



Scholarships 101

Scholarships provide free money for college. Scholarships can reduce your out-of-pocket costs and student loan debt.

What Kind of Money Is Out There?

Academic and Merit-based Scholarships

Most scholarships are academic and merit-based. Criteria for scholarships can vary widely. The application materials will provide all the details. Academic scholarships focus on GPA, standardized test scores, and other academic performance measures. Merit-based scholarships may not always have a GPA requirement but often focus on community service participation, leadership skills, performance arts, and/or athletic ability. Both academic and merit-based scholarships may have a need-based component.

How Do I Qualify for Scholarships?

Carefully reading the scholarship application materials is one of the most important steps toward winning a scholarship. The application will provide all the eligibility requirements, document requirements, essay question, and due date.

Many need-based scholarships will require the completion of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). FAFSA completion often determines your eligibility for federal and state grants, work-study programs, and low-interest loans.

FAFSA completion is one of the most important steps in the financial aid process. Many private and institutional need-based scholarships will use the Expected Family Contribution (EFC) from your FAFSA to decide whether you qualify.

Many colleges and universities offer scholarships when you are accepted or as part of your acceptance and/or award letter.

Most private scholarships require a separate application that you must complete. Winning a scholarship can be a competitive process.



Application Tips

College Application Portals

Using college application portals helps you stay organized and helps you track your college application. Many college application portals have a scholarship database as an add-on feature. College application portals are a great way to maximize institutional aid as well. The Common Application, the Common Black College Application, the Coalition Application, and the Universal College Application are great portals.

Write an essay that conveys how special you are. The essay provides the scholarship committee with valuable information about your accomplishments, passions, and dreams. Be certain to proofread and edit your essay.

Timeline

Start applying for scholarships now. There are scholarships that are open to all grade levels. You do not have to wait until your senior year to apply.

Spring of Junior Year

Review your academic and career planning (ACP) tools in Xello. Meet with your school counselor to refine your ACP. Calculate your cost of attendance for your top five colleges.

Take an in-person or virtual tour of your top college choices. Complete the FAFSA4caster to estimate your EFC. Request letters of recommendation from your school counselor, teachers, mentors, coaches, or other adult who can speak to your strengths.

Summer before Senior Year

Research scholarships from local and national foundations as well as institutional aid. Use the previous year's MPS scholarships list as a starting place. Write your personal statement and scholarship essay.

Fall of Senior Year

Meet with your school counselor to discuss your postsecondary plan. Use college application portals to apply to colleges and for scholarships. Complete the FAFSA and set a goal for applying for scholarships. Prepare for possible scholarship interviews.

Winter of Senior Year

Continue to apply for scholarships.



Spring of Senior Year

Continue to apply for scholarships. Review your award letters from all the colleges that you have been accepted to. Be sure to compare financial aid packages. Reach out to your recruiter or financial aid officer with questions and requests.

Throughout College

Continue to apply for scholarships. In addition, apply for internships and work experiences that can help offset the costs of your college expenses. Consider careers that have special government loan repayment programs or service-related programs. If you have student loans, meet with your financial aid advisor to understand repayment options.

What to Know about Your Scholarship

Understand the Terms of the Scholarship

After you have won a scholarship, be sure that you understand the terms of the gift. You may need to attend a special banquet, maintain a certain GPA for a renewable scholarship, or provide additional information to the scholarship donor. Make sure that you thank the donor, and consider sending them updates on your college journey.

Additional Resources

Scholarships are a source of financial aid that reduces the out-of-pocket money that you and your parents will need to pay for all your college expenses. Scholarships also help reduce the amount of student loans. Remember: Loans will need to be repaid after you have graduated from college. Your school counselor or CACC advisor can assist you in understanding this process.

To read more about college affordability, visit the MPS [Paying for College](#) web page.

Access the [MPS Scholarships Google Folder](#).

Additional assistance is available by contacting Karolyn Taylor, scholarship coordinator, at henderkt@milwaukee.k12.wi.us.