

# Identify Your Unique Scholarship Profile

The essence of creating a personal scholarship profile is getting to *know yourself*—as in the activities, personal information, credentials, affiliations, and background (and that of your family, too) that you either aren't aware of, don't know fully about, or didn't realize could make you eligible for additional scholarship awards.

You might not know off the top of your head, for instance, which Army division your father served in during the Vietnam War. You might not know the names of all of the business or professional associations and organizations in which your mom maintains an active membership. Maybe you just had no idea that the church you attend is part of a larger religious association.

But here's the really cool part: Knowing such things could help you discover that you are eligible for dozens of additional scholarship awards. It is important, therefore, to ask questions and interview family members, and analyze your own involvements, memberships, and tangential affiliations.

To help you do this, I've created two special forms: the *Search Profile Worksheet* and the *Personal Scholarship Profile Questionnaire*. The worksheet is a shorter version of the multi-page questionnaire that fits on a single page. This more condensed version is useful when you need to present the information to another



**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](http://www.ScholarshipCoach.com/needkit)

person (such as your college counselor) and don't want to overwhelm him with pages and pages of paperwork. You will find both of these forms attached to this article.

These two forms will help you document and organize your personal information, credentials, characteristics, interests, goals, and affiliations (including your family affiliations related to your parents and grandparents).

It will prompt you to track down a lot of personal information—some of which you won't know off the top of your head—that can prove useful in locating scholarships. Fill in the forms as best you can and add more details as you unearth them.

Keep in mind that the more precisely you describe yourself *now*, the better your chances of discovering those “hidden” scholarship gems *later*. Armed with this unique personal scholarship profile, you will be able to locate a cornucopia of awards that few of your peers will be able to find.

So take a few moments right away to fill out the forms as best you can. You'll want to keep these forms handy since we will refer to them in later action steps as well.

## The Right Fit

To help you understand why it is important to fill out these forms thoroughly, perhaps I should describe some of the major types of scholarships you'll be able to find based on the detailed information you provide.

### GEOGRAPHIC REGION

Perhaps the most common type of applicant targeting is based on geographic region. On the local level, particular awards may be designated to students from specific districts or communities.

This is especially true of scholarships sponsored by local businesses, associations, and organizations that hope to benefit from the publicity generated and overall community goodwill.

Scholarships targeted at students from a particular state or several states are also common. The McDonald's restaurant owners of the New York tri-state area, for example, fund the McDonald's Golden Arches Scholarships. (Do you want fries with that scholarship?) These 100 awards of \$1,000 each are open only to residents of New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut.

### ORGANIZATIONAL MEMBERSHIP

Some scholarship contests are open only to members of particular organizations. The National Honor Society scholarship program, for instance, offers hundreds of \$1,000 scholarships for society members in grade 12.

Other national youth-oriented organizations that provide or administer member-only scholarship awards include the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, Key Club, 4-H Club, Junior Achievement, National Council of Youth Leadership, Golden Key International Honor Society, and American Radio Relay League, as well as career exploration programs such as the Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA) and the Future Farmers of America (FFA). Many of the special-interest associations discussed earlier in the chapter also require that scholarship recipients be members of the association.

### FAMILY AFFILIATION

Other scholarships are limited to students who are affiliated (through their parents or ancestors) with particular groups, as well as historical figures or events. For instance, the Descendants of the Signers of the Declaration of Independence Scholarship provides college cash to undergrad and grad students who can prove they are direct descendants of one of the Signers.

Some corporations offer scholarships as an additional benefit to employees and their families. ABC/Capital Cities, for instance, conducts a scholarship program open only to dependent children of company staff. These employee-focused scholarship programs tend to be sponsored by companies with more than 500

employees and other large, well-established business entities.

A number of scholarships are aimed at students whose families have a military affiliation. Such programs may specify that the parents or ancestors of applicants be war veterans and may even specify further requirements (service in a particular war or service division, death or disability, etc.).

The First Cavalry Division Association Scholarships are given to children of soldiers who died or were fully disabled from injuries while serving in the First Cavalry Division during and since the Vietnam War or during the Persian Gulf War.

### COLLEGE AND CAREER GOALS

Some scholarships, especially those sponsored by industry groups or professional associations, are designed for students with particular college plans or career and vocational interests.

