

SCHOLARSHIPS 101:

Your Action Plan for Financial Aid

Winning scholarships is a process, not a lottery. Start early and treat it like a part-time job to maximize your success. Here is your essential guide and timeline for securing funds for college.

Action Steps for Success

Step 1

Request Letters Early

(One Month in Advance)

Even if you have "stock" letters saved, always give your recommenders at least four weeks' notice before an application deadline.

Step 2

Focus on Fit

Don't apply for every scholarship. Prioritize those where you meet all criteria.

Step 3

Proofread Everything

A strong essay with typos will always lose to a slightly less polished essay that is flawless. Use a parent or counselor to review your work.

Where to Search for Scholarships (Prioritized List)

THE BEST SCHOLARSHIPS ARE OFTEN THE ONES CLOSEST TO HOME. THESE FUNDS ARE GEOGRAPHICALLY RESTRICTED, DRASTICALLY LIMITING THE NUMBER OF APPLICANTS. START WITH THESE HIGH-PRIORITY SOURCES:

COMMUNITY & REGIONAL FOUNDATIONS

Muskingum County Community Foundation (MCCF) | www.mccf.org

Licking County Foundation | www.thelcfoundation.org

Coshocton Foundation | www.coshoctonfoundation.org

The Columbus Foundation | www.columbusfoundation.org

Foundation for Appalachian Ohio (FAO) | www.appalachianohio.org

Genesis Healthcare Foundation | www.geneshcs.org/genesis-healthcare-foundation

William E. Shinnick Education Fund | www.shinnickeducationalfund.com

LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS & EMPLOYMENT

Local High School Counselor Office: Counselors keep a running list of small, local scholarships (e.g., Rotary Club, Lions Club, Alumni).

Employment: Check with your own employer, your parent/guardian's employer, and your electrical utility company (e.g., Guernsey-Muskingum, Cleveland Cliffs & Sons, Starbucks).

Local Organizations: Check with churches, labor unions, credit unions, and local fraternal organizations (e.g., Elks, Knights of Columbus).

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The Timeline: When to Act

Timeframe	Key Action	Why It Matters
Spring (Junior Year)	Begin the Initial Search. Familiarize yourself with the MCCF website and the types of scholarships available. This is the time to start gathering names of teachers you'll ask for recommendations.	Early preparation prevents stress and missed deadlines in the fall.
October 1 (Senior Year)	Complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) on the studentaid.gov website.	The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is the single most important document for college affordability. It determines eligibility for virtually all federal, state, and institutional aid, including grants (free money), work-study programs, and federal student loans (low interest). Even if you believe you won't qualify for need-based aid, you must complete the FAFSA to unlock these opportunities. Without a FAFSA, you won't receive any financial aid offer from a college.
Early Fall (Senior Year)	Request Recommendation Letters. Ask teachers and counselors for recommendation letters now, even before specific applications open. Provide them with a resume and a list of your best achievements.	Recommenders get busy quickly, and you need a polished letter ready to go.
November/December	Create Your Master List. Go through all available scholarship catalogs and create a detailed list that includes the scholarship name, the exact deadline, and the application requirements.	This is your roadmap. Focus only on scholarships you are eligible for.
Ongoing (Until Deadline)	Prioritize Local Funds. Spend the majority of your time applying for local scholarships, as they have significantly less competition.	Your best chance of winning is close to home!