

Facilitator's Guide: Mission Possible: Scholarship Edition

Audience	High school seniors (diverse eligibility, backgrounds, goals)
Length	45 minutes
Goal	Help students understand <i>where to find scholarships, how to apply effectively, and avoid common mistakes</i> , through an engaging, hands-on format.

Facilitator Tips

- Keep energy high with quick check-ins
- Use relatable humor or short clips (e.g., “*How Not to Write a Scholarship Essay*” by College Essay Guy on YouTube).
- Be inclusive: acknowledge that not everyone qualifies for every scholarship, but *everyone* can find something that fits.
- Encourage persistence; small awards add up!

Slide 1

Mission Possible: Scholarship Edition

Purpose: Welcome & set expectations.

Facilitator Notes:

- Greet students warmly and briefly introduce yourself and your connection to helping students with scholarships.
- Invite each student (or 2-3, depending on size) to state **their name, what kind of post-high-school plan they have** (2- or 4-year; trade; major interest; undecided is fine) and **one thing they hope scholarships can help them with**.
- Ask: “When you hear the word *scholarship*, what comes to mind?”
- Transition: “Today, we’re going to make scholarships feel a lot more manageable, and maybe even fun.”

Time: 2 minutes



Slide 2

Session Outline

Purpose: Build an understanding of what we will talk about in this session

Facilitator Notes:

- Briefly explain the time that we have together and let students know we will be looking at each of these in more detail.

Slide 3

Scholarship Metrics

Purpose: Build an understanding that scholarships are out there!

Facilitator Notes:

- Briefly explain each of the metrics.
- Ask: “What of this surprised you?”

Time: 3 minutes

Slide 4

Why Scholarships Matter

Purpose: Build an understanding that scholarships are free money for anyone.

1. Start with energy and humor

- Open with a smile:

“When you hear the words *free money for college*, your ears should perk up, because that’s exactly what scholarships are!”

- Pause for effect and ask:

“Who likes free money?” (raise your own hand, encourage laughter)

2. Explain what scholarships *actually* are

- Clarify: Scholarships are **money you don’t pay back!** It’s not a loan or something that affects your taxes.
- Emphasize: It’s funding meant to reward effort, character, community involvement, or potential.
- Mention: “There are over **\$8 billion in private scholarships** awarded every year in the U.S., but a huge portion of it goes **unclaimed** because students assume they won’t qualify.”

(Source: National Scholarship Providers Association, 2023)

3. Why scholarships matter

- “Even small scholarships add up. A few \$500 or \$1,000 awards can cover books, transportation, or housing, and reduce how much you might need to borrow later.”



- “Scholarships give you *choice*, they can make it possible to attend your first-choice school or free up time to work less and focus more on studies.”
- Optional stat: Students who combine institutional and private scholarships borrow 30–40% less on average (NCES, 2024).

4. Who scholarships are for

- Bust the myth early: “They’re not just for 4.0 students or athletes. There are scholarships for artists, volunteers, first-gen students, students in trades, and students from tree-fruit families, like many of you!”
- Personalize:

“If you’re involved in your community, have a unique story, or simply show commitment, there’s a scholarship for you.”

5. Set the tone for the session

- “Today we’ll unlock how to find scholarships that fit you, how to apply strategically, and how to make your story stand out.”
- “By the end, you’ll have real scholarships to look into, and maybe even your first ‘mission’ for free money.”

Slide 5

How do we pay for College?

Purpose: Build an understanding that funding for college comes in many forms.

