

National Area Scholarship Program – 2026 Instructions

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Program Information

Paying It Forward: National AAFES Retired Employees Association (AREA) Scholarship Program

For 40 years now, the National AAFES Retired Exchange Association (AREA) has made a considerable impact by investing in the futures of deserving students. Since its inception in 1985, the National AREA scholarship program has provided over \$1,000,000 in scholarship funds to over 430 students.

This year we have a few exciting changes!

This year's awards include two \$5,000 scholarships and ten \$3,000 scholarships, and *NEW* this year, an additional \$3000 for deserving Trade School applicants with the potential for additional awards based on the number and quality of applications received. Continuing the National AREA tradition of giving with a commitment to invest in the AAFES community's future and help people achieve their academic dreams.

The completed application process will open on January 2, 2026, and must be received by National AREA via email or postmarked no later than noon CST **March 27, 2026**. Email the application and attachments to scholarships@aafesretired.org following the guidance below.

Scholarship Application Procedures

The application submission period begins **January 2, 2026**, and ends **March 27, 2026**.

Completed applications with required documentation must be submitted to the Scholarship Committee by email no later than the application deadline following the Application Instructions for submission. Time extensions are not normally made. The eligibility of each applicant will be reviewed and validated. It is the responsibility of each applicant to ensure that all required information/documents are received, in the desired format per the instructions, by the Scholarship Committee before **noon (1200) United States Central Standard Time March 27, 2026**.

Your application will be late if it is not received by the deadline. **National AREA reserves the right not to consider late applications.**

Personal Eligibility Criteria

Who Can Apply

Graduating high school seniors who have been accepted to an accredited college, university, community college, trade school, or US military academy are eligible to apply.

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Applicants must be:

- Permanent US residents and are less than 21 years of age.
- A natural, legally adopted child, or custodial stepchild of an active, retired, or deceased Exchange US payroll employees.
- If the applicant's sponsor is a deceased parent, the parent must have died while an active Exchange employee, a retired Exchange employee, or military assignee.
- One of the parents of the applicant must have had at least twelve consecutive months of Exchange employment, or in the case of military personnel, Exchange assignment. For a deceased parent, the twelve-month employment requirement must have been met at the time of death.
- If retired, the sponsor must be an active National AREA member. An active member is one who is a member of the National AREA organization (not just a member of a local AREA Chapter) and whose dues payments are current. [Eligibility for National AREA membership.](#)
- If an applicant's sponsor is a Military retiree, the Military retiree must have retired while on assignment with the Exchange and must be an active member of AREA.
- Work for the Exchange themselves and paid on the US payroll.

Student Academic Criteria

Applicants must...

- Be in their senior year of high school and scheduled to graduate in calendar year 2026
- A GPA average of 3.33 (B+) on a 4.0-point scale or 87-89 (B+) on a 100-point scale is required.
- Applicants must plan to attend an accredited college, university, community college, trade school, or the US military academy for undergraduate studies in 2026.
- Accreditation will be determined through the US Department of Education Database of Accredited Postsecondary Institutions and Programs (DAPIP), [College Accreditation | U.S. Department of Education.](#)

Application Instructions

Please read carefully. Missing information or documents may affect your consideration and/or evaluation score.

Applicants must meet the Personal and Student eligibility criteria above and provide all documentation, as indicated.

National AREA awards scholarships based only on the information and documents you provide. Financial need is not required, although if applicable you may mention it in your essay.

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Scholarship awards will be sent directly to the school of choice. The applicant must be able to identify a specific school prior to scholarship being awarded, or they will not be considered.

Documents Required

- Completed and signed application form. If additional space is needed to provide any information pertaining to Scholastic Honors, School Activities, or Outside Activities that should be considered, please include it as an attachment or within your resume. If the applicant is under 18, a parent or guardian must also sign the application.
- Three (3) letters of reference from teachers, employers, supervisors, or other adults familiar with your high school academic performance, your leadership ability, and participation in school and outside activities.
 - These letters should speak to your leadership attributes, dedication, and what sets you apart from others.
 - If applicable please include any work experience, volunteer service, or leadership roles and responsibilities.
 - No letters of reference may come from individuals in your family.
- An essay, no more than one page in length, explaining why you should receive a scholarship, your goals and any lessons learned.
- A resume, no more than one page in length containing:
 - Contact Information: Your name, phone number, email address, and LinkedIn profile (if applicable).
 - Objective Statement: A brief statement outlining your goals and what you hope to achieve with the scholarship.
 - Education: List your academic achievements, including your GPA, relevant coursework, and honors.
 - Extracurricular Activities: Include clubs, sports, volunteer work, and any leadership roles that demonstrate your skills and commitment.
 - Awards and Achievements: Highlight any scholarships, awards, or recognitions you have received.
 - Work History if applicable
- Copy of high school transcript from latest semester or term completed, including grades, GPA, and student ranking.
- A current portrait style 3 ½ x 5-inch photo of yourself in .jpg format. It will not be returned to you and will be used for publicity should you win a scholarship.

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How to Email Documents

All documents submitted should have the title of the document in the file name and the applicant's name. For example, Scholarship Application-John Smith.pdf, or Letter of Recommendation #1 Coach Jones-John Smith.pdf.

- The application is fillable on-line. Click on the link and download the document. Fill out all information and save as a .pdf. Print, sign, and date (parent signature required if under 18). Scan the document as a .pdf and attach it to the email.
- Scan all other documents you are submitting and save as .pdfs (photo as small .jpg).
- Ensure that all attachments are vertical and right side up.
- Open an email message to scholarships@aafesretired.org and attach each document to the email.
- Attachments must not be sent utilizing Google drive or other similar manner. All attachments must open directly from the email.
- Review email for completeness and then send the email.

Processing and Scoring Procedures

As they are received, each application and corresponding documentation are reviewed for eligibility. Each eligible applicant's file is forwarded to the Scholarship Review Board members.

Multiple factors listed below are scored to determine the ranking for scholarship awards.

- Scholastic Honors & Other Recognition Received.
- School Activity Participation.
- Outside Activities, Hobbies and Special Talents.
- Essay: Tell us why you feel you should be awarded a scholarship.
- Letters of Recommendation

Scores are aggregated by applicants and ranked to determine awards. Awards are made from highest to lowest scores until the number of board-approved awards is met.

Application

PREFERRED: [Application](#) – This is fillable and in Word format. Download the file to your computer to complete. Once completed, print the document and obtain the necessary signatures. Email the file as indicated above.

OPTION: If you are unable to use the fillable form, use this option, [Application](#), and print the document. Complete and obtain the necessary signatures. Email the file as indicated above.