SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATION – HELPFUL TIPS

You have the opportunity to apply for scholarships with the Heart of Illinois Community Foundation. We'd love to see you complete and submit an application to be considered for the scholarship opportunities that are a match to you. To help you be prepared and successful, here are a few things to note as you get started:

1. **Gather needed materials**. In the months before the process opens, take time to complete and gather files like your essay(s), letters of recommendation, FAFSA and SAI information, SAT/ACT scores and documentation, list of extracurricular activities, employment information, community service completed, etc. Make sure any files you will upload are in .doc or .pdf format (no screenshots or image files). *See below for guidelines on some of the items listed here.*

2. **Start early and be thorough.** Be sure to complete all of the required fields in the application form and any additional questions that may be a part of this application. Start early and don't rush – take your time to make sure your information is clear and complete. Have conversations ahead of time with parents and family members about current employers and any potential organization affiliations they may have (as there are opportunities affiliated with some of these positions or groups) – pay attention to where you are able to note these on your application. The scholarship application portal is open from **January 1 – March 1** (11:59 PM). Use your time wisely. Don't wait until days before the portal closes to start your application – choosing to do so will increase the likelihood you won't submit on time.

3. **Complete your essay(s) ahead of time.** There is a personal essay that is a part of the application which every applicant will complete (questions are listed below). This is your chance to shine and distinguish yourself from other applicants – it is important to not only thoroughly respond to the questions, but pay attention to detail. This response is one of the most important pieces of your application, as it is here that you are able to stand out from your peers by being authentic, specific, and thorough. Some scholarships you may match with will require additional essay responses (see attached for the list). Follow the instructions as related to that scholarship opportunity. Please complete your essay in a Word document and save it - then you may upload it into the field provided within the application. Please include your first initial and last name in the file name when saving along with which essay it is – for example: *BSmith-Personal-Essay.doc*

Be sure to also include your name *within* the document you upload. For your personal essay, please complete it in essay format (including an introductory and conclusion paragraph) and commit at least one paragraph each in response to the following:

- What personal characteristics or experiences qualify you to receive a scholarship? *(What do you think sets you apart from other applicants?)*
- Share 2-3 of your learning/educational *goals (How do you want to grow as a learner?)* Explain how you hope to achieve them by continuing your education (via college/university or trade program).
- Share two of your career goals and/or long-term life goals. What steps will you take to achieve them?

4. **Ask early for your Letters of Recommendation.** At minimum, you will need to upload **two** required Letters of Recommendation for your application (some scholarship opportunities you may match with will require an additional letter as specified – see attached for the list). You want to be sure to carefully consider who you ask, and you should provide the person writing a letter for you with information about the scholarship (as available) you are applying for and any qualities or experiences you have that they should highlight. These should be professional letters, on letterhead (where available), contain the person's contact information, and be signed or clearly noted who has written the letter (and who it is for). This is another opportunity for you to shine – pay attention to criteria and to details. *Please address them to "Heart of Illinois Community Foundation".*

- **Letter of Recommendation #1** – This letter should be from a current **TEACHER** at your high school.
- **Letter of Recommendation #2** – This letter should be from a **Community Member** (employer or supervisor, high school counselor, organization leader or advisor, clergy, etc.). This person should NOT be related to you (not a family member).

ADDITIONAL REQUIRED ITEMS – BY SCHOLARSHIP OPPORTUNITY

IF YOU ARE ELIGIBLE FOR ONE OF THE FOLLOWING SCHOLARSHIP OPPORTUNITIES, YOU MAY BE ASKED TO COMPLETE ADDITIONAL ITEMS. THIS CAN INCLUDE A SEPARATE ESSAY IN RESPONSE TO A SPECIFIED QUESTION, AN ADDITIONAL LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION WITH GUIDELINES NOTED, OR OTHER VERIFICATION ITEM (FORM, LETTER, ETC.). PLEASE FOLLOW INSTRUCTIONS TO UPLOAD IT INTO THE DESIGNATED FIELD WITHIN YOUR ONLINE APPLICATION. THE FOLLOWING ARE SCHOLARSHIP OPPORTUNITIES THAT REQUIRE ADDITIONAL ITEMS.

Please Note: *New Scholarships are in development – this list will be updated prior to the portal opening in January and shared with our resources at heartofillinois.org/scholarship.* ***QUESTIONS?*** *Contact Andrea Gerhard at 217-429-3000 OR agerhard@heartofillinois.org*

AFSCME Local 612 Scholarship

Submit a letter of verification (certifying family connection/membership in the Union).

Submit an additional 300-word essay in response to the following: *"Describe how the Union has impacted you and your family."*

Lynn D. Augustine Memorial Scholarship – *Macon County Only*

Submit an additional 100-word Personal Statement *(a personal statement shares details about your experiences, motivations, skills, and values, used to explain why you are a good fit for this opportunity)*.