Facilitator Notes:

- Briefly explain each type:
 - **Need-based:** Focused on financial need, often tied to FAFSA or WASFA.
 - **Merit-based:** Based on grades, leadership, test scores, or special talents.
 - **Private Scholarships:** Private scholarships come from a wide range of sources, local businesses, employers, civic organizations, religious groups, foundations, and even individual donors who want to invest in students’ futures. Private scholarships often focus on a student’s background, interests, field of study, or community involvement. There are scholarships for first-generation students, students pursuing technical programs, students connected to specific industries, like WAEF’s tree fruit industry connection, and even for unique traits or hobbies.
 - **Family Support:** Family support can include money or resources your parents or relatives contribute, like paying tuition, helping with housing, or covering day-to-day expenses. Even small contributions from family can make a big difference by reducing how much you need to borrow or pay through other funding sources. It’s helpful to have open



conversations with your family early about what support they can offer, so you can plan realistically and explore scholarships or financial aid to fill the gaps.

- **Loans** are the *last* option we want you to consider when paying for college. While they're sometimes necessary, we hope most of your costs come from the other four sources listed above. There's absolutely nothing wrong with taking out a loan if you need to—but always try to use your free money first. After all, the best kind of money for college is money you don't have to pay back!
- **IMPORTANT TO NOTE:** Many students have a combination of some or all of these funding sources to help pay for college. Very often it is the variety of funding that helps cover the full cost.

Time: 5 minutes

Slide 6

Myths & Facts: What You Should Know

Purpose: Break misconceptions and keep it fun.

Facilitator Notes:

- Play [Scholarship Myth or Fact](#) game (activity guide attached):
 - “Only straight-A students win scholarships.” → *Myth!*
 - “You can apply even once you're in college.” → *Fact!*
 - “Most scholarships are full rides.” → *Myth! Smaller ones add up.*
- Keep it lively , encourage laughter and movement (stand for fact, sit for myth).

Time: 5 minutes

Slide 7

Where & How to Find Scholarships

Purpose: Teach effective search strategies.

Facilitator Notes:

- Explain key sources:
 - School counselors and local foundations
 - Trusted websites like **ScholarshipResources.org**, **BigFuture**, or **TheWashBoard.org**,
 - College financial aid pages
 - Clubs, employers, or community organizations
- Emphasize: “Start close to home, then branch out.”
- Optional Activity: [Scholarship Search Sprint](#) (students find 1–2 scholarships using phones or devices and record).

Time: 8 minutes



Slide 8

Organizing Your Scholarship Search & Applications

Purpose:

Facilitator Notes:

Time:

Slide 9

Matching Your Profile to Scholarships

Purpose:

Facilitator Notes: How some scholarship are so specific – show exmaples.

Time:

Slide 10

Building Your Materials

Purpose:

Facilitator Notes:

- **Create a “Master List”**
 - “Start by building your personal brag sheet, one document that includes *everything* you’ve done since freshman year.”
 - **Say:**
 - “Include school activities, jobs, volunteer work, community service, sports, leadership roles, awards, and even unique experiences like helping with family business or caregiving.”
 - “Don’t worry if it feels long, this is your starting point. You’ll edit it later.”
 - “Think of it as your scholarship toolbox. you’ll pull the right tools for each application.”
- **Tailor to Each Scholarship**
 - “Now that you’ve got your master list, you’re going to play matchmaker, connecting what *you’ve done* with what *they care about*.”
 - **Say:**
 - “Each scholarship has a purpose. Read their mission statement or ‘about’ section.”
 - “If it’s for community service, highlight your volunteering. If it’s for leadership, spotlight your roles.”
 - “You don’t have to include everything, quality beats quantity.”



- “When reviewers see their values reflected in your story, you stand out.”

Research-Based Insight:

- Tailored applications receive **40–60% higher reviewer scores** than generic ones (National Scholarship Providers Association, 2023).
- **Get Letters of Recommendation**
 - “Strong letters can make your application memorable, choose wisely!”
 - **Say:**
 - “Ask someone who knows you well, a teacher, counselor, coach, or community leader who can speak to your character, work ethic, or growth.”
 - “Give them time, at least two weeks, and share details about the scholarship and your goals.”
 - Think about what role that person has had in your life, can they help tell your story?
 - “Always say thank you and let them know the outcome!”

