

Harvest School Resources

What is the best place to start your scholarship search? Surprise! Believe it or not, the best place to begin is actually at your own school.

The reason schools are a bountiful source of scholarship information is that many scholarship sponsors send applications, brochures, and other materials directly to schools to get the word out about their programs. Your school is an especially good starting point for searches specific to your community or state, since search resources *outside* your region are unlikely to have as much specific information as your local high school or college.

At high schools, scholarship information is typically centralized—usually at a guidance office, career center, or school library. You might find a filing cabinet devoted to scholarship applications, a bulletin board that lists forthcoming deadlines, or a database of scholarship programs specific to your home state. So find out how your school works, and become an expert on the resources available. It will pay off in a big way!

Although colleges and universities may have a centralized scholarship information source, they also may have additional information disbursed throughout their campuses. The place to start, of course, is the financial aid office. But keep in mind that scholarship resources



ATTENTION STUDENTS AND PARENTS: This article is designed to work together with Ben Kaplan's *Scholarship Starter Kit* CD. If you haven't received a CD, contact your college planner or counselor, or let us know at www.ScholarshipCoach.com/needkit

and information may also be located at various libraries or career centers on campus, at specific offices related to a particular student classification (such as offices for international students or students with disabilities), as well as at individual departments associated with a student's major or area of specialization.

At Harvard, for instance, the Office of Career Services had on hand a great deal of resources devoted to scholarships and fellowships. But I also discovered more exciting opportunities at the undergraduate prizes office and at the economics department headquarters.

Keep in mind that you're likely to find a lot of course-specific scholarship information at individual departments associated with your major or area of study. For scholarships oriented toward specific academic fields, individual departments may have more substantial information than the financial aid office.

Academic department offices usually have information on scholarships controlled and awarded by the department itself (for students attending your specific college), as well as scholarships funded by private sources open to students from a

variety of institutions.

Several scholarship winners I've interviewed have mentioned that by asking specifically for scholarship and fellowship information at department offices, they unearthed scholarship opportunities specific to their major that others in the department didn't even know about!

Regardless of whether you attend high school or college, I suggest setting up a meeting with a general counselor or financial aid officer at your school for the express purpose of discussing scholarship opportunities. Here's why this is so important: A lot of scholarship applications are sent *directly* to guidance counselors and financial aid officers. So when an application crosses the desks of these school officials, you want them to think of you.

Tell your counselor or officer that you are serious about winning scholarships, and that you would be very grateful for any help, direction, and information that he or she can provide. Because I did this, I was informed of many programs and scholarship opportunities that I would have otherwise missed.

For those of you looking for a campus job, you may want to con-

sider taking a paying job or volunteering in your school's guidance or financial aid office. One scholarship winner I interviewed said that by doing this, he dramatically increased his access to scholarship opportunities—he was the one who sorted and filed away scholarship applications received by the school!

One financial aid officer I spoke with from Southern Oregon University said that she kept an eye out for (and passed along scholarship opportunities to) students who worked in the financial aid office.

High schools and colleges also sometimes keep lists of past students at the school who have won particular scholarship awards. Seeing the awards that former students have won can yield a valuable list of potential scholarship programs—especially local ones. In addition, scholarship information letters and applications from past school years are often filed in binders for student perusal. If your school doesn't already keep a file of past winners and prior applications, don't be shy about making the suggestion.

Many high schools and colleges also purchase scholarship search databases on CD-ROMs that are updated periodically or subscribe to database services available over the Internet. Keep an eye out and ask around for such resources.

Tap Into Other Schools

One question I always get asked in my scholarships workshops is, "What if my school doesn't have the greatest scholarship resources?" And here's my answer: You do the same thing you would do if you were really craving your favorite junk food snack.

The distribution of scholarship information is far from uniform: The school across town may have a list of scholarship programs that just never made it to your neck of the woods.

So imagine you really want a bag of Doritos. You want the crunch of those Doritos. You want to taste that cheesy goodness. But you go to the corner store and they are all out of Doritos. There is not a single "Doritos" in sight. So the question is this: You're craving that cheesy goodness, you want that Doritos crunch, what do you do? My guess is that if you wanted the Doritos badly enough you would go to another grocery store.

Likewise, when it comes to scholarship information, don't be limited to your own school. The distribution of scholarship information is far from uniform: The school across town may have a list of scholarship programs that just never made it to your neck of the woods. In fact, there are three key ways you can tap into other school's resources.