Matthew and Natalie Beck Kindness Matters Scholarship – *St. Teresa High School Only*

Submit an additional essay in response to the following: *"Please describe what kindness means to you & how you have demonstrated kindness in your community and beyond."*

Student must demonstrate kindness in their community by having community service hours exceeding that required for graduation. *(More than 40 hours of service per St. Teresa High School requirements.)*

Anita Buckner Memorial Scholarship – *Students previously affiliated with Boys & Girls Club of Decatur*

Submit an additional 250-400 word essay in response to the following: *"Describe your volunteer activities and the impact they have had on your life."*\

Camfield Family Scholarship – *Argenta-Oreana High School Only*

Candidate must demonstrate a value of hard work, respect, and responsibility as evidenced through letters of recommendation (one teacher, one community member).

Candidate must complete the required essay in response to the following: *"Explain how hard work, respect, and responsibility have influenced you and the person you are becoming. Consider giving an example of someone in your life who has shown these qualities, and how you strive to show hard work, respect, and responsibility currently and in your adult life."*

Roberta K. Gorden Scholarship

Submit an additional 300-word essay in response to the following: *"Describe the importance and value of work and your individual work experience."*

L. Mark Hanover Memorial Scholarship

Submit an additional 250-400 word essay: *"Describe your long-term goals and your reasons for selecting the particular (science) major you have chosen."*

Submit a letter of recommendation from one of your Science teachers at your school, demonstrating how you are an outstanding science student. (This is in addition to the required letter of recommendation from a teacher as outlined in the application.)

Hickory Point Bank Educational Opportunity Scholarship – *Macon County Only*

Submit an additional 500-word essay in response to the following: *"Explain how receiving this scholarship would enable you to achieve your educational goals and contribute positively to your community."*

Demonstrate your desire for learning through a letter of recommendation from a current teacher. (This is in addition to the required letter of recommendation from a teacher, which should also reflect your desire for learning.)

Moultrie County Impact Giving Circle Scholarship – *Moultrie County Only*
Student must complete an additional essay in response to the following: *"What are your beliefs about the value of community and the power of volunteering/service? Through your volunteer/service experiences*, how have you added value to your community?" *Please include examples from your own experience.*

Curtis R. and Georgia Ann Pelz Scholarship – *Lowpoint Washburn High School Only*
Submit an additional 250-400 word essay: *"Describe your long-term goals and your reasons for selecting the particular major you have chosen."*

John Glenn Snow Musical Memorial Scholarship – *Meridian High School Only*
Applicant should demonstrate a love of music, as evidenced through a letter of recommendation and an additional short essay in response to the following: *"Describe how music has impacted your life."*

Michael E. Shampine Memorial Scholarship
Applicant should include letter of verification/declaration of eligibility of self/parent/guardian/spouse union membership through the AFL-CIO.

Submit a 300-500 word essay in response to the following: *"Discuss the positive effects of unionism on your life."* You may also be asked to complete an interview.

Norman Lee Stewart Education Scholarship – *MacArthur High School Only*
Submit an additional 500-word essay in response to the following: *"Describe a teacher, book, work of art, or piece of music and how that has influenced or changed your life."*

Susan and Lloyd Swanson Memorial Scholarship
Applicant should include verification of parent/guardian membership in the Decatur Education Association (DEA) or Police Benevolent and Protective Association Unit 39.

Robert G. and Mildred R. Turner Memorial Scholarship
Submit an additional 500-word essay in response to the following: *"Reflect and share about what leadership and citizenship means to you. Provide 1-2 examples of how you have invested in the lives of others and how it has impacted you as a result."*

Demonstrate your consideration as an outstanding student, high qualities of leadership, citizenship, and interest in fellow human beings as evidenced in the two required letters of recommendation you will provide (one from a teacher at your school, the other from a community member or school counselor).

Robin Vogel Memorial Scholarship – *Macon County Only*
Submit a 300-word essay in response to the following: *"Describe an occasion in your life when you made a decision you later regretted. How did this experience change you? What did you learn?"*

Wiesemann Family Scholarship
Demonstrate your desire for learning through a letter of recommendation from a current teacher. (This is in addition to the already required letter of recommendation from a teacher, which should also reflect your desire for learning.)

YMCA David Petrowsky Soccer Scholarship – *Decatur Family YMCA Soccer Affiliation*
Submit the required response to the following questions (double-spaced paragraph format using maximum of 500 words: *"How has playing in the Decatur Family YMCA Soccer program helped you develop the character values of caring, honesty, respect, and responsibility? How have you modeled these values in your high school career? How have you helped the Decatur Family YMCA Soccer Program?"*

Young Leaders in Action Wiesemann Family Scholarship – *Young Leaders in Action Members Only*
Submit the required 500-word essay in response to the following: *"Describe how your leadership and service has made a positive difference in your school, in your community, in your family, and/or on the job, and how it will continue to make a difference in college and beyond."*

Demonstrate your *desire for learning* through an additional letter of recommendation from a teacher. (This is in addition to the required letter of recommendation from a teacher as outlined in the application.)

QUESTIONS?

Contact Andrea Gerhard
Director of Scholarships & Grants
217.429.3000
agerhard@heartofillinois.org

LEARN MORE AT *HEARTOFILLINOIS.ORG/SCHOLARSHIP*

SCHOLARSHIP PORTAL OPEN
JANUARY 1, 2027 TO MARCH 1, 2027