

Information and Instructions for Special Scholarship Candidates

This document answers questions frequently asked by candidates in the competition for awards called “Special Scholarships,” which are offered through the National Merit® Scholarship Program by corporate and business sponsors. Also explained are requirements that candidates must meet in order to receive further consideration for a Special Scholarship.

The National Merit Program is conducted by National Merit Scholarship Corporation (NMSC), a not-for-profit organization that operates without government assistance. The majority of the scholarships NMSC offers are financed by several hundred independent sponsor organizations, which include corporations, company foundations, and professional organizations.

What are Special Scholarships?

Special Scholarships are provided by many of the National Merit Program’s corporate sponsors that also offer Merit Scholarship® awards for students who meet their specified criteria—usually children of employees or residents of communities where the company is located. Only students who qualify as Semifinalists in the National Merit Scholarship Program and then advance to Finalist standing can win Merit Scholarship awards. Because the number of Finalists eligible for a sponsor’s Merit Scholarship awards varies from one annual competition to another, corporate sponsors who want to offer a fixed number of awards each year make arrangements with NMSC to offer Special Scholarships as a supplement to their Merit Scholarship awards. In years when the number of eligible Finalists is smaller than the number of scholarships a sponsor wishes to offer, NMSC designates a pool of high-scoring candidates (who are not Finalists) to compete for Special Scholarships.

Special Scholarships are administered by NMSC in the same manner as a sponsor’s Merit Scholarship awards. Both types of scholarships provided by a corporate sponsor usually are named for the grantor organization. However, the words “National Merit” are not included in a Special Scholarship name; for example, a scholarship may be called “XYZ Company Scholarship” rather than “National Merit XYZ Company Scholarship.”

How were Special Scholarship candidates designated?

Students entered the 2012 competition by taking the 2010 Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT®) and by filing an entry form with the sponsor company. The sponsor forwarded its entry forms to NMSC which used the qualifying test as an initial screen of entry form applicants who met National Merit Program participation requirements. NMSC designated a pool of candidates with the highest PSAT/NMSQT Selection Index scores who now have an opportunity to continue in the competition for the sponsor’s Special Scholarships. These candidates and their high school officials must complete and submit a *Special Scholarship Application* that contains a substantial amount of academic and other information that will be used in the selection process.

What requirements must candidates meet to continue in the competition?

To receive further consideration for a Special Scholarship to be awarded in 2012, you must meet all specified requirements and deadlines or you will be withdrawn from the competition. To continue in the competition for a Special Scholarship, you must:

1. Continue to meet all program entry requirements (published in the 2010 *Official Student Guide to the PSAT/NMSQT*) and the sponsor’s eligibility criteria.
2. Be enrolled full time in the last year of high school and be planning to enroll full time in college in the fall of 2012 **or** be enrolled in the first year of college, if grades 9 through 12 were completed in three years or less.
3. Be a citizen of the United States; or be a U.S. lawful permanent resident (or have applied for permanent residence, the application for which has not been denied) and intend to become a U.S. citizen at the earliest opportunity allowed by law. If you have not yet become a citizen, see box below.
4. Be fully endorsed and recommended for a Special Scholarship by your high school principal (or school official designated by the principal).
5. Have a record of consistently high academic performance in **all** of grades 9 through 12 and in any college course work taken. Your school must provide a complete record of high school courses you have taken, grades earned, and course work you are taking in grade 12. The school should also notify NMSC of any noticeable decline in your academic performance after your scholarship application has been filed. If you are now in college, high academic performance must continue and must be documented by an official transcript of your record (see instructions on page 3 of this document).
6. Submit the completed application to your high school official as soon as possible. The school official will then complete the school’s sections of the application for final submission to NMSC by December 16, 2011.
7. Provide any additional documentation and information that NMSC requests.

If you have not yet become a U.S. citizen, you must submit with your completed *Special Scholarship Application*:

- A letter signed by you explaining your plans for becoming a citizen, including the date on which you expect to be eligible and will apply for U.S. citizenship.

AND

- **If you are a U.S. lawful permanent resident**, a copy of your Permanent Resident Card (Green Card); **or** a copy of your passport including the identity/biographical page and the “I-551” stamp showing that you have been granted lawful permanent resident status.

OR

- **If you have applied for U.S. lawful permanent residence**, a copy of the Form I-797 Receipt Notice from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (CIS) that verifies you filed the “Application to Register Permanent Residence or Adjust Status” (Form I-485). Note: *Form I-797 Receipt Notice must be received by NMSC on or before January 31, 2012.*

What procedures must candidates now enrolled full time in college follow?