Foundations with specific societal goals in mind also frequently create these types of programs. The Washington Crossing Foundation, for instance, targets students with "an interest in government service." Like many scholarships, this government service specification is very broad: Past winners have included students interested in

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becoming public prosecutors, senators, National Park Service botanists, army doctors, high school teachers, and everything in between.

As a general rule for high school students and young undergraduates, even if you are only marginally interested in a particular field or career, you should not hesitate to apply for such scholarships.

### RACE, ETHNICITY, AND DENOMINATION

Plenty of scholarship money is also available to students who are members of ethnic minority groups, such as African Americans, Asians, Hispanics, or Native Americans. Some scholarships are open to members of any ethnic minority, whereas others are targeted at a particular group.

A term that is used in some of these scholarship competitions that can make things a bit more confusing is "traditionally underrepresented ethnic minority"—a specification that generally does not include Asians or Asian Americans. Other scholarship programs seek to "promote ethnic diversity and cultural awareness," but they don't actually require that all award recipients be part of an ethnic or minority group.

Unfortunately, many scholarship seekers believe that if they are not members of an underrepresented

minority group, they are not eligible for scholarships targeted for students with a particular ethnicity. This is far from the truth: A high proportion of fraternal organizations based on a particular ethnicity offer scholarships to students who fit their own ethnic profiles.

Whether your heritage is Chinese, Cuban, Danish, Japanese, Italian, Norwegian, Laotian, Polish, Swiss, Greek, Armenian, Cambodian, Filipino, Slovakian, Puerto Rican, French, Hawaiian, Portuguese, Vietnamese, Indian, or Korean, or is based in some other part of the world, you can frequently find ethnically targeted college scholarship programs.

Your religious denomination can yield surprising scholarship opportunities as well. Whether you are Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, Jewish, Bahai, Muslim, Eastern Orthodox, Sikh, a Christian Scientist, or even an atheist or agnostic, there may be money for college based on your religious beliefs or your membership in a church, synagogue, temple, or mosque.

### **GENDER**

Some scholarship contests, especially those sponsored by various women's groups, are open only to female applicants. The Business and Professional Women's Foundation Career Advancement Scholarship Program is targeted to female undergrads, age 25 or older, who are upgrading their skills, training for a new career, or planning to enter the job market. As you might expect, scholarships open only to male students are not as common.

For some scholarship contests open to both sexes, however, the criteria may specify that one male national winner and one female national winner be selected in each category.

### **DISABILITIES**

A variety of national advocacy groups for people with disabilities, several giant pharmaceutical companies, and particular foundations and associations provide scholarships specifically for students with disabilities.

If you or a loved one has a hearing or speech impairment, a visual impairment, asthma, attention deficit disorder, dyslexia or other learning disability, epilepsy, diabetes, autism, sickle cell disease, or hemophilia, or if you are paraplegic or use a wheelchair, there may be additional college money to help level the playing field.

### **EMPLOYMENT, ACTIVITIES & HOBBIES**

Did you ever think that working part-time flipping burgers or carrying golf clubs could earn you a college scholarship? A variety of scholarship programs reward all sorts of student employment. The activities and hobbies you pursue in your spare time can also earn you big scholarship dollars.

Such pursuits include bowling, amateur radio, aviation, dog shows, horseback riding, scuba diving, sewing, astronomy, music, artistic endeavors, sports, and foreign languages, to name a few. I've even seen scholarships for duck calling!

### **Cast Wide, Focus Narrow**

It is important to create a detailed personal profile for one

additional reason: It helps you avoid some of the most common scholarship searching mistakes by forcing you to record all aspects of your potential scholarship eligibility.

Some students, for instance, seek out only scholarship opportunities that have very broad eligibility criteria—in other words, scholarships that a wide range of people can apply for. Conversely, other students look for nothing but scholarships that are open only to students with a unique personal characteristic, such as a particular disability, hobby, or ethnic background.

Each of these approaches on their own are problematic. Those who search only for broad, generic scholarship programs miss out on awards that may be designed specifically for someone with their unique characteristics—programs that are often less competitive because very few people can apply for them.

On the other hand, those who focus solely on scholarships for students with a notable personal characteristic—such as scholarships for undergraduates with asthma—lose perspective on the vast forest of scholarship money that is accessible to all.

So why not do both? To avoid leaving any potential scholarship money untapped, cast a wide net, yet focus narrow, too. On both the worksheet and questionnaire, you'll find questions designed to help you achieve both objectives.

