding to concentrate on volunteer scholarships or animal rights or rescue agencies, whereas students who enjoy math or science may find STEM scholarships more interesting. If students are interested in what they are writing about, chances are the scholarship committee will be more interested in reading the applications, too.

5. Submit Your Best Work—Scholarship donors can easily spot an application that has been submitted hastily or without much thought; they are often riddled with grammatical errors, missing important elements or fail to stay on topic. Although students can increase their chances of winning scholarships by applying to many programs, it does absolutely no good if they submit poor quality work. To get the most out of your time, pay close attention to guidelines and ensure all work is reviewed by at least one other person prior to submitting any applications. Small mistakes can often mean the difference between students making it to the final round or not. You'll also need a positive attitude! It's tough sending off scholarship applications and not receiving an award right away, but those who stick with it often find that their efforts were worth it.