

Scholarship Program Self-Assessment:

How Student-Centered Are You?

Why Student-Centered Scholarships?

Centering students in scholarship programs means putting their needs, experiences, and success at the very heart of everything you do. It's important for several key reasons:

- **Impact:** When programs are student-centered, they're designed to truly help students succeed, not just give them money. This leads to better outcomes like higher graduation rates and stronger career paths.
- **Fairness & Access:** It breaks down unfair barriers and makes sure scholarships reach students who need them most, regardless of their background or situation.
- **Efficiency & Relevance:** Programs that listen to students are more effective and stay relevant. They don't waste resources on outdated processes or rules that don't serve today's students.
- **Stronger Communities:** By truly empowering students, scholarships contribute to a more educated workforce, stronger communities, and a more equitable society.
- **Long-Term Program Health:** Programs that prioritize students are more likely to attract passionate donors and continue to thrive, because their impact is clear and meaningful.

In short, it's about shifting from viewing scholarships as just a financial transaction to seeing them as a powerful tool for student transformation and societal good.

How to Complete this Assessment

For each statement in the assessment, award scores based on the following:

- **You're doing this—hooray!** Give yourself 1 point.
- **You've asked students about this or have involved them in decision-making related to this topic.** Extra kudos to you! 2 points!

Don't be discouraged if you don't give yourself points for the activities below. Knowledge is power, and taking this assessment is a first step to moving your program in a more student-centric direction. Keep it up, friend!

Student-Centered Scholarships Self-Assessment

Program Strategy

- ___ You have an overarching scholarship program strategy that's documented and available to all stakeholders.
- ___ Your strategy clearly outlines the intended outcomes of your program.
- ___ You regularly assess your scholarship program's effectiveness in achieving its stated outcomes and adjust your strategy.
- ___ You involve students in evaluating your scholarship program's overall impact and direction.
- ___ You consistently review and update your scholarship policies based on student needs and feedback, integrating these updates into your strategy.

Scholarship Development

- ___ You work with donors to establish student-centric scholarship opportunities.
- ___ You proactively share insights with donors about today's students and their evolving needs.
- ___ You involve current and past scholarship recipients in the design of new scholarship opportunities.
- ___ You create future-proof awards that adapt as students, higher education, and financial aid change.
- ___ You work with donors to understand their philanthropic intent, while your expert team develops the scholarship's operational mechanics.
- ___ You ensure that fund agreements focus on donor intent, excluding specific operational mechanics.
- ___ You prioritize creating flexible scholarship opportunities that adapt to evolving student needs.
- ___ You clearly articulate the student impact of a scholarship to potential donors.
- ___ You prioritize offering renewable scholarships for the full academic program when establishing new funds.

Marketing

- ___ You know where students and families gather information, and you promote your scholarships through these channels.
- ___ You have additional partnerships and adapted outreach channels for special populations your scholarships serve.
- ___ You have marketing materials translated into the major languages spoken in your community.
- ___ You use communication channels used by students and others in their support system.
- ___ You tailor your marketing messages to resonate directly with the lived experiences and aspirations of diverse student populations.
- ___ You use diverse images and stories of consenting past and current scholars in your marketing.
- ___ You actively partner with community-based organizations and student support services to reach underserved student populations.

Application Development

- ___ You give students ample time to find and complete all parts of your application.
- ___ Your application timeline is shared publicly where students might see or access the application.
- ___ You align your application schedule with financial aid, decision, and enrollment deadlines.
- ___ You use a common application for all scholarships.
- ___ You give students enough notice to factor your decision into important school selection and financial aid packaging decisions.
- ___ You ask trust-based questions and do not require uploads as proof.
- ___ Your application process is accessible to students with varying technological capabilities and internet access.
- ___ You provide clear, step-by-step instructions and support for completing the application.
- ___ You offer multiple ways for students to ask questions and receive support during the application process.
- ___ You solicit feedback from applicants on the clarity and ease of your application process.

Selection & Committee Management

- ___ You include current students and recently graduated individuals (less than three years since graduation) on your committee.
- ___ You train your selection committee on the specific needs of students in your community.
- ___ You ensure your selection committee understands the overall purpose of your scholarship program, including the population served and desired outcomes.
- ___ You outline your selection process to describe how applicants will be assessed.
- ___ You ensure your selection committee participates in anti-bias training.
- ___ Your selection criteria prioritize a holistic review of applicants, considering diverse experiences and circumstances.
- ___ You ensure your selection committee reflects the diversity of the student population you serve.
- ___ You offer additional resources or support to unsuccessful applicants, when appropriate and feasible.
- ___ You allow non-citizens and non-permanent residents to receive scholarships, clearly outlining eligibility in your selection process.