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*The author of this article, Ben Kaplan, is the publisher of [ScholarshipCoach.com](http://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.*

## Search Profile Worksheet

*This worksheet helps you summarize the personal attributes that can make you eligible for greater numbers of scholarships.*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_ Year in School: \_\_\_\_\_

Home City and State: \_\_\_\_\_ Home County: \_\_\_\_\_ Home Country: \_\_\_\_\_

Current or Prospective Colleges and Grad Schools: \_\_\_\_\_

Current or Prospective Academic Majors: \_\_\_\_\_

Current or Prospective Career Goals: \_\_\_\_\_

Current GPA and Class Rank: \_\_\_\_\_

Standardized Test Scores (PSAT, SAT, ACT, etc.): \_\_\_\_\_

Advanced Test Credits (AP, IB, CLEP, etc.): \_\_\_\_\_

**Student Affiliations and Memberships** (Future Farmers of America, National Honor Society, etc.):

**Parent, Grandparent, and Family Affiliations** (employers, military service, unions, professional associations, civic groups, etc.):

**Extracurricular Activities, Hobbies, and Special Talents** (school clubs, athletic participation, music, etc.):

**Awards, Honors, and Leadership Positions** (school awards, elected and non-elected club positions, etc.):

**Work Experience, Internships, and Community Service** (part-time jobs, apprenticeships, volunteer work, etc.):

**Ethnicity, Nationality, and Religious Denomination** (ancestry, minority status, church or synagogue membership, etc.):

**Disabilities, Medical Conditions, and Unique Attributes** (physical impairments, learning disabilities, asthma, etc.):

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## Personal Scholarship Profile Questionnaire

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This comprehensive questionnaire is designed to help you document and organize your personal information, credentials, interests, and affiliations—the factors that can make you eligible for greater numbers of scholarship awards. The more precisely you can profile yourself on this worksheet, the better your chances of discovering scholarships that you are uniquely qualified for—and that others will be hard-pressed to find. We will draw upon this worksheet multiple times in future action steps. If the space provided is not adequate for any given question, you may attach additional sheets.

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date of Birth:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Year in School:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Home City:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Home State:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Home County:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Current GPA:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Class Rank:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Standardized Test Scores** (PSAT, SAT, ACT, SAT II, LSAT, GMAT, etc.):

**Advanced Test Credits** (AP, IB, CLEP, DSST, etc.):

**Prior Schooling and Degrees Earned:**

## MEMBERSHIP

**Are you a member of any national organizations and groups?**

(This could include groups like National Honor Society, Future Farmers of America, Junior Achievement, fraternities and sororities, etc.)

**Are you a member of any local or community organizations and groups?**

**Have you won any awards or received any honors (including appointments and elected positions) related to your involvement with the above groups?**

## ACADEMIC AND CAREER GOALS

**What subjects are you potentially interested in studying?**

(This includes academic subjects beyond your major field of study.)

**If you are not yet enrolled, where are you considering attending college and/or graduate school?**  
(Note the city, state, and county of each prospect school.)

**What specific career goals are you considering?**

## **ACTIVITIES AND INTERESTS**

**What types of extracurricular activities have you participated in?**

**Have you participated in any community service projects or programs?**

**Have you held part-time or full-time employment?**  
(This also could include internships and apprenticeships.)

**What are your hobbies?**

**Do you participate in any sports or sports leagues?**



## PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

**What is your ancestry, nationality, and ethnicity?**

(If you have a mixed ethnic background, make note of this.)

**Are you a member of any type of minority or special-interest group?**

**Are you a member of a religious faith?**

(Note any specific denominations and if your place of worship is part of a larger association or group.)

**Do you have a disability or medical condition?**

## **FAMILY AFFILIATION**

**Who are your parents' or grandparents' employers?**

(If the company is the subsidiary of a larger company, make note of this.)

**Are your parents or grandparents the members of any business, trade, or professional associations, unions, or credit unions?**

**Are your parents or grandparents members of any community, civic, or fraternal groups?**

(This could include groups like the Elks Club, Rotary Club, or Daughters of the American Revolution.)

**Have your parents or grandparents served in the military?**

(Note the specific branch of the military, any notable units or divisions, and theaters of combat.)

**Where did your parents or grandparents attend high school and college?**

(Note the school, the graduation year, and any involvement in alumni groups.)