

## Scholarships: More Than an Award

Each year, many students prepare the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) to apply for financial aid in the form of grants, loans, and work-study programs. However, while submitting the FAFSA serves as one way in which college-bound and undergraduate students can offset the cost of tuition, students should also consider the impact that their strengths and talents have on garnering scholarship awards from sources beyond their school, which can do the same.

Scholarship awards can range from hundreds of dollars to full-tuition—and they cost nothing. Families should, therefore, take seriously the impact that a few awards can have on not only supplementing the cost of tuition but also reinforcing a student's strengths.

Follow these tips to conduct a successful scholarship search.

**Know thyself.** Tons of awards exist, so narrow down your search by knowing the awards that fit who you are. Are you a student who excels academically with a GPA of 3.5 or above? Do you participate in extracurricular activities? Are you a minority student? Do you belong to the local chapter of a national organization?

Knowing who you are also includes learning about awards in your neighborhood. A number of awards exist solely for students living in particular cities, such as Atlanta. The Congressional Black Caucus Foundation, for example, offers several awards to students who are academically-talented, active in their communities, and live in or attend college in a Congressional Black Caucus Member district. Atlanta-area students who live in or attend college in Congressional District 5, presided over by Representative John Lewis, are eligible to apply for these awards—the CBC Spouses Education Scholarship and the CBCF General Mills Health Scholarship.

**Exhaust your resources.** Start with resources closest to you such as the school or local library, your guidance counselor's office, and websites dedicated to scholarship awards. Scholarship guides can be found in the reference section of the library or in your guidance counselor's office. Also, be vocal about your scholarship search. Share the news of your search with family, and teachers and guidance counselors so that if something comes their way, they will share the information with you.

**Don't limit yourself.** Consider awards at every level—local, state, and national. Awards can come from businesses and organizations in your community to well-known national organizations. Does a local restaurant award neighborhood scholars? Does a national foundation award students who are active in their communities? If you fit the criteria, apply for the award. Also, consider smaller awards of \$250 and \$500. If you are awarded a scholarship in this amount, not only can the recognition reinforce your

talents, but these awards are perfect for smaller college expenses such as books or late-night meals during exam week after the dining hall has closed.

**Stay organized.** Keep a list of all the awards you are applying for, as well as their deadlines. Online organizers such as Google Sheets or an actual folder with printed documents can help you stay organized during your search.

**(Apply)<sup>3</sup>.** Apply for as many awards as is within your power. The more applications you complete, the better chance you have of receiving multiple awards. Also, remember to apply for school-specific awards if you are currently enrolled in college, or are certain of the school where you will enroll.

**Pay it forward.** Once your efforts have paid off, encourage the next generation to apply for awards. Encourage family members or other students to use their talents to apply for scholarship awards. Dr. Marjorie Innocent, Vice President of Programs for the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation, notes, “We hope that as young people who receive our scholarships grow, advance and become leaders, they will also become an inspiration to other young people around them and to future generations.”

While the FAFSA helps to offset the cost of college tuition, scholarship awards serve the dual purpose of not only offsetting costs but also highlighting a student’s particular strengths. In this way, a student will have the financial freedom to pursue their goals and know what talents they bring to the table. Scholarship awards, in a sense, nurture the leaders of tomorrow. Why not consider them in addition to the FAFSA, or even as a viable alternative to it.