



This document is intended to explain the various steps in the Community Foundation of Northern Illinois' (CFNIL) scholarship process to students, parents, and counselors. CFNIL's scholarship application opens on Dec. 1, 2018 and closes at 5 p.m. on Feb. 1, 2019. Learn more at [cfnil.org/scholarships](http://cfnil.org/scholarships).

## BEFORE THE APPLICATION

- Step 1**  
Oct. 1 **COMPLETE THE FAFSA**  
Visit [fafsa.ed.gov](http://fafsa.ed.gov) to fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid. You'll need the Student Aid Report to complete the financial aid section of the CFNIL application.
- Step 2**  
Oct. 5 **MAKE A LIST OF ALL YOUR EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES**  
Write down your involvement with sports, clubs, volunteer activities, and work. Make sure to note when you were involved, if you had a leadership position, and how many hours you spent at each.
- Step 3**  
Oct. 12 **COLLECT YOUR ACADEMIC INFORMATION**  
For high school seniors, track down your second semester report card from your junior year. College students will use your most recent report card or transcript.
- Step 4**  
Oct. 19 **READ ABOUT CFNIL'S SCHOLARSHIP OPPORTUNITIES**  
Go to [cfnil.org/scholarships](http://cfnil.org/scholarships) and find opportunities that match your background, academics, and goals. CFNIL has 89 scholarships, each created by donors who established the scholarship's criteria and the endowment that sustains it.
- Step 5**  
Oct. 26 **LEARN ABOUT OTHER LOCAL SCHOLARSHIP OPPORTUNITIES**  
Visit [rockfordpubliclibrary.org/young-adult-zone/scholarship-search](http://rockfordpubliclibrary.org/young-adult-zone/scholarship-search) to find a list of all scholarship opportunities for local students.
- Step 6**  
Nov. 2 **WRITE A PERSONAL STATEMENT**  
Write a paragraph explaining your future educational and career goals and why you want to pursue them.
- Step 7**  
Nov. 9 **LOOK AT ESSAY PROMPTS**  
Each scholarship has its own essay prompt. If you feel like you're a good candidate for a specific scholarship, we recommend working on the essay as early as possible. All essay questions can be found on the individual scholarship pages on [cfnil.org/scholarships](http://cfnil.org/scholarships).
- Step 8**  
Nov. 16 **START THINKING ABOUT REFERENCES**  
You'll need at least two references from adults who are familiar with you as a student, employee, or member of an organization to apply for CFNIL scholarships. Some scholarships require a specific reference, like a coach or music teacher.
- Step 9**  
Nov. 23 **CREATE ACCOUNT ON CFNIL'S SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATION PORTAL**  
Visit [cfnil.spectrumportal.net](http://cfnil.spectrumportal.net) to create a login. You can register at any time.

## DURING THE APPLICATION

- Step 1**  
Dec. 1 **APPLICATION OPENS**  
Start working on the “Contact Information” and “College Plans & Educational Background” sections of the applicant profile and familiarize yourself with the application portal.
- Step 2**  
Dec. 4 **ATTEND THE COMMUNITY SCHOLARSHIP FAIR -- 5:00 - 7:00 p.m.**  
Meet with representatives from many local scholarship providers and learn about their application requirements. A CFNIL representative will present a detailed walkthrough of the application.
- Step 3**  
Dec. 7 **COMPLETE THE “PERSONAL HISTORY” SECTION OF THE APPLICANT PROFILE**  
Just the basics—write your personal statement about your future educational and career goals and list your extracurricular activities, work history, and any honors or awards you have received.
- Step 4**  
Dec. 14 **COMPLETE THE FINANCIAL INFORMATION AND MATCHING QUESTION SECTIONS**  
If you want to apply for scholarships with a financial need component, you’ll need to provide a copy of your Student Aid Report. The matching question section narrows down the number of scholarships for which you fit all the criteria.
- Step 5**  
Dec. 28 **COMPLETE THE REFERENCE SECTION OF THE APPLICANT PROFILE**  
Provide the contact information for your references. They will receive an email prompt to complete the reference section after you’ve selected the individual scholarship(s) for which you would like to apply.
- Step 6**  
Jan. 4 **SELECT YOUR SCHOLARSHIPS**  
The Web Portal will automatically match you with every scholarship for which you qualify, but you get to select the scholarship(s) to which you would like to submit an application. The Web Portal automatically copies your information from your applicant profile into a new application for each scholarship.
- Step 7**  
Jan. 11 **WORK ON ESSAYS FOR EACH SCHOLARSHIP THAT YOU’VE SELECTED**  
Write an essay that speaks to the criteria and purpose of each scholarship that you’ve selected. Have a trusted reader edit your essays.
- Step 8**  
Jan. 24 **SUBMIT YOUR APPLICATIONS**  
After reviewing everything on your application(s) for completion and accuracy, it is time to submit.
- Step 9**  
Feb. 1 **APPLICATION DEADLINE**  
You must submit your application by 5 p.m. on Thursday, February 1. No late applications will be accepted.
- Step 10**  
Feb. 2 - 18 **CONFIRM WITH YOUR REFERENCES**  
Follow up with your references to make sure they have received the email prompt to complete your recommendation. The deadline for references is 8:00 a.m. on February 19.

## AFTER THE APPLICATION

- Step 1**  
Feb. 20 **STAFF SCREENS THE APPLICATION**  
CFNIL staff members screen each application for completion and accuracy.
- Step 2**  
March & April **SCHOLARSHIP COMMITTEES & TRUSTEES GO TO WORK**  
Nearly 100 volunteer committee members will read and score the applications in a blind review process. The committees meet in late March to recommend recipients. CFNIL’s Trustees ultimately vote on the committees’ recommendations.
- Step 3**  
Apr. 26 **RECIPIENTS ARE NOTIFIED BY LETTER**  
CFNIL will send out letters to all students who have received scholarships.
- Step 4**  
May 1 **APPLICANT STATUSES ARE POSTED ON THE PORTAL**  
CFNIL will update the Web Portal notifying all students of the status of their application(s).
- Step 5**  
May 31 **SCHOLARSHIP ACCEPTANCE FORMS ARE DUE**  
Use this form to confirm your attendance at the school indicated in your scholarship application.
- Step 6**  
mid-June **SCHOLARSHIP AWARD NIGHT**  
CFNIL will gather donors, recipients, and CFNIL volunteers for a scholarship celebration.
- Step 7**  
July 1 **CHECK LETTERS ARE SENT TO COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES**  
CFNIL will mail the scholarship check directly to your college or university.