

KEYS TO A SUCCESSFUL SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATION

An Inside Look

Criteria for obtaining scholarships vary from one scholarship donor to another, with academic achievement remaining an important determinant in any competition; however, judges who award scholarships are also especially interested in the applicant's extracurricular activities. Accordingly, students must demonstrate that they have actively contributed in community or service related activities. Wouldn't it be great to know what scholarship providers look for in an application? Take an inside look at how judges pick their favorites.

At First Glance

The judges' first evaluation of your application is a quick one - usually only 15 to 30 seconds. Most applications don't get past this quick but important first stage. Give your application one last review to be sure yours makes it through.

- **Do you qualify?** Nothing makes it easier for judges to say 'no' than an applicant who doesn't meet the minimum requirements.
- **Is your application neat?** An application with coffee stains or messy handwriting won't make the cut. The first conditions to meet, in order to complete an application form correctly, is clarity and neatness. Judges must be able to read and understand the information easily; this information, while being truthful and straightforward, must allow the judges to portray the applicant at his or her best.
- **Are all of the required documents included?** Be sure you're not leaving out references, transcripts, or anything else the application requires. Preparing well in advance is strongly suggested so that unanticipated delays with letters of reference, mailings and official transcripts for example don't ruin one's chances. Required documents must be ready by set deadlines, be they for the selecting faculty, the Awards Office or the donor agency.
- **Are all of the questions answered?** Scan your application to see if you've left anything out. All too often, students fail to obtain the scholarships they apply for not because they lack the necessary qualifications, but because the application itself is incomplete. Remember, when you complete the application you are talking to a *real person* and not a computer or a mind reader. Make sure you give them enough information so they don't have to guess about your motives or your performance. Students can do themselves a great injustice if the forms they complete for this purpose do not clearly reflect their academic achievements, their personality, and their social and community activities.

The Second Cut

After an application makes it past the first round, the judges separate "OK" from "great". The applications that make it through are those that have thorough and well-thought-out responses.

Make sure your responses are complete and answer the question. It's very important that your grammar and spelling are correct, so check and double-check all of your essays.

A detailed comprehensive description of all community involvement is essential; simply mentioning one's membership in an organization is not enough. Specifically, students must describe the organization, explain its goals and the role they play in it, and list the benefits that the organization can give to the community. Also, the student should explain how the involvement helped in their development and learning.

Donor companies use these criteria to reach students who believe in social commitment, and what speaks the most for a student's potential as a contributor to the community is an existing track record of social and extracurricular involvement. In fact, judges in general look to reward students who succeed in maintaining the delicate balance between academic excellence and conscientious community activity.

The Final Decision

This is not the most difficult part of the process for judges. They've narrowed it down to a few highly qualified students. Now they must examine and compare every detail of the applications.

Judges pay special attention to:

- **ACADEMICS** - It's important to have a competitive GPA. However, providers also consider how challenging your course load is. They also check to see if you're taking the right courses to reach your goals and how well you did in those courses.
- **LEADERSHIP** - If leadership is part of the criteria they're looking for, judges will examine your activities. They'll also look for a range of leadership positions.
- **SERVICE** - Some providers are interested in knowing what community service you've done. They'll want to know if you've been continuous in your volunteer efforts. If volunteer work is required by your school, they will look for activities that are above and beyond the required serviced job.

- **CREATIVITY** - You can show your creative side if you play an instrument, write stories, paint pictures or act in plays. Demonstrate your ability by letting judges know if you've won any awards.
- **SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES** - If you've overcome any obstacles to achieve your goals, the judges want to know about it. Let them know how you achieved all that you've done, in spite of the roadblocks you've encountered.

It's not an easy job being a scholarship judge. Deciding who will receive an award is a tough decision. By knowing what's on the minds of scholarship judges, you'll have a better chance at being one of those winners.