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Scholarship Common Application Toolkit

This guide will help students/applicants apply for a BCF scholarship. Below is a suggestion of how to approach the application . Please feel free to use this as needed. There is additional information and guidance for several of the steps below.

Go to www.berriencommunity.org/scholar to complete the application. If you have questions email sharnae@berriencommunity.org or quini@berriencommunity.org

Apps are due February 1, 2027

Step#1 LOG IN

Create username and password. (Write it down!). Then log in to the common scholarship application.

Take a quick tour of the application sections:

Student Information
School Information
Essay
Additional Scholarship Criteria
Extracurricular Activities
Financial Information
Letters of Recommendation
Transcript
Signatures and Completion

Step #2 LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION (2 Letters required)

You will need to ask two people to write a letter of recommendation for you. Fill out in application. (you will also be given the chance to write a short note to your recommenders)

Step #3 UPLOADS

TRANSCRIPTS, FAFSA, RESUME (Resume if applicant has worked, or is currently working)

- Determine which documents you have and what you still need. As your counselor or a trusted adult if you have any issues getting these items. (Or ask BCF! See above.⇈)
- Cross of items that are finished and uploaded on the Scholarship Checklist.

Step #4 ESSAY/SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS

- All applicants will be asked to provide the common essay. Depending on the information they provide in their whole application, they will be asked to provide short answers to additional questions.

🔥HOT TIP: *Open a WORD document and write your essay and short answers, then save them. This makes it easier to proof/edit them. When you're happy with it, copy/paste it into the application.*

Step #5 FINANCIAL INFORMATION

- If you have completed the FAFSA application, upload it and answer the additional financial question. If not, follow the guide in this toolkit to get it done.

Step #6 SIGN AND SUBMIT

- Once you have answered every question and uploaded all your documents, ***review the entire application one more time***, if you're happy with it, sign and submit.
- Pat yourself on the back! Great job on completing your application!!!

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Scholarship Application Checklist

Have as many of the checklist items as you can before you start to make applying fast and easy!

Apply at: www.berriencommunity.org/scholar

Application Due Date: February 1, 2027

✓ Laptop

- You'll use this to complete and submit your application

Fully charged = bonus points!

✓ High School Transcript

- Your most recent transcript from your high school
- See your high school counselor

✓ FAFSA Results or Estimate

- An estimate is fine if that's what you have
- Just make sure it's ready before you apply

✓ Extracurricular Activities

- Sports, clubs, volunteering,leadership roles, church activities, and hobbies all count

✓ Family Info

- Parent or guardian's occupation
- Did either parent graduate?
- How many siblings attending college?

✓ Job Info (Only if you've worked)

- Job title or position
- Dates of employment
- Pay stub or employer letter

✓ Recommendation Letters

- Two people willing to write letters for you
- Have their first and last name
- Have their email address
- Teachers, counselors, coaches, or mentors are great picks

✓ Scholarship Essay (250 words or less) — Totally Manageable!

- Discuss your educational and career goals
- Explain how receiving a scholarship would help you achieve them
- Share your intended major and why you chose it
- If undecided, describe your interests

Hot Tip *: 250 words ≈ 4 short paragraphs*

Paragraph 1: Who you are & your goals

Paragraph 2: Your major or interests

Paragraph 3: Your career plans

Paragraph 4: How the scholarship helps

That's it - no novel required!

You don't have to do everything at once. Just start checking boxes-each one gets you closer to free money for college!

Questions? Ask Sharnae Hudson - Sharnae@berriencommunity.org - 269-983-3304

or Quini McGhee - Quini@berriencommunity.org - 269-983-3304

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Scholarship Application Login Guide

- Go to berriencommunity.org/scholar
- Select 'Click Here to Apply'
- Create a new account. *Hot Tip* 🔥 *:when asked to choose between and Individual and organization, choose INDIVIDUAL.*
- Verify your account using the verification email sent to your email address used to register
    - The verification email could take up to 10 minutes to receive
- Log into your account
- In the **My Opportunities** folder, select **Scholarship**
- *That's it*... start working on your application!

