



OPPORTUNITY
UNIVERSE

The Opportunity Handbook

How to find, choose and win the scholarships, fellowships, competitions and funded programmes the world sets aside for young people.

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First edition



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Written and edited by the Editorial Team
of the Opportunity Universe Platform

opportunity-universe.com

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First edition, July 2026.

Published by the Editorial Team of the Opportunity Universe Platform, the team behind opportunity-universe.com. Written in English; the site itself runs in twelve languages.

All the counts, charts and category breakdowns printed in this book were taken from the Opportunity Universe database on 31 July 2026. On that date the database held **17,128** opportunity records, of which **6,172** were open for applications, collected from **155** monitored sources plus direct crawling. Those numbers grow every day, so treat the figures here as a photograph rather than a live reading. The proportions between categories move slowly and are still worth studying.

Deadlines, eligibility rules, stipend levels and application routes change from one cycle to the next. Nothing in this book replaces the official page of the programme you are applying to. Where we describe a specific programme we describe how it has usually worked, and we say so; always confirm the current rules at the source before you spend a month of your life on an application.

Programme names, organisation names and logos mentioned in the text belong to their respective owners. Their appearance here is descriptive and implies no endorsement, partnership or affiliation in either direction.

Corrections, disagreements and better examples are genuinely wanted: opportunity-universe.com/en/contact.

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Contents

Before you start	xi
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Part One · The ground rules

1	What an opportunity actually is	3
1.1	A working definition	3
1.2	Who pays, and what they want back	6
1.3	Reading a call, and spotting what is not one	9
2	What “funded” actually means	13
2.1	The five labels, and what each one hides	13
2.2	Inside a package, and what kind of money it is	17
2.3	The costs nobody prints, and the arithmetic that follows	21
3	Who is allowed to apply	27
3.1	The nine levels, and why they exist	27
3.2	Reading eligibility rules literally	31
3.3	Where you actually sit	34

Part Two · Twenty kinds of opportunity

4	Scholarships	39
4.1	National and government schemes	39
4.2	University money, foundations and the awards close to home	43
4.3	Inside a scholarship selection	47
5	Fellowships, research places and grants	51
5.1	The four fellowships	51
5.2	Research programmes and the summer that changes a CV	54
5.3	Grants, and how calls for proposals work	57
5.4	Writing to a person you have never met	60
6	Competitions, olympiads and prizes	65
6.1	Olympiads and the national ladder	65
6.2	Competitions and hackathons, where you enter with work	68
6.3	Prizes you do not apply for	72

7	Schools, conferences, forums and exchanges	75
7.1	Summer schools, winter schools and camps	75
7.2	Conferences, and how students actually get in	78
7.3	Forums, summits, delegations and exchanges	81
8	Work, training and building things	85
8.1	Internships, placements and training	85
8.2	Mentorship, accelerators and building your own thing	89

Part Three · Finding them

9	How the market actually behaves	93
9.1	Why good programmes stay hidden	93
9.2	The seasons of the application year	96
9.3	Who you are actually competing against	99
10	Search craft	103
10.1	The words that find things	103
10.2	Filters, and turning four thousand into twelve	106
10.3	The weekly routine, and verifying what you find	109
11	Working with Opportunity Universe	113
11.1	What the index is, and how it gets built	113
11.2	The tools, and which job each one does	116
11.3	From a database to twelve applications	119

Part Four · Applying

12	The anatomy of an application	123
12.1	The parts, and the question each one answers	123
12.2	The room where it is decided	126
12.3	Planning backwards from the deadline	129
13	Paper, and the things that take longest	133
13.1	The CV that gets read in fifty seconds	133
13.2	Certificates, transcripts and the machinery of proof	136
13.3	Evidence, portfolios and the things nobody thinks to send	139
14	Writing about yourself	143
14.1	The motivation letter	143
14.2	Study plans and research proposals	146
14.3	Editing when nobody will read your draft	149

15	Referees, interviews and tests	153
15.1	Reference letters	153
15.2	Interviews and assessment days	156
15.3	Language and admission tests	159
16	After you press send	163
16.1	The waiting, and what to do in it	163
16.2	Rejection, waitlists and the second attempt	166
16.3	When you win	169

Part Five • Reference

A	The application year, month by month	175
A.1	Autumn, the season that decides next year	175
A.2	Winter and spring, the second wave	178
A.3	Summer, when the quiet is deceptive	181
B	An atlas of programmes that come back	185
C	Checklists worth printing	193
D	Glossary	197

Before you start

Why a search engine wrote a book, what is inside it, and how to use it without reading all of it.

