

# Scholarship Scams

## Don't Pay Money to Get Money

Some deceitful companies will go about swindling dollars by promising students free scholarship money in exchange for an up-front fee. Others claim to have access to untapped sources of financial aid, charging students for information on various scholarship awards. Many parents will receive letters in the mail promoting "free financial aid seminars" or "open interviews" for financial assistance, not knowing that the real purpose of the event is to plug unnecessary products and/or services. When a sales pitch implies that purchasing such a product is a prerequisite to receiving federal student aid, it violates federal regulations and state insurance laws. While some of these profit-making companies do offer legitimate services, there are several alternative routes students can take to acquire a wealth of scholarship information - for FREE. The bottom line: if you have to pay money to get money, it's probably a scam and you're better off looking elsewhere.

## Six Signs of a Scam

The Federal Trade Commission urges students and parents to look out for six signs that a college scholarship offer is a scam:

1. "The scholarship is guaranteed or your money back." No one can guarantee students that they'll receive scholarship money. Always look for strings attached. FinAid ([www.finaid.org](http://www.finaid.org)), an acclaimed web site dedicated to providing students with comprehensive scholarship information, alerts that "some companies will not refund your money, but instead will offer to rerun the search for a specified number of times at no charge." It also has found that numerous organizations define the word "receive" ambiguously - students will receive information about scholarships, not the scholarships themselves.
2. "We will need your credit card or bank account number to hold this scholarship." Never give out an account number without getting all the information in writing first.
3. "You can't get this information anywhere else." Don't believe a company that claims its search engine is entirely unique. Different scholarship databases overlap significantly since many utilize the same information-gathering techniques. There are several free search services on the Internet where students can enter information about themselves and instantly see a list of valid scholarships for which they may qualify.
4. "The scholarship will cost some money."
5. "We'll do all the work for you." There are thousands of legitimate scholarship opportunities out there. However, these award donors often require substantial materials from their applicants - essays, letters of recommendation, transcripts, etc. For these applications, you can't hire a company to do the work for you.
6. "You've been selected" by a "national foundation" to receive a scholarship or "You're a finalist" in a contest you never entered. Before sending anything, call directory assistance to see if the company has a listing. Find out how the company acquired your information and then be on guard for hidden fees.

If you or someone you know suspects that a scholarship offer may be a scam, you can report it to the National Fraud Information Center at 1-800-876-7060, the Federal Trade Commission at 1-877-FTC-HELP, or by email to [Finaid.org](mailto:scams@finaid.org) at [scams@finaid.org](mailto:scams@finaid.org). You can also contact your State Attorney General's Office, the Better Business Bureau, U.S. Postal Inspection Service (if any part of the transaction was through the mail), U.S. Department of Education Office of Inspector General, or your high school counselor for more assistance.

## National Scholarship Databases

Listed below are several scholarship databases available to assist students in finding private sector scholarships, fellowships and loans for which s/he may be eligible. Upon entering student-specific information (i.e. grade level, major, email address...) the search will retrieve information about scholarships pertaining to that student and send this information to his/her email account. This may include more detailed information about the scholarship, as well as how to request an application.

**Horatio Alger National Career & Technical Scholarship** <https://application.horatioalger.org>

**Scholarship Databases** <http://www.finaid.org/scholarships/>

Major-Specific Database <http://www.finaid.org/otheraid/majors.phtml>

Scholarships for Students with Disabilities <http://www.finaid.org/otheraid/disabled.phtml>

Scholarships for Minorities <http://www.finaid.org/otheraid/minority.phtml>

**Hispanic College Fund** <http://www.hispanicfund.org/>

**For current high school seniors.** <http://www.axa-achievement.com/>

**General Scholarships**

• **Scholarships** <http://www.scholarships.com/>

• **Education Planner** <http://www.educationplanner.com>

• **SuperCollege** <http://www.supercollege.com/>

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