



Student Loan Tips

How to Find College Scholarships: Where to Look and Trusted Resources

Quick answer: You can find college scholarships through your high school or college financial aid office, community foundations, employers, civic and professional organizations, and trusted scholarship search websites such as Federal Student Aid, BigFuture, CareerOneStop, Scholarship America, Scholarships.com, Fastweb, and Bold.org. Applying broadly — including smaller, local awards — improves your odds of winning money that generally doesn't have to be repaid.

By **Lisa Kaplan** / Aug 5th, 2026

4 min read

Why It Pays to Search Locally, Not Just Nationally

Many students focus only on large national scholarship programs, but thousands of legitimate opportunities are available through local organizations, colleges, employers, nonprofits, and community foundations. Because local scholarships usually have smaller applicant pools than national competitions, applying to both local and national awards can improve your chances of earning financial assistance and reduce how much you need to borrow for college.

How many scholarships should you apply for?

There's no fixed number. Apply to every scholarship you're eligible for and can submit a genuinely strong, tailored application for, and prioritize opportunities with smaller applicant pools — like local and niche awards — over broad, highly competitive national ones. Quality and fit matter more than hitting a specific count.

Start Your Search Close to Home

Local scholarships are offered by organizations within your community, such as community foundations, schools, businesses, and nonprofit organizations.

A good place to start is your local community foundation. Use the Council on Foundations' [Community Foundation Locator](#) to find the foundation serving your hometown or county, then look on its site for a Scholarships or Grants page.

You can also check with:

- Your high school counseling office
- Your college financial aid office
- Local businesses and chambers of commerce
- Civic organizations such as Rotary, Kiwanis, and Lions Clubs
- Local nonprofit and religious organizations (when applicable)

Trusted Scholarship Search Websites to Bookmark

When using a search website, stick with reputable organizations that are transparent about eligibility requirements and never require payment just to search.

[Federal Student Aid](#) — government guidance on finding scholarships, grants, and other financial aid.

[BigFuture Scholarship Search \(College Board\)](#) — search thousands of scholarships by interests, achievements, major, and background.

[CareerOneStop Scholarship Finder](#) — a U.S. Department of Labor–sponsored database organized by education level and field of study.

[Scholarship America](#) — administers scholarship programs in partnership with employers, nonprofits, and foundations.

[Scholarships.com](#) — a large searchable scholarship directory.

[Fastweb](#) — matches students to awards based on a detailed profile.

[Bold.org](#) — creates, funds, and hosts thousands of scholarships directly (rather than only listing third-party awards) and lets you apply within the platform using more than 50 filters.

Not everything you find while searching is a straightforward scholarship — some listings are contests, and some are no-essay sweepstakes with different rules. See our [Common Scholarship Mistakes to Avoid](#) guide for how to tell the difference.

Look for Scholarships Tied to Your Background, Skills, or Circumstances

Some of the easiest scholarships to win are the ones with the smallest applicant pools — both everyday circumstances many students share and some genuinely unusual ones.

Everyday circumstances

Being the first in your family to attend college is one of the most common qualifying factors. The [RSM US Foundation](#) awards first-generation students studying business or technology up to \$30,000 over three years, while other first-generation programs administered through organizations like [Scholarship America](#) typically range from \$5,000 to \$10,000. Returning to school later in life or having a parent who works in a specific industry can also qualify you for dedicated funds.

Hobbies and unusual skills

Scholarship providers reward all kinds of niche talents, including knitting or textile interests, candy-making and confectionery technology, duck-calling competitions, and sci-fi or fantasy illustration.

Physical traits and personal characteristics, family background, diet or advocacy, and career interest

Some awards are built around a specific trait (left-handed student scholarships, for example), a life situation (parents of twins or triplets, students from immigrant families), an advocacy cause (the [Vegetarian Resource Group](#) rewards students who've promoted vegetarianism or veganism in their community), or a specific field such as mortuary science or papermaking and pulp technology.

Fandoms and pop culture

Even a favorite game can be a scholarship angle — some providers run essay-based awards tied to specific games, like Minecraft or Pokémon tournaments.

How to find these: Many scholarship search tools let you enter details like your hobbies, interests, ethnicity, religion, family background, and career goals as searchable keywords, which can surface awards you'd never find through a general search. For a sense of how specific these can get, [PrepScholar](#) and [Fastweb](#) both keep running lists of unusual scholarships. The more detail you add to your profile, the more of these niche awards can surface.

Key Takeaways

- Search locally (community foundations, schools, employers, civic groups) and nationally — local awards have smaller applicant pools.
- Bookmark free scholarship search sites.
- Build a detailed profile tied to your background, hobbies, or circumstances on the scholarship sites.
- Never pay a fee just to search for or “guarantee” a scholarship.