Chevening is the British government's scholarship scheme. It pays the tuition, the flights and a year of living costs for people from more than a hundred countries to take a master's degree in the United Kingdom, and it has been doing so since 1983. Applications open in the summer and the portal closes in early November. In the fortnight after it closes, our inbox fills with the same message written in twenty different ways: I only heard about it last week, is there any chance, can I still send something. The answer is no, and it is a bad answer to have to give, because most of those people were eligible. They had the degree, the work experience, the reference letters sitting in a drawer. What they did not have was six weeks of warning and a rough idea of what the essays were supposed to contain.

That gap is what this book is about. There is a lot of money in the world set aside for young people who want to study, research, compete, build or travel, and a surprising share of it goes unclaimed or gets claimed by the same small group of well-informed applicants year after year. The money is real. The selection is genuinely competitive at the top and genuinely uncompetitive further down. Almost nobody is told, in one place and in plain language, how any of it works.

Who we are, and what we are not

We run opportunity-universe.com, an index of funded opportunities for people who are mostly under 40 or still in education. Our crawlers read the announcement pages of universities, ministries, foundations, research institutes, companies and the other opportunity portals, then a classifier sorts the genuine calls for applications from the news articles, the closed announcements and the listicles. On the day this edition went to press we held 17,128 records, 6,172 of them open, drawn from 155 monitored sources plus open crawling.

Sitting on top of that pile teaches you things. You see which categories are crowded and which are nearly empty. You see the months when deadlines pile up and the months when almost nothing closes. You see the same eligibility sentence copied between programmes and the same four mistakes in the applications that organisers complain about publicly. This book is an attempt to write that down before it disappears into a database.

What we are not: an agency. We do not write applications, we do not sell places, we do not charge for the search, and we have no arrangement with any programme that would make us recommend it over another. When we say a programme is generous or badly run, that is an editorial opinion formed from reading thousands of calls, and you are free to disagree with it.

Who this book is for

The obvious reader is a student looking for funding. That reader is well served here, particularly in Parts III and IV. But three other people keep turning up in our support mail and we wrote for them too.

The first is the person who already has a place at a university and a funding gap of a few thousand euros, and who assumes the only options are a loan or giving up. Chapter 4 exists largely for them; small foundation awards, faculty hardship funds and community scholarships are the least glamorous and least contested money in the whole system.

The second is the person who has finished studying and thinks the door is shut. It is not. Early-career fellowships, government exchange programmes, professional training schemes and forum delegations take applicants into their thirties, and some have no age limit at all. In our database, 511 open records name early-career professionals as their primary group and a further 7,167 set no level restriction whatsoever.

The third is the teacher, counsellor or youth worker who has to advise thirty students at once and has never had time to learn this properly. Chapters 9 and 10 are the ones to photocopy. Appendix C collects the checklists.

What this book will not do for you

It will not give you a list of open deadlines. Anything we printed here would be stale within weeks, and keeping a live list current is exactly what the website is for. What we print instead are the patterns behind the deadlines: which

programmes recur, when in the year they usually open, what they ask for, and how to be ready before the announcement appears.

How the book is arranged

Five parts, and they are meant to be read in different ways.

Part I sets out the ground rules. What an opportunity actually is, who pays for it and why, what the funding labels really cover, and how the eligibility system carves the world into study levels. If you read only forty pages of this book, read these.

Part II walks through the categories one at a time: scholarships, fellowships, grants, competitions, olympiads, conferences, forums, summer schools, exchanges, internships, training, volunteering, mentorships, accelerators. Each has its own culture, its own vocabulary and its own tricks. You will probably read the two or three that apply to you and skim the rest. Skim them anyway. The most common reason people miss funding is that they never realised a category existed.

Part III is about finding things: how the market behaves, how to search properly, how to use our tools, and how to build a shortlist that does not eat your whole year.

Part IV is the application itself. Documents, letters, essays, proposals, referees, interviews, tests, visas, and the part nobody writes about, which is what to do in the four months of silence afterwards.

Part V is reference material to keep: a month-by-month map of the application year, a short atlas of programmes that come back every cycle, printable checklists, and a glossary of the words that appear in calls without ever being explained.

The boxes, and what they mean

Five kinds of box interrupt the text, and they are worth learning because they carry most of the practical content.

A **From the database** box reports something we can actually count: how many records of a certain kind exist, how deadlines are distributed across the year, which countries host what. These are the closest thing to hard evidence in the book, and they are all queries against our own data rather than figures borrowed from elsewhere.

