

3 Easy Steps to Starting a Scholarship Search

By Jean O'Toole, Author of *Scholarship Strategies Finding and Winning the Money You Need*

Years ago, while presenting student success workshops in high schools, conversations with students would turn to the rising cost of college. Students didn't want to take on enormous student loan debt. Their words resonated with me. I was the first person in my family to go to college and although I won some scholarships, it wasn't enough. I had to also sign my name to student loans. I was inspired by those many conversations with students to research and find ways to reduce the cost of college. That research led me to create my signature presentation, *Scholarship Strategies Finding and Winning the Money You Need*. I turned my presentation into a book to assist more families and empower more students.

Any student and their family can easily get started on a scholarship search in three easy steps.

STEP 1: GET ORGANIZED

Students miss out on scholarships because they focus only on opportunities that relate to their grade point average, extracurricular activities, community service and career goal. I suggest, as a first step in the scholarship search, for students to create what I call a Personal Search Engine List. This is a list that describes all activities, interests and accomplishments from their life along with what they want to accomplish in their future. It will also include their "ready-to-go materials", which are papers, projects, essays or poems which were completed for class or club assignments to be used for potential scholarships. The Personal Search Engine List becomes a student's map for monies. It guides a student on opportunities they can and should seek out. Visit www.connections101.com to view a sample Personal Search Engine List for reference.

STEP 2: USE MULTIPLE SOURCES TO FIND SCHOLARSHIPS

There are four places to find scholarships: a student's school, their family members, scholarship book directories and online search engines. First, high school students should proactively be regularly asking their school counselors for any available opportunities. I call this "Getting Out of the Waiting Game". College students should be proactively asking their financial aid offices, department offices for their field of study and their alumni offices on campus. Secondly, all students should ask family members to find out if there are scholarships through their companies or professional unions. Third, students should utilize the index of scholarship book directories to identify scholarships quickly that correlate to their Personal Search Engine List. Lastly, there are many online scholarship search engine websites. My favorite is www.scholarships.com.

STEP 3: CREATE A PLAN OF ACTION TO APPLY

All students have a limited amount of time to search for scholarships and expedite applications. They are actively balancing academic assignments, completing college applications and keeping up their commitments to their athletic or creative extracurricular activities. Many also have job and family responsibilities. Starting and continuing a scholarship money mission doesn't need to be a burden on their already full calendar. It can easily be woven into a weekly schedule in small increments of time. I recommend that students focus on applying to 1 scholarship each week using "ready-to-go" materials such as a poem from an old homework

assignment and applying to 1 additional scholarship. By committing to expediting two scholarships weekly, a student will apply to over 100 scholarships each year.

With the student loan debt crisis in the United States having reached over 1.5 trillion dollars, surpassing credit card debt, it is important that families are empowered with a proactive approach to the scholarships from companies, organizations, individuals and foundations. It is my hope that every family will start a money mission as early as possible because the more information we have the easier it is to design our lives. I encourage you to keep in touch and share with me what scholarships your family members have found and won as your story will inspire others. Good luck and go get the money! Connect with me @scholarshipjean or www.connections101.com.