



# **Scholarship Committee Handbook**

Revised November 2024

Welcome to The Community Foundation of Western North Carolina's scholarship programs!

CFWNC currently administers approximately 50 scholarship programs, which collectively award more than 100 scholarships each year and total around \$500,000 annually. We rely heavily on our volunteer advisory committee members to review applications thoroughly and thoughtfully.

While awards are primarily available to students within the eighteen westernmost counties of North Carolina, a few programs reach beyond our region as well. Some scholarships are restricted to schools within the UNC consolidated system or to a specific institution, but most allow recipients to attend any accredited non-profit higher education institution within the United States.

CFWNC conducts outreach to high school counselors in our region, who then share information about our scholarships with their students. To apply for a scholarship, students must create an account in SmarterSelect, our scholarship software, and complete an online application. CFWNC staff screens student applications for eligibility and completeness, and then assists scholarship committee members with their review of applications.

Committees throughout the region, which may include school officials, community volunteers, donor advisors, and CFWNC Board members, select and recommend scholarship recipients to CFWNC. Each committee has at least three members, and award recommendations are based on the majority support of committee members.

Committee members will review and rank scholarship applications online through SmarterSelect to ensure that all students receive consistent and objective evaluations. Our Scholarship Directory, available on our website, lists all scholarships that we currently offer and provides information regarding the number and amount of awards, eligibility, and criteria.

This handbook reflects our long experience with administering scholarship programs. We have implemented procedures that work well administratively, meet IRS requirements, fulfill the intent of our donors, and meet the needs of our students. We have also incorporated ideas learned from other community foundations and organizations making scholarship awards, and from previous scholarship advisory committees.

Please reach out to us if you have ideas to improve our scholarship policies and procedures. Your involvement keeps us in touch with student needs in your community. As a scholarship advisory committee member, your time and commitment to this process are crucial and much appreciated.

Thank you for joining CFWNC in providing access to higher education for Western North Carolina students!

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## **I. Introduction**

### **A. CFWNC Scholarship Program Information**

The Community Foundation of Western North Carolina, a public charity established in 1978, enables generous people to make gifts to benefit our 18-county region, a region that includes the Qualla Boundary. The many individual funds and endowments established at CFWNC provide grants to nonprofit organizations working to address community needs and scholarships to assist students with the significant costs of higher education. Gifts to CFWNC are tax deductible.

In 1991, CFWNC established its first endowed scholarship and is pleased to make scholarship assistance available to students throughout Western North Carolina.

Scholarships are available to students located in one of the following eighteen western North Carolina counties: Avery, Buncombe, Burke, Cherokee, Clay, Graham, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Swain, Transylvania, Yancey and the Qualla Boundary. CFWNC administers a variety of scholarship funds that may require students to attend a specific high school, pursue a particular field of study, attend a specific institution or live in a particular county or region. A few scholarships are offered to students outside CFWNC's 18-county region.

Several scholarship programs also allow high school seniors attending either campus of the North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics or the UNC School of the Arts to apply, as long as their primary residence is in Western North Carolina. Home-schooled students whose home schools are registered with the North Carolina Division for Non-Public Education are also eligible to compete for some of our scholarship programs. Each scholarship will list its eligibility requirements on the scholarship directory on our website. Scholarships are awarded without regard to race, creed, sex, sexual orientation, ethnic background or handicap, unless a specific restriction or preference is clearly stated.

Generally, awards are made to students who will attend an accredited nonprofit college, university, community college or vocational school within the U.S. on a full-time basis in the fall following the award.

Applications for scholarship programs administered by CFWNC are available through our website ([cfwnc.org](http://cfwnc.org)).

