2020 NFB Scholarship Program Information and

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

This is a competition offering merit-based scholarships ranging in amounts from $3,000 to $12,000, plus other prizes, to blind residents of the United States and Puerto Rico who will attend college during the fall semester of 2020. The rules of eligibility are posted on our home page at www.nfb.org/scholarships. Last year's scholarship program of the National Federation of the Blind received over 600 applications from which our NFB Scholarship Committee chose thirty finalists—only thirty out of all who applied. Many students apply more than one year before they win. All thirty scholarships are awarded based on academic excellence, community service, and leadership. If your question is not answered below, please contact our Scholarship office by email: scholarships@nfb.org, or telephone: (410) 659-9314, extension 2415.

APPLICATION DEADLINE is March 31, 2020 (midnight, EST):

The 2020 NFB Scholarship Program Application Form and all other required documentation must be submitted online or postmarked by the deadline, and applicants must have requested AND accomplished an interview with their NFB affiliate president or his/her designee. The interview may take place after March 31 ONLY with the consent of the affiliate president.

A COMPLETED APPLICATION CONSISTS OF THE FOLLOWING:

• The 2020 NFB Scholarship Program Application Form (online or print),

• The documents listed on the Submissions Checklist (an essay; at least one letter of recommendation; transcript(s); proof of legal blindness; and for high school seniors only—ACT or SAT reports, if available).

• One interview. Students will request and complete one interview by the student's NFB affiliate president (home state or school state) by the deadline; one exception—the affiliate president may choose to schedule an interview later than March 31.

Note: NFB state affiliates often have their own statewide scholarship program with similar application requirements but a different deadline.

ACCEPTED FILE FORMATS: DOC, DOCX, RTF, and PDF. (We do not accept faxes.)

TIPS FOR COMPLETING THE ONLINE APPLICATION FORM:

Open the online Application Form, which is linked to the Scholarship Program's home page (www.nfb.org/scholarships). Create a simple password. Complete the required three pages of the online application form:

Page 1 - Provide basic information

Page 2 - Upload required documents

Page 3 - "Save" and/or "Submit" the application

Until the deadline, by entering your email address and password, you may change, delete, or replace the answers in the application and delete or replace the uploaded documents. Each time you make a change to your application, remember to go to page 3 and "Save" it. Also, please note that until you hit the "Submit" button on page 3, your application will not be officially submitted in our Scholarship Program database.

Students who complete all of the requirements are much more likely to do well. The application period for the NFB Scholarship Program lasts for five months. If you are among those who send their application and required documents in the last two weeks before the deadline, be aware it may be physically impossible to answer this question: “Have you received all of my documents?”

CONFIRMATION EMAIL: After you submit your application, a confirmation email is automatically sent to your inbox. It will contain a copy of your completed application with attached copies of any documents that you've uploaded. We strongly suggest that you verify that all of your uploaded files are intact. Some large files last year had the name without the contents. Documents that are very large may have problems and then must be resent via attachment to an email or in print. Remember, until the deadline of March 31, you may return to your online form to make additions and/or changes or to check that all of your documents are in order in our database.

NFB SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM CALENDAR:

November 2019:

The NFB Scholarship Program for 2020 commences in the first week of November 2019. For five months, students may apply online and, upon request, in print.

March 31, 2020: The NFB Scholarship Program deadline (midnight, EST).

May 15, 2020, or sooner: After all thirty finalists are personally notified by a member of the Scholarship Committee, the complete list of finalists for 2020 is posted on www.nfb.org/scholarships. If you are not called and your name is not on this list by May 15, you did not win in this competition year.

First week in July 2020 With the financial assistance of the NFB, all thirty finalists will attend the six-day Annual Convention of the National Federation of the Blind in Houston Texas. The finalists talk with blind mentors employed in professional fields of all kinds and explore this largest-in-the-world yearly convention of blind persons. The announcement of individual scholarship awards is made at the convention’s evening banquet on the last day. The thirty finalists depart the hotel the day after the banquet.

September 2020: Scholarship checks are sent directly to the finalists for their fall semester.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:

1. The NFB has two award programs with similar names. Students cannot win both scholarships in the same year. What is the difference between the $12,000 Kenneth Jernigan Scholarship and the NFB Kenneth Jernigan Convention Scholarship Fund?