Awarding

- ___ You create your awarding schedule around institutional deadlines to ensure students have resources appropriate to their terms and academic years.
- ___ You inform students of your award processing approach and timelines.
- ___ You ensure that funds reach students or their accounts well in advance of deadlines.
- ___ You know what information students need to report their scholarship to their school or organization and make it accessible.
- ___ You provide clear, personalized award letters that explain all aspects of the scholarship, including disbursement details.
- ___ You ensure scholarships cover any item included in the school's cost of attendance.
- ___ You offer clear guidelines for how scholarship funds can be flexibly used by students to cover various educational and living expenses.
- ___ You have a process for students to request adjustments to their scholarship disbursement or usage if their financial circumstances change.
- ___ You understand scholarship displacement and have created awarding mechanisms to mitigate it.

Student Engagement

- ___ You are clear with students about the requirements for keeping a scholarship.
- ___ You know if and how scholars want to engage with you, your donors, or other stakeholders.
- ___ You regularly check in with scholars to understand their academic progress and personal well-being.
- ___ You offer opportunities for scholars to connect with each other, when appropriate and relevant.
- ___ You provide mentorship or professional development opportunities for scholarship recipients, when appropriate and relevant.
- ___ You empower scholars to share their stories and provide input on program improvements.
- ___ You have a clear process for addressing scholar concerns or challenges.
- ___ You have policies that support students in maintaining their scholarship even if they face academic or personal challenges, offering clear pathways for support.
- ___ You allow students to take gap semesters or years, or deferrals, while maintaining scholarship eligibility.
- ___ You clearly communicate all scholarship policies in an easy-to-understand format to all students.
- ___ You actively solicit feedback from students on how to improve scholarship policies.

Alumni Engagement

- ___ You know if and how current scholars want to engage with alumni.
- ___ You ensure your most engaged alumni represent your current scholar cohorts.
- ___ You offer meaningful ways for alumni to contribute to the scholarship program.
- ___ You solicit feedback from alumni on the long-term impact of the scholarship on their lives and careers.
- ___ You celebrate the achievements and contributions of your scholarship alumni.

Private Provider & Institutional Relationships

___ You establish strong working relationships with your counterparts at institutions or organizations to ensure smooth scholarship disbursement and minimize displacement.

___ You share data and insights with institutions or organizations to better support shared students, as consent and regulations allow.

___ You proactively communicate scholarship details and requirements to institutional or organizational partners.

___ You prioritize minimizing scholarship displacement by coordinating with financial aid offices and educating students on the impact of external awards.

Donor Engagement

___ Instead of focusing on specific characteristics or criteria, your conversations with donors focus on the impact they want to make on students in their community or the opportunities they want to make possible for students in their community.

___ You ensure your donors understand the specific needs, challenges, and opportunities of the students in your community.

___ You regularly share the personal stories and impact of scholarship recipients with donors, with student consent.

___ You create opportunities for donors to interact directly with scholars.

___ You educate donors on the evolving needs and challenges faced by current students.

Leadership & Staff Engagement

___ Everyone on your team actively champions a student-centric culture throughout the organization and program.

___ You provide ongoing training and professional development for staff on best practices in student support.

___ You regularly collect and act on feedback from staff regarding student needs and program effectiveness.

Evaluation

___ Information you collect, both quantitative and qualitative, through formal evaluation channels or otherwise, is used to assess your alignment with your program strategy.

___ You use collected information to make changes that better align with the outcomes and impact you hope to have on students.

___ You collect comprehensive data on student outcomes, beyond just academic performance, to understand the holistic impact of your scholarships.

___ You use student feedback as a primary data source for program evaluation and improvement.

___ You transparently share evaluation findings with stakeholders, including students and donors.

Scholarship Program & Policy Revisions

___ You have a clear process for identifying and addressing problematic scholarship fund requirements.

___ You proactively work to revise outdated or restrictive scholarship criteria to better serve students.

___ You involve students in discussions about potential revisions to existing scholarship policies.

Total Scoring & Next Steps

Total Score Ranges

Now that you've completed the assessment, tally your scores to see where your organization stands on the journey to becoming student-centered.

121-160: Visionary Impact Leader! You're at the forefront of student-centric scholarship practices, consistently creating transformative opportunities for students. You're true inspiration in the field!

81-120: Student Success Champion! You've built a strong foundation for student-centered support, and your efforts are clearly making a difference. Keep up the excellent work!

41-80: On the Path to Greater Impact! You're making significant progress in prioritizing student needs. This assessment highlights areas where you can continue to enhance your program's effectiveness.

0-40: Building a Brighter Future! This assessment is a valuable starting point for elevating your scholarship program. Every step you take towards student-centricity creates better opportunities for students!

Where Can You Do Better?

Review all the places where you didn't award any points. These are your prime opportunities for growth. From this list, highlight two to three specific actions you think you could realistically accomplish in your next scholarship cycle.

Remember, this assessment is a tool for empowerment, not judgment. Your commitment to enhancing your scholarship program for students is commendable, and we're here to support you on that journey.

Ready to Take the Next Step in Your Student-Centered Journey?

Your students deserve a program that truly supports them. [Schedule a free consultation](#) to learn how we can help you get there.

