

SOUTH DAKOTA

STATEWIDE FAMILY ENGAGEMENT CENTER



Scholarships Tips and Tricks

- Start applying early!** You don't need to wait until your junior year. Getting a head start gives you more time to research the ones that are worth your time and energy. Many scholarships have limited funds. That means the earlier you apply, the better the opportunity you will have before that budget runs out.
- Use a scholarship matching tool.** There's really no limit to the different types of scholarships that are available to college students. Browse sites such as the [US Department of Labor's free scholarship tool](#), [scholarships.com](#), and [fastweb.com](#) to show you dozens of categories of scholarships. Visit [Select Dakota](#) for South Dakota specific scholarships.
- Meet with your counselor and/or career coach.** Build a relationship with your school counselor/career coach early in your high school career because they can be a great resource to help you find scholarships that are tailored to you, narrow your search, provide feedback on your essay, and conduct mock interviews.
- Fill out the FAFSA** after October 1 of the year before you will be attending college.
- Consider retaking the ACT/SAT.** Raising your score a few points can mean thousands of dollars.
- Build your resume.** Keep track of all your community involvement, awards and honors, extracurricular activities, and employment.
- Volunteer in your community!** Volunteering can be a key factor in getting some scholarships because it demonstrates your community involvement and leadership skills.
- Stay organized.** Set up a calendar, spreadsheet, or filing system to help you keep track of deadlines, and a place to put transcripts, test scores, and reference letters for easy access.
- Search the financial aid web pages at the schools you are serious about attending.**
- Improve your online presence.** Highlight your strengths and interests. If the person who is reviewing your scholarship application decides to Google your name, have your best version of yourself online!
- Look beyond your grades.** Before you start filling out the forms, think about what makes you uniquely qualified and deserving of that scholarship. Your passion will shine through when it comes time to write about your extracurricular activities.
- Write a great essay.** Don't be afraid to apply for a scholarship that requires an essay because a well-written essay can be your ticket to standing out from the crowd. If you don't have great writing skills, consider working with an advisor or teacher. Be careful to follow the scholarship rules, including essay word count. The most important thing to remember is to answer the question that's being asked.
- Practice your interviewing skills.** Practice answering questions about your background, interests, achievements, and aspirations.
- Utilize your own network.** Let teachers, coaches, and anyone in your network know that you are looking for scholarships. There may be several local scholarships that are not well advertised. Check in directly with local foundations, community organizations, and local businesses to see if they offer any scholarships, too.

Resources: College Ave. Student Loans; US News and World Report; Brazos Education Foundation

Collect letters of recommendation. They could include your employer, teachers, coaches, high school counselors, or other adults who can testify to your strengths, qualifications, and ambition. Ask for multiple copies. Be sure to write them a thank you for taking the time to help you!

Apply for many scholarships, both big and small. Make applying to scholarships your new mindset and habit. Set a goal to apply to one or two each month, starting in your sophomore year.