B. Our 18-County Region of Western North Carolina

**18 counties served with major cities / towns**

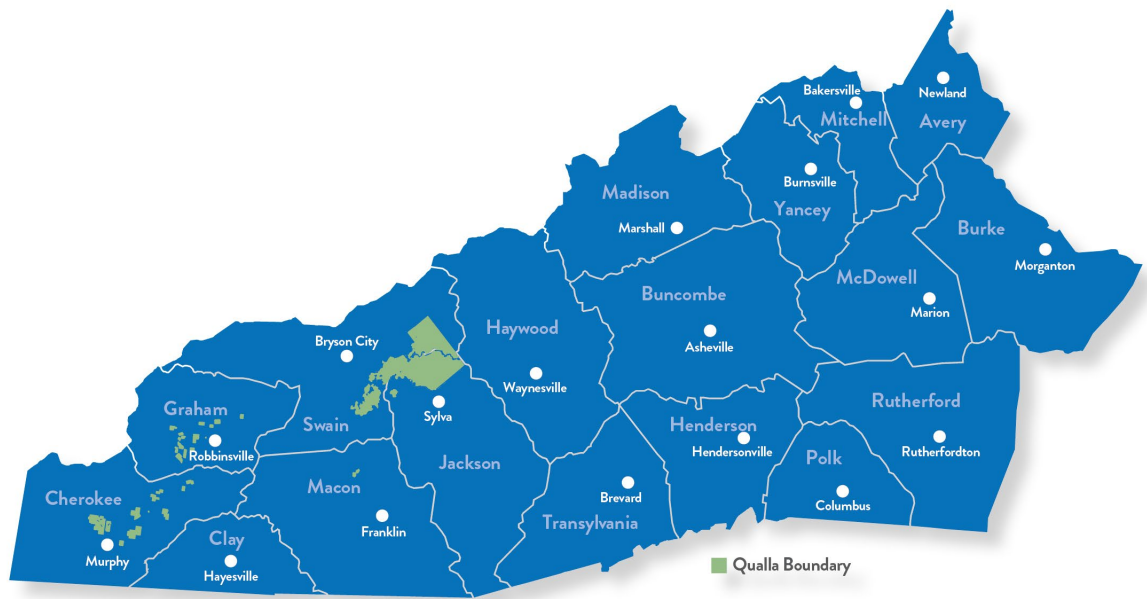
<b>AVERY</b>	<b>BUNCOMBE</b>	<b>BURKE</b>	<b>CHEROKEE</b>	<b>CLAY</b>
Banner Elk	Alexander	Connelly Springs	Andrews	Brasstown
Cranberry	Arden	Drexel	Culberson	Hayesville
Crossnore	Asheville	Glen Alpine	Marble	Warne
Elk Park	Barnardsville	Hildebran	Murphy	
Linville	Black Mountain	Icard	Topton	
Minneapolis	Candler	Jonas Ridge	Unaka	
Montezuma	Enka	Linville Falls		
Pineola	Fairview	Morganton		
Plumtree	Leicester	Rutherford College		
	Montreat	Valdese		
	Ridgecrest			
	Skyland			
	Swannanoa			
	Weaverville			

<b>GRAHAM</b>	<b>HAYWOOD</b>	<b>HENDERSON</b>	<b>JACKSON</b>	<b>MACON</b>
Fontana Dam	Canton	Balfour	Balsama	Aquone
Robbinsville	Clyde	Bat Cave	Cashiers	Franklin
Tapoco	Hazelwood	Dana	Cullowhee	Highlands
	Lake Junaluska	East Flat Rock	Dillsboro	Otto
	Maggie Valley	Edneyville	Glenville	Scaly Mountain
	Waynesville	Etowah	Sylva	
		Flat Rock	Tuckasegee	
		Fletcher	Webster	
		Gerton	Whittier	
		Hendersonville		
		Horseshoe		
		Mountain Home		
		Naples		
		Tuxedo		
		Zirconia		

<b>MADISON</b>	<b>McDOWELL</b>	<b>MITCHELL</b>	<b>POLK</b>	<b>RUTHERFORD</b>
Hot Springs	Glenwood	Bakersville	Columbus	Bostic
Mars Hill	Marion	Little Switzerland	Lynn	Caroleen
Marshall	Nebo	Penland	Mill Spring	Chimney Rock
	Old Fort	Spruce Pine	Saluda	Cliffside
			Tryon	Ellenboro
				Forest City
				Harris
				Henrietta
				Lake Lure
				Rutherfordton
				Spindale
				Union Mills

**18 counties served with major cities / towns  
- continued -**

SWAIN	TRANSYLVANIA	YANCEY
Almond	Balsam Grove	Burnsville
Bryson City	Brevard	Green Mountain
Cherokee	Cedar Mountain	Micaville
	Lake Toxaway	
	Penrose	
	Pisgah Forest	
	Rosman	
	Sapphire	



**C. Scholarship Policies**

Detailed information regarding CFWNC's scholarship policies (including Administration, Fund Types, General Payment Guidelines, Committees, Evaluation and Awards, Guidelines and Forms) is contained in the Scholarship Policies Manual, which is available upon request from the Foundation.