• The $12,000 Kenneth Jernigan Scholarship is funded by the American Action Fund for Blind Children and Adults (AAF) in memory of the man who changed perceptions regarding the capabilities of the blind in this country and the world. It is the most prestigious scholarship of the thirty national-level awards in the NFB Scholarship Program. (To read or hear Dr. Jernigan's thought-provoking essays, go to www.nfb.org and follow the links from Topic Index to Banquet Speeches to Kenneth Jernigan.)

• The NFB's Kenneth Jernigan Convention Scholarship Fund assists NFB members who need some financial assistance to attend their first national convention. See the January issue of the Braille Monitor magazine for details.

2. Do I have to be an NFB member to be eligible for an NFB college scholarship? Do nonmembers ever win?

You do not need to be an NFB member. Some of our finalists, including some who have won the $12,000 Kenneth Jernigan Scholarship, had never heard of the National Federation of the Blind before they discovered the NFB's college scholarship program designed specifically to help blind and/or legally blind residents of the United States and Puerto Rico.

3. What is meant by "legally blind" and "blind?"

The NFB considers these two words as interchangeable. Among legally blind persons only 20 percent are totally blind; the other 80 percent have some degree of vision. The United States Code's definition of blindness is the NFB's definition for our scholarship program. This federal definition is also required for most disability services and for special consideration from the IRS, Social Security, and other federal, state, and private organizations. The federal definition [10] of "blindness" in the Supplemental Security Income program under Title XVI of the Social Security Act currently states:

(2) "An individual shall be considered to be blind for purposes of this title if he has central visual acuity of 20/200 or less in the better eye with the use of a correcting lens. An eye which is accompanied by a limitation in the fields of vision such that the widest diameter of the visual field subtends an angle no greater than 20 degrees shall be considered for purposes of the first sentence of this subsection as having a central visual acuity of 20/200 or less. http://www.ssa.gov/OP\_Home/ssact/title16b/1614.htm

NFB Translation: If you wear your glasses or contacts (or both) and then are measured on an eye chart as seeing 20/200 or less, or if the width of vision for both of your eyes totals an arc of 20 degrees or less, then you are legally blind according to this federal definition.

For example, some blind persons with central vision (“tunnel vision”) read ordinary print books without difficulty, but they cannot see someone walking toward them who is outside of their narrow width of vision. For the NFB's practical philosophy concerning life and blindness, go to "Speeches and Reports."

4. I am legally blind in one eye only. Am I eligible?

You are not eligible.

5. I am visually impaired because I can see some. Am I eligible?

Eligibility requires written certification by a qualified authority which states you are legally blind (See FAQs #3 and #6). Note: If you are not legally blind but you are running into some problems in college because of a visual impairment, we can often help you find workable solutions. Join the National Association of Blind Students (nabl-l) listserv at www.nfbnet.org to ask about their work-arounds as problems come up.

6. Who is a “qualified authority" who can certify that a student is legally blind?

Qualified authorities include a professional in eye care or a medical doctor, a professional in the education or rehabilitation of persons who are legally blind, or the president of an NFB state affiliate. Do not send us actual medical records full of abbreviations that only another doctor can understand. If we cannot tell from the document sent to us whether you are blind in both eyes according to the legal definition, you will not be considered eligible for our scholarships. You may send a copy of an original document which certifies that you are legally blind, or your qualified authority may fill out and use our PDF form, Confirmation of Legal Blindness.

7. Am I eligible if I live outside the USA? Do I need to be a US citizen?

While you do not have to be a US citizen, our national scholarships are restricted to blind persons who live and attend school where we have an affiliate of our organization and who intend to reside in the US after graduation. The National Federation of the Blind has more than 50,000 members in fifty-two affiliates, which includes all fifty states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. If your home is anywhere else, you are not eligible.

8. Am I eligible if I am an American but the college I attend is located outside the United States? What if my college is located in the US, but the course I will attend in the fall takes place in another country?

To be eligible, during the fall semester following the award program, you must be enrolled in an accredited university located in the United States or Puerto Rico. You are still eligible if you attend a program or course this college offers outside the United States.

9. Am I eligible for these scholarships if I am participating in correspondence courses through an online university or working toward a certification?