Tips To Know

- Once the application has been selected, until it is successfully completed, it will move ***from*** the My Opportunities folder and into the **In Progress** folder
    - If you are on a computer, folders are visible on the top, left side of your screen
    - If you are on smartphone, folders will appear after selecting the **Options button** (3 stacked horizontal lines) on top, right side of your screen
- Once the application is completed, it will appear in the **Submitted** folder
- In the Submitted folder is also where the status of your letter of recommendations can be tracked
    - **Sent** = recommender has not yet opened recommendation email
    - **In Progress** = recommender has opened recommendation email
    - **Completed** = recommender has submitted their recommendation letter on your behalf
    - **Edit button** – use to change your recommender or to make corrections to the information currently entered
    - **Resend Email button** - resends originally sent email to your recommender to complete the recommendation request

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Letters of Recommendation

Each applicant will be asked to provide the **names** and **email address** of 2 people to write a letter of recommendation for the applicant.

To ensure you get both letters of recommendation in before the deadline, start your application and **ask your recommenders early in advance** to allow them to time to submit a letter on your behalf.

Types of people to ask

Current high school students or current college students:

- School Faculty Member - Instructor, counselor, administrator or any faculty member at your school to request a letter of recommendation.
- Community Member Recommendation - a community member such as a coach, employer, extracurricular advisor, etc.

Types of people to ask

Adult scholars or those returning to school after a gap in time:

- School Faculty Member (if you are in school, if not, then choose two community members) - Instructor, counselor, administrator or any faculty member at your school to request a letter of recommendation.
- Community Member Recommendation - a community member such as a coach,

DO NOT!

Request a letter of recommendation from family members.

DO!

Notify your recommender that you will be requesting a letter from them.

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How to Write a 250-Word Scholarship Essay

BCF Common Application Essay Prompt:

“Discuss your educational and career goals and how a scholarship would help you achieve those goals. What is your major, and why have you chosen it? If you are undecided on a major, what are your interests?”

1. Start With a Short Introduction (2–3 sentences)

Say who you are and what you want to do in the future.

Example:

> *“My goal is to become a nurse because I want to help people in my community stay healthy. I am working hard in school so I can go to college and study nursing.”*

2. Explain What Inspired Your Career Path (2–3 sentences)

Share a moment, person, or experience that made you interested in your major or career.

Example:

> *“I decided to become a nurse after helping take care of my grandmother when she was sick. I liked seeing how nurses made her feel safe and cared for.”*

If undecided:

> *“I’m not sure of my major yet, but I love drawing, writing stories, and helping younger kids with homework. These interests make me excited to explore art and education in college.”*

3. Explain Your Educational Goals (3–4 sentences)

Tell what you want to study and why it matters to you.

Example:

> *“I plan to study nursing in college. I chose this major because I enjoy science and caring for others. I want to learn the skills I need to work in a hospital or clinic.”*

4. Explain Your Career Goals (3–4 sentences)

Describe the job you hope to have and the impact you want to make.

Example:

> *“My career goal is to become a pediatric nurse. I want to work with children and help families understand how to keep their kids healthy.”*

5. Describe the Financial Challenges You Face (2–3 sentences)

Be honest and simple. Explain what makes paying for college hard.

Example:

> *“My family has had a hard time saving for college because my mom works two jobs and we help support my younger siblings. Paying for books and fees will be difficult without help.”*

6. Explain How the Scholarship Will Help You (3–4 sentences)

Show why the support matters and how it will help you reach your goals.

Example:

> *“This scholarship would help me pay for books and school supplies. It would also let me work fewer hours so I can focus on my classes. With this support, I can stay on track toward becoming a nurse.”*

7. End With a Short Conclusion (2–3 sentences)

Thank the committee and restate your goals.