## **II. The Role of a Scholarship Advisory Committee Member**

Committee members have an important role in ensuring that the original intent of the scholarship fund is followed. We value you as a steward of the fund and its purpose. As such, you have a responsibility to participate actively in the scholarship selection process.

Since most Scholarship Advisory Committees review applications or meet only once or twice each year, your participation is critical. Some committees' members work independently and submit their reviews to the Foundation online. Others meet in person or virtually. In either case, we will make materials available to you in a timely fashion. You will also be asked to complete a Conflict of Interest disclosure form as a part of our required efforts to ensure fairness in the scholarship process.

As a Scholarship Advisory Committee member, we ask that you make CFWNC aware of any concerns or questions about the scholarship process that may arise in your community.

Scholarship Advisory Committee members serve one-year terms. At the discretion of CFWNC, members may be asked to return to the same committee in subsequent years or to rotate onto a different committee (periodic membership changes help keep committees energized and encourage broad community participation). Scholarship Advisory Committee members may request rotation to another committee; if this appeals to you, please ask about other opportunities. We invite and appreciate your suggestions of others to serve on your or other scholarship advisory committees.

### **III. Diversity, Equity and Inclusion**

Scholarship Advisory Committees make decisions and recommendations about award recipients in accordance with terms set forth in the relevant fund agreement and specific guidelines prepared to ensure that each scholarship recipient is selected on a fair and objective basis. Scholarships should be awarded without regard to race, creed, sex, gender, sexual orientation, ethnic background or disability, unless a specific restriction or preference is clearly stated in the Fund Agreement.

CFWNC prioritizes diversity, equity and inclusion, and we promote fairness for all people from all backgrounds. Scholarship Advisory Committee members should treat all applicants with respect and approach this work without any prejudice toward any scholarship candidate, regardless of personal traits or characteristics other than those set for in the relevant scholarship guidelines.

In reviewing applications and interviewing students, Scholarship Advisory Committee members should consider their possible biases and seek to make scholarship recommendations that do not reflect those biases. When interviewing applicants, Scholarship Advisory Committee members should avoid making assumptions based on an individual's race, gender, sex, sexual orientation or disability in interview questions and comments.

### **IV. Applications and Evaluation**

#### **A. Application Process**

The majority of our programs assist graduating public high school seniors. Applications are available online beginning in November. Guidance counselors at participating schools let their students know applications are available. In general, our donors have entrusted us to identify and assist students with strong academic performance and aptitude, good moral character, and a history of community/school involvement. Most CFWNC scholarship programs also require evidence of financial need.

#### **B. Determining Financial Need**

Because so many factors influence an applicant's financial need, there is no universally-applied assessment tool. The CFWNC application used for most high school programs asks students to provide a snapshot of their parents' and their own financial resources, including information about family size, income and cash available. Applicants may also be asked to provide us with a copy of their FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) Submission Summary. The Submission Summary includes an SAI (Student Aid Index) amount that, based on federal methodology, the student and his/her family are expected to contribute towards the cost of college. In addition to the snapshot and SAR, we invite students to include a "Supplementary Financial Statement" to bring to our attention any circumstances not evident on the other forms



(some examples are unusual medical expenses or additional family members currently attending or recently completing college). When considering financial need, it is helpful to begin by comparing the resources and SAIs of students competing for the same award. Often, by comparing family size and income for students in the same applicant pool, a pattern of need emerges. For example, at least on the surface, a family of 4 with a \$30,000 income exhibits a higher need than a family of 4 with a \$50,000 income. If, however, the latter family has, for instance, a disabled parent and a sibling already in college, then fewer resources would be available for the rising college freshman. We ask that you use your best judgment to determine whether an applicant will be able to attend college without financial assistance. While the SAI numbers are a very useful tool, they do not always reflect unusual circumstances or demands on family resources that are described in the Supplementary Financial Statements submitted by some students. Please consider both when evaluating need.

While we are pleased that many generous donors have chosen to establish scholarship funds here at CFWNC, we do not have adequate funds to assist all students who need aid. It is important, therefore, that when applicants are qualified in all criteria, preference should be given to those applicants with significant financial need *unless financial need is explicitly excluded from the criteria*.

