

# How To Increase Your Scholarship Applicant Pool and Reduce Student Stress

By Marcie Frederickson

**E**ach year, senior high school students seek local scholarship opportunities. These local scholarships provide an outstanding service to students. However, those involved in creating the private scholarship applications are often unfamiliar with the

current college application and scholarship processes. Although well-meaning, some committees create cumbersome application processes that are more complicated than applying to the most selective institutions in the nation. Students and families often become frustrated

and simply do not apply. This article is meant to provide information and guidance to scholarship committees in creating a meaningful but less stressful application. This will help streamline the process, reduce stress on students and families, and increase the applicant pool.

## Essay

While many colleges require essays for their admission, many do not. The essay can be an excellent way to learn more about a student and whether they would be a good choice. However, scholarship committees should be aware that students are not trained in writing essays in this particular format. Scholarship committees are encouraged to ask for one essay that is 500 words or less and to consider a simple question that will provide information not included in other parts of the application.

## Recommendations

Teachers and counselors tend to know their students well and can provide insight into a student's character. However, many colleges do not require recommendations; therefore, teachers are not always trained to write references. Likewise, students are often unfamiliar with the protocol to effectively request recommendations. Recommendation letters take considerable time to write and with teachers' busy schedules, this can be a big task for them. Scholarship committees are encouraged to consider carefully whether a recommendation



will provide the needed information to make a decision. Another option is to ask for the name of a reference and then reach out in cases where you feel more information is needed. A five-minute phone call will probably give you all the information you need. Alternatively, you could create a simple form for teachers or counselors to share a few characteristics or words describing the student. If you decide to request a recommendation, please limit it to one.

## Transcript

The majority of colleges accept electronic transcripts. Gone are the days high school counselors and registrars printing and signing transcripts. While most scholarships accept electronic transcripts, some require a school signature, which is an outdated request. Scholarship committees are recommended to accept electronic transcripts from applicants. If ever in doubt, contact the school to confirm that the transcript is legitimate.

## Grades and Rigor of Courses over Test Scores

The majority of universities have eliminated the ACT/SAT requirement for admission. While this was a growing trend pre-COVID, the pandemic forced the issue and moved us forward. Studies have found that course rigor and GPA are better predictors of college success. In addition, for many years there has been debate regarding test bias toward minorities and students from low socioeconomic and rural homes. Scholarship committees should consider eliminating test scores from the process and spend time evaluating the transcript for good grades in rigorous courses. Students who challenge themselves in high school are more likely to graduate college and are a sound investment for your scholarship.

## Résumé

Résumés can provide an excellent snapshot of a student's high school accomplishments and activities. Students usually do not need to

submit a résumé for college admission; however, this is an excellent skill for them to develop. Some scholarships require students to list activities on a form even if they have a résumé. Scholarship committees are encouraged to accept a résumé in place of an activities list on an application form.

## Application

Nearly all college applications are electronic. While most local scholarships are as well, some require a student to download, print, and sign an application. Not all school-issued computers have this capability and it can become a barrier. Also, printing and signing means an added step of scanning or mailing documents. Scholarship committees are recommended to create an online application with a program such as Google Forms where the student can input, attach, and submit all information.

## Attending College: Why In-State?

Some local scholarship applications indicate that to be eligible a student must attend an in-state college. This keeps many qualified, deserving high school students from applying. Scholarship committees should consider eliminating a requirement for students to attend an in-state college. Students who plan to attend an out-of-state college have many valid reasons for doing so and families are often disheartened that their children are excluded from local scholarships. These same students often return to their home state after graduation and are excellent investments for your organization.

## Interview

Most college applications do not require an interview. If you plan to offer or require an interview, keep in mind that students have very little experience with this. Consider sending them a list of expectations (how long will it last, what to wear, how many people will be

there, what kind of questions to expect). Committees are encouraged to develop a standard set of questions to ask every applicant. This will ensure you gather information related to the purpose of your scholarship and keep interviewers focused on that goal.

## Summary

- Understand the college application process in your area before creating a scholarship application.
- If asking for an essay, ensure the question is clear and only ask for one that is 500 words or less.
- Consider asking for names and contacts of recommenders instead of full letters. If a full letter is necessary, limit the recommendation to one.
- Eliminate any standardized test score as a factor. Instead, use the grades and rigor of courses taken.
- Accept a résumé in place of listing activities on the application.
- Ask for electronic transcripts and applications.
- Allow all students to apply regardless of their university choice.
- For interviews, develop a standard set of questions to ask each applicant.
- Contact a school counselor for advice. They are experienced and happy to help you support their students. ➤

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