Is your online university accredited? Students must be attending a full-time, postsecondary course of study in a degree program at an accredited university or attending part-time while working full-time. A certification program for a profession or trade does not qualify as a university degree program. If in doubt, the chairperson’s decisions are final.

10. How much of the convention do I have to attend? What if I have an internship that prevents me from coming the first day or staying on the last day? What if I am ill the week of convention?

The NFB assists finalists to attend the convention as one of the valuable gifts we give each finalist in addition to the monetary award. To be eligible for any of the thirty scholarships, you must attend the entire convention—no exceptions. If an internship or similar obligation comes up, we may be able to help you negotiate time off with your employer or your school. Finalists in the past discovered the benefits they received from attending the largest convention of the blind in America endured well beyond the one-time monetary check.

A past finalist wrote: "The money will, of course, be a huge help and make it possible for me to avoid taking out a student loan this year. Though the money is awesome and truly appreciated, the people I met and the connections I made will be so much more valuable to me long-term. I would have never expected to learn so much in just a few days, to find so many new friends, or feel so motivated and empowered by the ideas I discovered. I'm thankful to all of the members of the scholarship committee for making this possible for not only myself but for all of us in the scholarship class."

Another past finalist wrote: "Part of the scholarship program is matching the winners with mentors. Among my mentors was one of the top civil rights lawyers in the country, a US foreign service officer who had completed five tours overseas, a world-renowned bioethics professor, an intelligence analyst of twenty-seven years for the federal government, and a general counsel of a major corporation. Oh yeah, and they happen to be blind too."

11. Is there any benefit in submitting more than one application?

No. Complete and submit the requirements for one application in order to be considered for all thirty awards.

12. One original essay, written by you personally, with no more than 700 words is required. May I write more than 700 words? What is the topic?

Write 700 words or less. The topic is you. The committee members want to know what sets you apart from other applicants: Who are you? What are your outstanding qualities? How do you handle your blindness? What makes you unique and qualifies you for a scholarship on the national level? Beyond the words, we recommend using Arial 12-point font and having someone proofread your essay before you submit it.

13. Should I send my photograph?

 No. Photographs are irrelevant.

14. Transcripts are required. How far back do you want them? May I send my transcripts to you myself? If applicable, should I send the original or a copy of my ACT and SAT scores, certificates of achievement, or any other proof of my awards and grades?

We accept copies, and we will not return documents we receive. All students must supply a copy of any postsecondary transcripts for current and past colleges. If you have attended less than one year of higher education, provide your high school transcript as well. You or your school or an online transcript service may mail or email a transcript directly to our office, or you may upload a copy to your online application. If available, proof of college entrance exam scores, such as final ACT or SAT scores, should be sent for high school students entering their freshman year of college.

15. At least one letter of recommendation is required. May I send more than one? Who should write the letter(s)? Who sends the letter(s) in?

At least one letter of recommendation (LOR) is required; more letters are permitted. The best letters come from an authoritative source and provide verification of your excellence with examples of your level of scholarship, ability as a leader, community involvement, or fineness of character. The person writing the LOR may send the letter to us (via email or mail to the address in #22 below). If the author grants permission, students may upload a letter to their online application form, or attach it to an email, or send it in print by mail.

16. One affiliate president's interview is required. Before March 31, make your request by phone or email to the NFB affiliate president located in your home state or your college state (your choice). You are required to request AND complete one interview before the deadline, unless the president requests a later date for the interview. For affiliate contact information please go online to our website www.nfb.org. The Presidents List can be found under Fast Facts.

17. Problems connecting with the state president? Did you give your phone number and your email address? Most interviews are by phone. If a state president has not responded to your request for an interview within seven days, email your request to the president with a copy to scholarships@nfb.org and ask our help to make contact. Perhaps your voice was unclear on the phone message. The date on the email will verify that you asked for the interview before the deadline. NFB presidents are volunteers working out of their homes in the evening or on weekends, and presidents may appoint a designee to conduct the interview if they are unavailable. Some affiliate presidents choose to conduct all of their interviews after March 31. Note: If you wait until near the deadline to make your request, we may have a problem assisting you to complete this requirement on time.

18. Let us know how you heard about the NFB Scholarship Program: i.e. the Braille Monitor, a listserv, state president, state library, rehabilitation counselor, TVI or O&M professional, internet search, NFB member, etc.