As instructed in the *Special Scholarship Application*, submit the completed application to the school official (high school you last attended), who will complete the school's sections of the application for final submission to NMSC by December 16, 2011.

To be considered for an award, you must meet all the requirements specified in the previous section and, immediately after the end of the current term, arrange to have your college send an **official transcript** of all college course work you have taken to the Department of Educational Services at NMSC.

Why should candidates report their college choice?

Before any candidate can be offered a Special Scholarship, he or she must have notified NMSC of plans to attend a college or university in the United States that holds accredited status with a regional accrediting commission on higher education. You are asked to report your first-choice college on your application. To report your college choice or a change in your choice go to www.nationalmerit.org/forms.php to access the *College Choice: Report or Change* form. Fill out this form and mail a copy to NMSC or fax it to (847) 866-5113. It is your responsibility to apply and be admitted to the college you plan to attend.

How are Special Scholarship winners chosen?

Scholarship recipients will be selected by a committee of NMSC's professional staff who will evaluate the information candidates and their schools supply on the scholarship applications. Committee members will consider each student's academic record (course load and difficulty level, depth and breadth of subjects studied, and grades earned); scores on the PSAT/NMSQT; the student's essay; demonstrated leadership in activities and significant contributions to the school and community; and the school's written recommendation and characterization of the candidate. Scholarship winners will be the candidates judged to have the greatest potential for success in rigorous college studies, based on their abilities, accomplishments, and personal attributes—without regard to gender, race, ethnic origin, religious preference or family financial circumstances.

What is the monetary value of a Special Scholarship?

Each corporate sponsor decides whether to provide nonrenewable or renewable awards and chooses the monetary limits (within a defined range) of the scholarships it finances. Nonrenewable awards provide a single payment between \$2,500 and \$5,000. Renewable awards cover up to four years of undergraduate study and provide either a fixed yearly stipend of \$1,000 to \$5,000 that is the same for every recipient of the sponsor's scholarships, or an annual stipend that can vary by individual, within minimum and maximum limits.

Variable-stipend awards take into account financial circumstances of the winner's family and educational costs at the college to be attended. These awards range in value from \$500 to \$2,000 or more per year; a sizable number have a larger yearly minimum and many have a higher maximum, which can be as high as \$10,000 annually. Financial need is **not** considered in the selection of award recipients; for this reason, NMSC collects family financial information **only after** winners of variable-stipend scholarships are chosen and then only for those who wish to be considered for more than the minimum annual stipend. When a Special Scholarship offer is sent to winners of these awards, the stipend is set at the minimum level, but information is included about reporting family financial information.

Are there requirements that Special Scholarship winners must meet?

Yes. Terms of the scholarship are specified in the formal offer NMSC sends each winner. These govern acceptance and receipt of the award and, in the case of four-year scholarships, specify additional requirements for scholarship renewal in subsequent academic years. All Special Scholarship payments must be used exclusively for undergraduate education at a college or university in the United States that holds accredited status with a regional accrediting commission on higher education. Special Scholarship stipends are not payable, however, for attendance at service academies, virtual universities, or certain institutions that are limited in their purposes or training.

Special Scholarship winners must apply and be admitted to the college where the award will be used. The recipient also must enroll in college in the fall following selection, must attend college full time during the day, and must pursue a course of study leading to one of the traditional baccalaureate degrees. Special Scholarships are transferable from one regionally accredited U.S. institution to another. Information about how to request a transfer is provided to winners.

When do winners receive scholarship stipend payments?

Next September, recipients of nonrenewable awards will be sent a single payment in the full scholarship amount. At that time, winners of renewable awards will be issued the first payment of their annual stipend; additional installment payments will be sent on a scheduled basis (usually twice annually) for up to four years of undergraduate study or until baccalaureate degree requirements are met, whichever occurs first. NMSC sends stipend checks for scholarship recipients to their college financial aid offices.

When will candidates learn whether they have won a Special Scholarship?

In March 2012, NMSC will begin mailing scholarship offers to winners at their home addresses, with confidential notification to their high school principals. In mid-May 2012, NMSC will send notification to candidates who have **not** won a Special Scholarship; if a few additional awards become available after this date, winners will be chosen and notified during the summer.

Questions about the competition for Special Scholarships should be directed to:

*National Merit Scholarship Corporation
Attn: Educational Services
1560 Sherman Avenue, Suite 200
Evanston, Illinois 60201-4897
Telephone (847) 866-5161*

