How to Apply For a Merit-Based Scholarship, Fellowship or Award

Before you Begin

Read the entire application closely before you start filling it out. Ensure that you meet all eligibility requirements and review the directions carefully. Thoroughly review the program website. More than likely, the sponsoring organization/program will provide detailed instructions and advice for constructing a strong application.

Application Components

Basic Information

You will be asked for general information including, but not limited to: work experience, volunteer history, academic history, etc. Make sure to complete this section in its entirety.

Short Answer Questions

Short answer questions are an important part of the application, so you should put a significant amount of effort into crafting your answers. Be sure to demonstrate experiences that support your understanding of and commitment to the goals of the program. Your answers should be both thoughtful and concise.

Written Statement

A majority of scholarship, fellowship and award applications require at least one written statement. **This is the most important part of the application!** You may be asked to submit an essay, personal statement, statement of purpose, research statement or a combination of two or more of these. Required length can vary from 250 to 1000 words. In some instances, you may be provided with a topic or a specific question that must be addressed. Other statements can be very general and are open to a wide variety of topics.

Think carefully about your statement and write a draft. Read the application instructions to determine if you are allowed to seek out feedback from faculty members and/or the professional advisors in the Office of External Scholarships, Fellowships and Awards. Continue to revise the statement until it accurately reflects your goals. Remember that your statement(s) should be unique and set you apart from other applicants. Don’t forget to check your spelling and grammar for accuracy.

Letters of Recommendation

Most applications require a minimum of three reference letters from faculty and other professionals. Carefully select your recommenders according to the nature of the award. For example, if the award is research-oriented, you should approach faculty members who can speak to your research experience and abilities.

Be sure to contact potential recommenders well in advance (at least one month) of the application deadline. If possible, schedule an appointment with each of them to discuss your application. Provide them with a copy of your proposal, resume, and a description of the award so they can write a comprehensive letter in your support.

Resume/Curriculum Vitae

A resume is a brief (one page) summary of your achievements and involvment, whereas a curriculum vitae is a longer, more in-depth overview of your educational and scholarly background and accomplishments as they relate to your academic and career goals.

Your resume or curriculum vitae should be specific to the award you are applying for. Highlight the activities and accomplishments which are most pertinent to your application.

Transcripts

Official Binghamton University transcripts can be ordered via the BU Brain. Please allow 3-5 days for processing. In some cases you may be able to submit an unofficial version of your transcript via the online scholarship/fellowship application. Please note that you will most likely also be asked to provide transcripts from any other institutions you have attended.
Other

Some programs may require that you submit additional information as part of your application. Examples are financial documents, portfolios, and/or exam scores. Check and recheck that you have compiled all required materials before submitting your application.

Making it to the Next Stage

It is common for it to take several months before you hear back regarding the result of your application. Be patient! Do not contact the program/organization to check the status of your application unless instructed to do so. Please note that in some cases you may not hear back at all because of the sheer volume of applicants.

The second stage of the application process is usually in the form of an interview. If selected as a finalist, you will receive a letter and or e-mail providing the details of the interview. Sometimes you will have weeks to prepare and in other cases you may be provided only 24 hours of notice.

A mock interview with an advisor, faculty member or friend can be a good way to calm your nerves and help you anticipate possible questions. Imagine yourself as the interviewer and reread your application as objectively as possible, looking for holes, contradictions, and weak spots. What kinds of questions does it raise? Some committees may deliberately try to rattle you. Others simply want to give you a chance to show what you know. You may be asked questions relating to current events or recent developments in your field. You may be asked about your reasons for your proposal. There is no way to anticipate every question. The best approach is to be honest. If you don't know the answer to a question, say so. If you can, connect the question to something you do know. Relax, be yourself, and enjoy this chance to talk with some very interesting people.

Reapplying

If your application is unsuccessful and you are eligible to apply for the award again in the future, we recommend that you do so. Look at your first application as a learning experience and use what you have learned to help strengthen your application when you reapply.

Tips for Creating a Strong Application

- Give yourself a sufficient amount of time to complete the application. Plan to begin the process at least a semester in advance of the application deadline; in some cases you should begin a year in advance.

- Meet with a campus representative early on. We can provide you with invaluable advice and insight throughout the application process. Some scholarships require university nomination, so you will need to work closely with our office from start to finish.

- Research the program/organization to understand its mission and goals. Read profiles of past recipients of the scholarship/fellowship/award. This will allow you to better understand program values and the backgrounds and experiences of successful recipients.

- Ensure that you have defined, realistic future aspirations. Be able to articulate these goals in a clear and concise manner.

Helpful Campus Resources

- Office of External Scholarships, Fellowships and Awards http://scholarships.binghamton.edu
- Center for Career and Professional Development http://www.binghamton.edu/ccpd/
- Public Speaking Skills Lab (PSSL) http://www.binghamton.edu/public-speaking/
- Writing Center http://www2.binghamton.edu/writing/writing-center/