

THE SCHOLARSHIP HUNT

Establish a system for gathering and organizing all of your scholarship search paperwork: applications, recommendations, essays, test scores, transcripts.

Meet all application deadlines.

Use a calendar or planner, make a schedule, and stick to it. If you miss a deadline, even by just one day, you may not be considered.

Gather application materials early.

Give yourself plenty of time to complete each step. Applications that have been rushed look sloppy, and incomplete applications probably won't be accepted.

Don't ignore small awards.

Small awards can add up. Plus, the larger the award, the more competition you'll face.

Request letters of recommendation early.

Some applications require letters of recommendation. Think carefully about who should write these letters and choose people who can speak to your strengths and ability to overcome your weaknesses

- Use teachers, counselors, employers, community members – never family members
- Provide all requested information.
- Whenever possible, ask people to write letters that can be sent with multiple scholarship applications.
- Provide a copy of your essay or resume
- Give your letter writers as much time as possible.
- Check in with your letter writer at some point in the process to be sure he or she has everything needed.
- Be sure to ask that the writer use official letterhead if possible.
Follow-up with your recommender to assure that your letter was submitted.
- After you receive the letter, write a note of appreciation.

Write a great essay.

It should be well organized, grammatically correct, spellchecked, and no more than 500 words. Things to highlight might be:

- The motivational reason you are pursuing your chosen degree or certificate (make sure to expand on this topic and not just state the degree/certificate you are pursuing)

- Experience as a first-generation college student, single parent or caregiver for a disabled child, parent or spouse
- Overcoming a learning disability or physical/health challenges
- Description of volunteer and community activities

Attend a scholarship workshop.

Some schools offer workshops as well as individual donor organizations. There are also a variety of videos, articles, and online workshops on the Internet. Do your research.

Sing your own praises.

Applications will often ask you to talk about what you do with your time. As uncomfortable as this may feel, this is one time in your life when it's necessary to brag. Tell them about recognition and awards you've received. Emphasize activities that show your talents and passions, especially things that demonstrate your ability to lead, take initiative, persist through adversity and care for your community. Don't underestimate yourself - employment and family responsibilities can say a lot in your favor as well.

Try, try again.

Keep trying even if you don't win a scholarship right away. Save copies of every application that you complete so you don't have to start from scratch every time.