#### C. Assessing Community/School Involvement

Applications for CFWNC scholarship programs often ask applicants to provide information about their school and community activities such as clubs, athletics, academic teams, volunteer work or paid work. Students who find ways to be involved in a variety of activities demonstrate their well-roundedness and their commitment to building and strengthening their communities. Some committee members might assess involvement by the number of hours devoted to all activities; others look more closely at the variety of activities or depth of involvement in each. Application reviewers should remember that a student who participates heavily in only three or four activities is not necessarily less involved than one who has a long list of smaller time and energy contributions - quantity is not the issue, so much as the spirit of involvement. Many students also have jobs; time spent working will affect their ability to serve in the community. Sometimes those jobs are required to help support the family or to cover the student's personal expenses. Students should not be penalized for work obligations.

Another thing to consider is whether a candidate lives in an urban or rural area. Students who ride a bus 15 miles to school may not have access to transportation required for after-school activities, while students who live in other locations may be able to walk or ride a city bus. Students from smaller, more rural communities - even if they do have transportation - may simply have fewer opportunities for involvement. Again, we hope our committee members will consider a student's whole picture in evaluating whether that student has made an effort to be involved. Members of committees that interview candidates may have the opportunity to ask questions about the availability of school and community activities to help gauge the student's level of effort to be involved.

#### D. Interviewing Candidates

Some committees interview candidates as part of the selection process. Depending on the number of applicants, it may be possible to interview all candidates or a short-list of finalists. CFWNC staff will manage interview schedules and assist the advisory committee in developing an interview process aligned with the relevant scholarship fund's criteria. Generally, interviews last 10-20 minutes, and they work best when designed as a discussion rather than an evaluation. The best interview questions invite explanation beyond a simple “yes” or “no.” CFWNC staff will assist the committee by providing a list of potential questions and ensuring the timely commencement and ending of the interview.

Unless the scholarship criteria specifically require in-state public school attendance as a requirement, award decisions should not be influenced by the student's college choice. For some students, the smaller size of a private college may be a more appropriate environment to foster success than a less expensive but much larger school. Student success is the goal of our scholarship programs, and committee members should not substitute their preferences for those of the applicants.

Please be sensitive in choosing and wording questions and avoid asking about personal issues not affecting award eligibility. If a delicate subject warrants further scrutiny, questions should be crafted in a gentle and non-threatening manner. Whenever possible, asking a question that will prompt the student to volunteer information is preferred.

#### E. Publicizing Awards

After CFWNC takes action on the Scholarship Advisory Committee's award recommendations, CFWNC staff will notify applicants and their schools of the selections and prepare and distribute press releases to regional newspapers. If you would like to coordinate a local announcement of your awards, please contact us first to ensure that CFWNC has approved the committee's recommendations and to coordinate your local publicity efforts with our Communications Director. Please send copies of all coverage to the CFWNC for our records.

#### F. Other Resources

We do not currently have any unrestricted scholarship funds to help students who do not qualify for established CFWNC scholarship programs. When students contact us to request assistance other than that available through our established programs, we refer them to other resources to help them in their search for financial aid.

## **V. Timetable for Annual Scholarship Process**

The below schedule applies to the majority of our scholarship programs. This is a guide, and actual timelines may vary. CFWNC staff will communicate with scholarship committee members regarding their responsibilities throughout the process.

### November

CFWNC makes scholarship applications available to students and conducts outreach to high school counselors for the upcoming year.

### December

CFWNC conducts outreach to scholarship committee members to confirm participation for the upcoming year.

### January

CFWNC reviews scholarship applications for eligibility and completeness (deadlines for most scholarship programs are in late January).

### January/February

CFWNC makes scholarship applications available to school committees for review (if required by scholarship program).

### February/March/April

CFWNC makes scholarship applications available to scholarship committee members for review (dates vary by scholarship program).

### March/April

If required by scholarship program, committees conduct interviews to select recipients (dates vary by committee).

### March/April/May

Scholarship committee review is conducted and finalized (dates vary by scholarship program). As recipients are selected, CFWNC notifies recipients, non-recipients, and high school counselors.

### May

Scholarship committee recommendations are presented to the CFWNC Board.

### May/June

Scholarship recipients submit required documents to CFWNC for award acceptance and indicate institutions they will attend.

### July

CFWNC processes scholarship payments to institutions for student accounts.