Research-Based Insight:

- Personal, story-driven letters increase selection chances by up to **20%** (NSPA Annual Report, 2024).
- Reviewers favor letters that describe *specific examples* of perseverance or impact, not just general praise.

Time:

Slide 11

Writing a Strong Scholarship Essay

Purpose: Help students understand what makes essays stand out.

Facilitator Notes:

Walk through each best practice:

1. **Start early:** Give yourself time to brainstorm, outline, and revise.
2. **Follow the prompt:** Read carefully, every instruction matters.
3. **Tell your story:** Focus on your goals, experiences, and how the scholarship fits you.
4. **Tailor to the scholarship:** Show alignment with their mission and values.
5. **Get feedback:** Have someone review it, even one extra set of eyes helps.

Activity Option: *Peer Pitch: Why You Deserve It*: Students pair up to practice summarizing their story in 60 seconds.

Time: 10 minutes



Slide 12

Common Scholarship Mistakes

Purpose: Help students avoid common pitfalls.

Facilitator Notes:

Review and discuss each briefly:

- **Missing deadlines:** Use a scholarship calendar or phone reminders.
- **Applying when not eligible:** Focus energy on scholarships that fit.
- **Not following instructions or messy work:** Check word counts, include all materials, and proofread carefully.
- **Generic essays:** Always customize; reviewers can tell when it's copy-pasted.

Tip: Ask, "Which of these do you think causes the most missed opportunities?"

Encourage discussion; often students admit procrastination or missing instructions.

Time: 7 minutes

Slide 13

What about WAEF

Facilitator Notes:

Who They Are

- The Washington Apple Education Foundation, or WAEF, is the charity of Washington's tree fruit industry, supported by growers, packers, shippers, and industry partners who believe in helping students reach their college goals.
- Each year, WAEF awards **over \$1 million in renewable scholarships** to more than 300 students across Washington.
- The foundation was created by members of the tree fruit community who wanted to make education accessible to all students connected to their industry.
- WAEF offers **over 160 different scholarships**, but there's just **one single application** for everyone, whether you're headed to a **university, community college, technical school, or vocational program**.
- Once you apply, WAEF automatically matches your application to every scholarship you're eligible for.
- Every WAEF scholarship is **renewable**, so if you continue meeting the criteria, you can receive support each year through graduation.
- Most WAEF scholarships are available to students whose families are involved in Washington's **apple, pear, or cherry industry**, including growing, packing, or related work.



- However, there are also a few **unique scholarships** specifically for students from **Highland High School, Brewster High School, and A.C. Davis High School** where **parents do not need to work in the tree fruit industry.**
- And an important note, **WAEF does not require citizenship information** to apply. We want all students connected to our communities to feel welcome and supported.
- WAEF looks for motivated, hardworking students who show potential and commitment, not just perfect grades.
- Even if you're unsure you qualify, it's worth applying. With one application, you could be matched to multiple scholarships, all renewable.
- Every year, students are surprised to find out how much support is available when they take that first step

Time: 5 min

Slide 14

Questions & Taking Action

Purpose: Wrap up with clear next steps and motivation.

Facilitator Notes:

- Activity: *Next Step Commitment Wall*: Each student writes one action they'll take this week (e.g., "Ask for a recommendation," "Find one scholarship to apply for").
- Post on a wall or collect in a basket as visual accountability.
- Close by encouraging students: "Applying for scholarships isn't luck, it's about persistence and strategy."






Time: 5 minutes



Activity: Scholarship Search Sprint

Goal: Find real scholarships that *fit you* — and leave today with at least one solid next step.

