Here at the Western Colorado Community Foundation, we have been administering scholarships since 2000. At present, we manage 38 scholarships for the benefit of the western Colorado region. Each of these scholarships has unique criteria for the selection of recipients, reflecting the interests of the donors who set up the scholarships.

Most of our scholarships are for graduating high school students, but we also offer some which target non-traditional students and training programs. Our experience in getting and processing applications for these opportunities has given us insight into the process used to distribute educational funds and, particularly, into some common problems with student applications which make it difficult to assess them for suitability.

Before addressing these “do”s and “don’t”s of seeking scholarships, let me mention that our website, wc-cf.org, has a whole section devoted to our scholarship work – including a very thorough FAQ and resource tab which may be useful to reference as you go through the process of applying for scholarships, whether from us, your university, or elsewhere.

1. Always write to the question.
   Read the questions carefully and make sure your answers specifically address them. For instance, if a question has two parts (what do you want to do and why) answer both of them. Don’t include irrelevant information (if you mention something you used to want to do, for example, make sure it is clear what connection it has to your present intentions).

2. Be concise.
   By all means, use the word count given to you but make sure every sentence you write actively adds something to your answer. Make your words count.

3. Be specific.
   Offer details about your past experiences and your current plans to help the reviewer understand your situation and your approach to your studies.

4. Be positive.
   If a question asks about a challenging experience, for example, explain what you gained from going through it.

5. Be organised.
   If your answer to a question has more than one part, lay them out logically to make sure your reader can follow you. Include cues if you want to make a transition.

6. Get your documents before hand if possible:
   - FAFSA
   - Photo – no boudoir photos, ladies
   - Transcript
   - Letter of reference
   - Special circumstances: finances, upset to the household, medical expenses, divorce, etc.

7. Proofread.
   It’s tempting to hit ‘submit’ as soon as you have filled everything in, but give your answers one last look to make sure that you didn’t autofill a field incorrectly or include errors that the spellcheck didn’t catch. GET ANOTHER PAIR OF EYES!

Earned an Interview?

1. Look your best.
   Make sure you look professional and collected. Once you are in the room, mind your bearing; don’t slouch or hide your face – look at the interviewer(s) straight-on. Sit comfortably in your chair, relax and smile

2. Listen carefully.
   Don’t spend so much time worrying about what to say and how to say, it that you mis-hear the question.

3. Practice.
   Speak clearly and confidently. The best answers in the world won't help you if the interviewer(s) can't hear them. Project and enunciate.

4. These people want to give you money – they are on your side.

5. If you have been awarded, remember ‘thank you’ notes, graduation photos etc. are important. Your donor does want to know the impact of this scholarship on you.