Example:

> *“Thank you for considering me for this scholarship. I am excited to study nursing and help my community. Your support will bring me closer to my dream.”*

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Easy Step-by-Step Guide to Applying for FAFSA

FAFSA stands for the Free Application for Federal Student Aid. It helps students get money for college like grants, scholarships, work-study, and loans. FAFSA is free to apply.

Before You Start

Student will need:

- Social Security number (if you have one)
- Email address
- List of colleges you may attend
- Tax information (if you filed taxes)

Parent may need:

- Social Security number
- Tax return from last year
- Records of income (W-2s or pay stubs)
- Email address

Step 1: Create an FSA ID

Go to studentaid.gov and click Create Account. The student and parent may each need their own FSA ID. Write down your username and password and keep them safe.

Step 2: Log In and Start FAFSA

Go to studentaid.gov and click Apply for Aid. Choose the FAFSA form and log in using the student's FSA ID.

Step 3: Answer Student Questions

Answer questions about the student, high school, and college plans. Answer honestly. If you are unsure, choose the best answer.

Step 4: Add Parent Information (If Required)

Most high school students must include parent information. FAFSA will guide you and tell you what is needed.

Step 5: Use the IRS Tax Tool (If Available)

FAFSA may allow you to pull tax information directly from the IRS. This helps reduce mistakes. If you cannot use it, you may enter the numbers manually.

Step 6: List Colleges

Add at least one college. You can add more later. Listing a college does not mean you must attend.

Step 7: Review, Sign, and Submit

Review all information carefully. The student signs using their FSA ID. The parent signs using their FSA ID if required. Click Submit FAFSA when finished.

After You Submit

You will see a confirmation page and receive a confirmation email. Your Student Aid Report will arrive in a few days. Review it and make corrections if needed.

Important Reminders

FAFSA is free. Never pay to apply. Apply every year as early as possible. Help is available from school counselors, colleges, and trusted community partners.

Experience & Next Steps

Showcasing Your Community Impact, Work Ethic, and Future Goals

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Scholarship committees want to know more than just your GPA—they want to know who you are outside the classroom, how you manage your responsibilities, and where you are headed next. Berrien Community Foundation's scholarship application gives each applicant the opportunity to paint a complete picture of your dedication, character, and drive. While working on your application, you'll complete and upload each of the following worksheets:

- **College Application Status:** List the schools you've applied to and your current application status (accepted, pending, denied).

- **Extracurricular & Community Service Activities:** List the extracurricular and community service projects you've participated in throughout high school. This includes sports, clubs, service projects, tutoring, mission trips, service positions appointed in church (youth minister, Sunday School helper), etc.

- **Work History:** List any jobs, internships, or responsibilities that demonstrate your time-management, leadership, and work ethic, throughout high school.

> *Take your time filling out each worksheet thoroughly. A well-documented application helps committees see your full potential and how deserving you are of support!*

College Application Status

Please list the colleges/trades programs to which you've applied in order of preference and include your application status, i.e. accepted, pending, denied.

College/University/Trades School Name	Indicate Accepted, Pending, or Denied
Example Michigan State University	Example Accepted

Extracurricular Activities Worksheet

Using the space below, please list the activities in which you have participated in the order of importance to you. You may add rows if necessary. Include things like clubs, volunteerism, church activities, sports, musical theatre, etc.

Organization Name	Number of Years Involved	How did you contribute to this organization? What projects or volunteerism were you apart of? Also list any leadership positions held and the years you held them.	Awards and Recognition received, if applicable
Example Key Club	Example 4	Example Blood bank organizer, peer tutoring, community clean-ups.	Example President 10/2025-05/2027

Work History

Using only the space below, please list your paid work experience. Begin with your most recent. Add additional rows to the table, if needed.

Employer	Dates of Employment	Provide the job title and a brief job description	Hours worked per week
Example Culver's	Example 06/2024- 11/2026	Example Cashier	Example 25