19. What is the HumanWare/NFB STEM internship?

HumanWare and the National Federation of the Blind share the same values and beliefs that blind people should be able to live the life they want. Science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields offer incredible employment opportunities, and we believe that blind students should be excited and confident to go into these fields for employment. Because of this shared belief, HumanWare and NFB have collaborated to offer the STEM Internship opportunity.

HumanWare is a leading assistive technology company that designs and manufactures products to help blind people to participate equally in society. This intern will be part of HumanWare’s research and development department, starting on or around June 4, 2020, going through August 17 2020. The selected intern will be housed in Longueuil QC Canada during the internship opportunity with a trip to the NFB 2020 convention included in the internship package. The internship package also includes housing, travel expenses, and an internship wage to be determined. If you are interested, please check the box on the NFB scholarship application to indicate this and answer the questions.

The HumanWare internship application must be completed by February 15, 2019.

20. What if I am selected but my state’s agency for the blind (the vocational rehabilitation agency) tries to count my merit-based NFB scholarship as income in order to reduce its funding of my education? Our "merit-based" scholarships may not legally be considered as income. The NFB obtained a ruling from the federal Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) based on Title 29 of the United States Code, which defines labor in the United States. It specifies that any “merit-based scholarships” you win may not be considered as “comparable benefits” when state agencies are deciding how much college funding to give to you. Contact us immediately if your agency is unaware of this ruling, and we will provide documents to help you educate them. We can also provide an advocate if necessary. Federal law states:

 (10) Comparable services and benefits means-

(i) Services and benefits that are-

 (A) Provided or paid for, in whole or in part, by other Federal, State, or local public agencies, by health insurance, or by employee benefits;

 (B) Available to the individual at the time needed to ensure the progress of the individual toward achieving the employment outcome in the individual's individualized plan for employment in accordance with § 361.53; and

 (C) Commensurate to the services that the individual would otherwise receive from the designated State vocational rehabilitation agency.

(ii) For the purposes of this definition, comparable benefits do not include awards and scholarships based on merit.

(Authority: Sections 12(c) and 101(a)(8) of the Act; 29 U.S.C. 709(c) and 721(a)(8)

 21. What other NFB services can benefit me, a blind student?

a. The National Association of Blind Students (NABS), an NFB national division.

b. The NFB Divisions and Committees page to locate blind professionals in many fields—lawyers, teachers, scientists and engineers, journalists, and more. For their online discussion groups, go to www.nfbnet.org.

c. The fifty-two state conventions and the annual national-level convention.

d. The NFB's International Braille and Technology Center for the Blind (IBTC), the world's largest laboratory for accessible technology for blind persons offers free hands-on tours by appointment. Email technology questions to access@nfb.org or call our Tech Answer Line at (410) 659-9314, extension 5.

e. The IBTC "Technology Resource List" at https://nfb.org/technology-resource-list .

f. NFB-NEWSLINE® - free audio to over 300 newspapers and 50 magazines and more.

g. Free long white canes: Complete a free white cane application online, or call (410) 659-9314, extension 2287, and ask for a print copy.

h. NFB's Independence Market sells aids and appliances designed for blind persons. Call (410) 659-9314, extension 4, or go to the Independence Market online.

i. The laws and legislation page – These affect you.

 22. How can I learn more about the NFB?

a. Contact the president of your state affiliate to locate the NFB chapter closest to you. NFB meetings are open to the public, and visitors are welcome.

b. Read our national magazine, Braille Monitor, in large print or Braille, on thumb drive, online (back to 1957), or by free email subscription.

c. Explore www.nfb.org; either “Fast Facts” or “Topic Index” is helpful.

d. Like us on Facebook: facebook.com/nationalfederationoftheblind

e. Follow us on Twitter or Instagram: @NFB\_Voice

f. Watch our videos: YouTube.com/NationsBlind

g. The KNFB Reader Mobile app is available for iPhone and Android.

h. Download the NFB app in the iTunes app store.

If you have further questions about the NFB Scholarship Program, please email the Chairperson of the NFB Scholarship Committee, Cayte Mendez at scholarships@nfb.org or call (410) 659-9314, ext. 2415, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. EST. Our mailing address is: NFB Scholarship Program, National Federation of the Blind at Jernigan Place, 200 East Wells Street, Baltimore, Maryland 21230.