First, you can do this in the physical sense: I used to go across town to a rival high school and actually thumbed through their scholarship files and folders. You know what? I ended up finding out about thousands of dollars in scholarship money that nobody at *my* school even knew about—money that I ended up winning.

During my own scholarship search, I made sure to visit other schools in my area on a regular basis. Of course, I didn't exactly get all decked out in my school colors and insignia when visiting rival high

schools. However, even if I had mentioned that I was from a different school, I think most counselors and parent volunteers would have still been willing to help me.

Second, if you have friends at other schools or if your parents know other parents whose kids go to those schools, get in the habit of trading scholarship information. One family I interviewed had a whole network of scholarship informants at various area schools. Opportunities to swap scholarship information are plentiful at local athletic competitions, church events, and other community functions.

Third, you can do this via the Internet: Because many high schools and colleges now post scholarship information online for their students (most sites don't require passwords), you can view these listings without ever setting foot on campus. So locate the appropriate Web addresses for other schools in your area that are especially known for strong counseling or financial aid departments, large budgetary allocations, or extraordinary college planning programs.

In the Internet age, you don't have to actually attend a school to benefit from its resources.

The author of this article, Ben Kaplan, is the publisher of ScholarshipCoach.com and the winner of more than two dozen scholarships worth \$90,000—enough to cover virtually the entire cost of his Harvard education.

School Resource Assessment Form

PART I: APPOINTMENT AND RESOURCE CHECKLIST

I have scheduled an appointment with a school counselor, financial aid officer, scholarship coordinator, or administrator at this date and time:

To demonstrate that I'm serious about pursuing scholarships, I will bring the following materials to my appointment:

- └ A Completed *Search Profile Worksheet*
- └ This *School Resource Assessment Form*

During my appointment and afterward, I will find out whether my school has the following resources:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Scholarship deadline bulletin board | <input type="checkbox"/> Local/state scholarship database |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Scholarship web page listings | <input type="checkbox"/> National scholarship database |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Scholarship application form binder | <input type="checkbox"/> College-specific scholarship file |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lists of past scholarship winners | <input type="checkbox"/> Sample winning application materials |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Academic department award listings | <input type="checkbox"/> School "Dollars for Scholars" chapter |

My school has its own scholarship web page at the following address:

My school has scholarship information workshops scheduled for the following dates and times:

PART II: QUESTIONS TO ASK

The following are questions you will want to ask your school counselor, financial aid officer, scholarship coordinator, or administrator during your appointment. Make sure to take detailed notes so that when you're ready to begin your scholarship search, the information you need will be right at your fingertips.

1. Does our school have a specific scholarship coordinator?
2. What are the hours the scholarship office is accessible?
3. Who receives incoming mail with scholarship opportunities?
4. What local scholarships have students from our school won?
5. Are there any local students who have won scholarships that you recommend talking to?
6. If a student must be nominated for a scholarship by our school, what is the procedure for getting a nomination?
7. Does our school have a specific contact person at the state's agency that administers government-sponsored scholarship funds?
8. Are there any other schools in the area that have good scholarship resources?

Other Schools' Resources Worksheet

Part I: Locating Schools with Excellent Scholarship Resources

Ask administrators, counselors, teachers, and others in your community about the high schools and colleges in your area with the strongest college preparatory or financial aid programs. List below any schools or colleges that are likely to have great scholarship information and resources. Try to tap into the resources of each of these other schools by using at least one of the three methods shown in the chart below. To record your progress, check off each method used for each school on your list:

	Make a physical visit to the school	Trade info with a friend at the school	Visit the school's scholarship website
1. _____			
2. _____			
3. _____			
4. _____			
5. _____			
6. _____			

Check each of the schools listed above for the following resources:

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Scholarship deadline bulletin board | <input type="checkbox"/> Local/state scholarship database |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Scholarship web page listings | <input type="checkbox"/> National scholarship database |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Scholarship application form binder | <input type="checkbox"/> College-specific scholarship file |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lists of past scholarship winners | <input type="checkbox"/> Sample winning application materials |

Part II: School Questions

The following are questions you may wish to ask each school's scholarship coordinator.

1. What are the hours the scholarship office is accessible?
2. What local scholarships have students from the school won?
3. Are there any local students who have won scholarships that you recommend talking to?