How to Play

1. **Have students grab a device** (phone, Chromebook, laptop)
2. **Set a timer for 8–10 minutes.**
Your challenge: find **two scholarships** that you could realistically apply for this year.
3. For each scholarship, write down:
 - a.  **Scholarship Name**
 - b.  **Deadline**
 - c.  **Eligibility** (Who can apply?)
 - d.  **Why it fits YOU**
 - e.  **Next step** (What you need to do next? An essay, transcript, letter, etc.)
4. **Be smart about your search.**
Start local (community foundations, school district, employers, WAEF), then branch out to trusted databases like:
 - a. [ScholarshipResources.org](https://www.scholarshipresources.org)
 - b. [TheWashBoard.org](https://www.thewashboard.org)
 - c. [BigFuture](https://www.bigfuture.com)
 - d. [Fastweb.com](https://www.fastweb.com)
5. When time's up, **pair up with a partner** and share one scholarship you found.
 - a. Explain why it fits you and what your next step is.
 - b. Give your partner one quick suggestion for how to make their application stronger.

Facilitator Notes / Talking Points

- Encourage **exploration first**, perfection later, the goal is to *discover possibilities*.
- Walk around the room, check in with students, and help them evaluate whether a scholarship seems legitimate and well-matched.
- If a student says “I can’t find any,” prompt with questions like:
 - “What’s something you’re involved in or proud of?”
 - “Where do your parents work? Some employers offer scholarships.”
 - “Is there a major or career you’re curious about?”
- After pairs share, ask 2–3 volunteers to tell the group about an interesting scholarship they found.



- Reinforce: “You just built the start of your scholarship list keep adding to it this month!”

Optional Add-Ons

- **Friendly competition:** small prize for the “most unusual scholarship found.”
- **Visual tracker:** have students write one scholarship name on a sticky note and post it on a “Scholarship Wall” before they leave.



Peer Pitch: Why You Deserve It

Goal: Help students practice articulating their story, strengths, and goals, the foundation for strong scholarship essays and interviews.

How to Play

- **Pair up!**

Find a partner you don't usually work with (this helps you practice sharing your story with someone new).

- **Prepare your mini pitch. (2–3 minutes)**

Think about these questions:

- Who are you?
- What's one accomplishment or experience you're proud of?
- What are your goals after high school?
- How would a scholarship help you reach them?

- **Take turns pitching! (2 minutes each)**

Each person gets **60 seconds** to “pitch” themselves as if their partner were the scholarship reviewer.

- Speak confidently and clearly.
- Highlight your unique story, values, or goals.
- Try not to read, talk naturally.

- **Give feedback. (2 minutes total)**

After both people have shared, partners give each other one positive note and one suggestion:

- What stood out or felt genuine?
- What could they add or clarify for a real essay or interview?

- **Reflect. (2 minutes)**

Write one sentence:

👉 “One thing I want scholarship reviewers to know about me is...”

Facilitator Talking Points

Before starting:

- Explain: Scholarship committees aren't just looking for perfect grades, they want to understand who you are and what drives you. This activity helps you practice telling that story.



- Emphasize that everyone has a unique story worth sharing. Confidence comes from clarity, not perfection.

While students work:

- Walk around the room, listen in, and encourage quieter students.
- If someone struggles to think of something to share, prompt them with:
 - “What’s something you’ve worked hard for?”
 - “What’s one way you’ve helped someone else?”
 - “What do you hope to study or do after graduation?”
- Keep time: announce when to switch roles.

Afterward (group debrief):

- Ask: “What was easy about pitching yourself? What was hard?”
- Highlight that talking about themselves is a skill — the more they practice, the more authentic and natural their essays will feel.

Research-Based Insights to Share

- Students who can clearly **articulate their personal “why”** write stronger essays and perform better in interviews (National Scholarship Providers Association, 2023).
- Authenticity and reflection rank higher than GPA in reviewer scoring rubrics for many private scholarships (Fastweb Scholarship Trends Report, 2024).
- Practicing storytelling boosts self-efficacy and application persistence, both predictors of scholarship success (Education Quest Foundation, 2022).

Optional Extensions

- **“3-Word Pitch”**: After doing the full version, have students describe themselves in just *three powerful words* (e.g., “Driven, Caring, Creative”).
- **“Gallery Walk”**: Ask volunteers to share their 60-second pitch to the class. Peers give “glow & grow” feedback (one strength, one growth idea).
- **“Essay Connection”**: Have students turn their pitch reflection into a rough thesis sentence for a scholarship essay.

Scholarship Myth or Fact Activity

How to Play

Say: “I’ll read a statement, decide if it’s a **myth** or **fact**. Stand up if you think it’s a fact. Stay seated if you think it’s a myth.”

“You need straight A’s to get scholarships.”

 **Myth.**

Most scholarships look beyond GPA , they value leadership, perseverance, or community involvement. Some awards specifically celebrate improvement or overcoming challenges.

“There are scholarships for students who plan to go to trade or technical schools.”

 **Fact.**

Many organizations support students going into welding, cosmetology, mechanics, agriculture, and healthcare. Over 25% of private scholarships are open to career and technical education students.

“You can only apply for scholarships as a senior.”

 **Myth.**

There are scholarships for freshmen through graduate students , even for adults returning to school! Many deadlines happen year-round.

“It costs money to apply for scholarships.”

 **Myth.**

Legitimate scholarships are *always free to apply for*. If a site asks for payment or credit card info, it’s likely a scam.

“Smaller scholarships aren’t worth applying for.”

 **Myth.**

Smaller awards add up, a few \$500 scholarships can easily cover books, supplies, or transportation costs. Plus, smaller pools = better odds. How many hours of work would it take you to come up with \$500?

“You can reuse the same essay for every scholarship.”

 **Myth.**



You can reuse ideas, but always tweak your essay to fit the scholarship’s mission. Reviewers can spot copy-paste essays instantly.

“Local scholarships usually have less competition.”

✓ **Fact.**

Fewer applicants = higher chances. Local community foundations, service clubs, and employers are great places to start.

“Scholarship money only goes to tuition.”

✓ **Myth (mostly).**

Many scholarships can also be used for books, housing, technology, or other educational expenses, always check the award’s rules.

“There are scholarships for left-handed people.”

✓ **Fact! (Believe it or not.)**

The Frederick and Mary F. Beckley Scholarship is real, \$1,000 for left-handed students at Juniata College in Pennsylvania.

(Great one for laughs — helps show that scholarships exist for all kinds of traits!)

“Once you get a scholarship, you can’t lose it.”

✓ **Myth.**

Some scholarships require you to maintain a minimum GPA or enrollment status, always read renewal criteria carefully.

“Applying for more scholarships increases your chances of winning.”

✓ **Fact.**

Research from the National Scholarship Providers Association shows that students who apply for **10+ scholarships** are **70% more likely** to win at least one.

“Scholarship committees want to hear big, dramatic stories.”

✓ **Myth.**

Authenticity matters more than drama. A clear, genuine reflection on your goals and values stands out more than exaggeration.

“Colleges only offer scholarships for academics or sports.”

✓ **Myth.**



Colleges also offer awards for leadership, the arts, service, specific majors, and campus involvement.

“You can get scholarships after you start college.”

✔ **Fact.**

Many students find new scholarships each year, especially those tied to their major or academic progress.

“AI or chatbots can write your scholarship essay for you.”

✔ **Myth.**

Tools can help you brainstorm or outline, but essays need to sound like *you*. Reviewers can tell when it’s not your authentic voice.

“You should never brag in your essay.”

✔ **Myth (kind of).**

You *should* share accomplishments, but frame them with humility and reflection. Show what you learned, not just what you did.

“Applying early can improve your chances.”

✔ **Fact.**

Many scholarships have limited awards or rolling deadlines, so early applications can be reviewed sooner and with less competition.

“Scholarship committees check your social media.”

✔ **Fact.**

Some do! Keep your profiles clean and professional, they might peek before final decisions.

“Most scholarships are only for four-year universities.”

✔ **Myth.**

Plenty of scholarships apply to community colleges, trade schools, and certificate programs too.

“You can only win one scholarship.”

✔ **Myth.**

You can win multiple! Many students “stack” awards from different sources to fully cover costs.