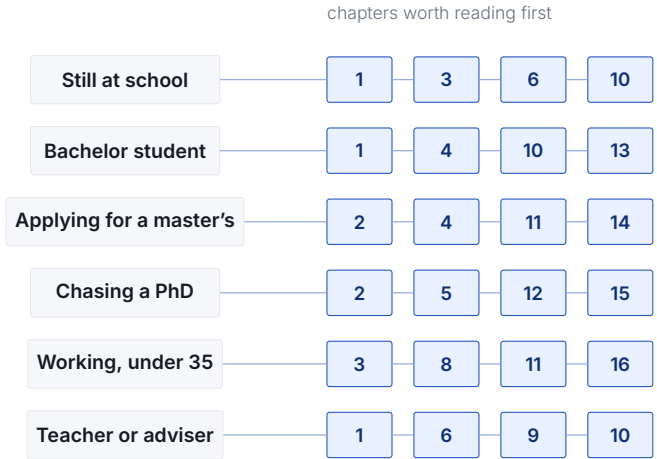


Figure 1. Six starting points and the four chapters we would send each of them to first. Nobody needs the whole book at once.

An **On the site** box, the dark one with the logo, points at a tool on opportunity-universe.com that does the job we have just described by hand. We have tried to keep these short and to place them where they are useful rather than where they flatter us.

A **Watch out** box marks something that regularly costs people a place: a rule that is easy to misread, a document that takes longer to obtain than anyone expects, a scam pattern.

A **Try this** box is a concrete exercise, usually one that takes under an hour and produces something you can reuse across many applications.

A **Case in point** box tells a short story. Where the story concerns a real person we have their permission and we keep them anonymous; where it is a composite drawn from several similar cases we say so in the box itself. We have invented no quotations and attributed nothing to anyone who did not say it.

Now go and read Chapter 1, or skip to whichever part of the book solves the problem you actually have this week. The index at the back is real, and so is the search box on the site.

The Editorial Team
Opportunity Universe, July 2026



PART ONE

The ground rules

What these programmes are, who pays for them, what the funding labels actually cover, and who is allowed to apply.

What an opportunity actually is

A working definition, the people who pay for all of this, and how to read a call for applications in ninety seconds.

A woman in Nairobi spends four evenings writing 800 words about water management, sends them to a foundation in Stockholm, and eleven weeks later is told that a two-year master's degree in Sweden will be paid for. A boy in Ho Chi Minh City fills in a form, sits a three-hour test in a school hall, and ends up at an international olympiad in a country he had never expected to see. A software developer in Lagos writes a project description, gets nine months of funding, and hires two people.

These three events look nothing alike. They come from different budgets, they are decided by different kinds of people, and the words used to describe them in the announcement are different. Underneath, the mechanism is identical, and learning to see that mechanism is most of the work.

1.1 A working definition

We use a simple test in our newsroom. Something belongs in the database if it satisfies three conditions at once.

There is a call and a deadline. Somebody has published an invitation to apply, with a date after which they stop reading. A permanent page that says “we sometimes support students, write to us” is a contact form, and it goes in a different mental folder.

Selection replaces purchase. You get in because a person or a panel decided you should, not because you paid. This is the condition that separates a summer school with a competitive application from a summer course you buy a ticket for, even when the two look identical on the website.

Something of real value transfers to you. Money, a place, access, training, a title, a plane ticket, a network. If nothing moves in your direction, it is a volunteer request or an advertisement.

Apply the three tests to anything you find and the picture clears up fast. A PhD position advertised with a salary passes all three. A conference that charges 450 euros to attend and accepts everyone who pays fails the second. A prize you cannot nominate yourself for still passes, because the selection happens and the value transfers, even though your route in runs through somebody else.

The question is never “is this a scholarship?” The question is whether somebody with a budget has published a date and intends to choose.

Why the boundary is worth drawing

People lose whole seasons by searching for the wrong noun. Someone who wants to spend a summer doing lab work in Germany types “scholarship Germany” into a search engine, reads about degree funding for a year and a half, and never finds the programme they actually needed, which is a paid research placement and is never called a scholarship by anybody who runs one. Someone who wants money for a community project searches for “grant”, which is right, then filters by “student”, which is wrong, because the money is sitting in youth funds that describe their applicants as “young leaders” and their awards as “seed support”.

Our category system exists to stop that from happening. Every record in the database is forced into one of twenty types, and the classifier that assigns them has read the full announcement page rather than the title. That is why a placement called “the Otto Bayer Programme” ends up filed under internships where you can find it, and why a “school” that is really a two-week conference ends up under conferences.

Twenty categories, five families

Twenty types is more than anyone can hold in their head, so group them into five families and the map becomes usable.

Money for studying. Scholarships and, in most of the world, fellowships. You are being paid so that a course of study or a piece of research can happen.

Money for doing. Grants, seed funding, accelerator investment. The money attaches to a project rather than to your enrolment, and somebody expects a result.

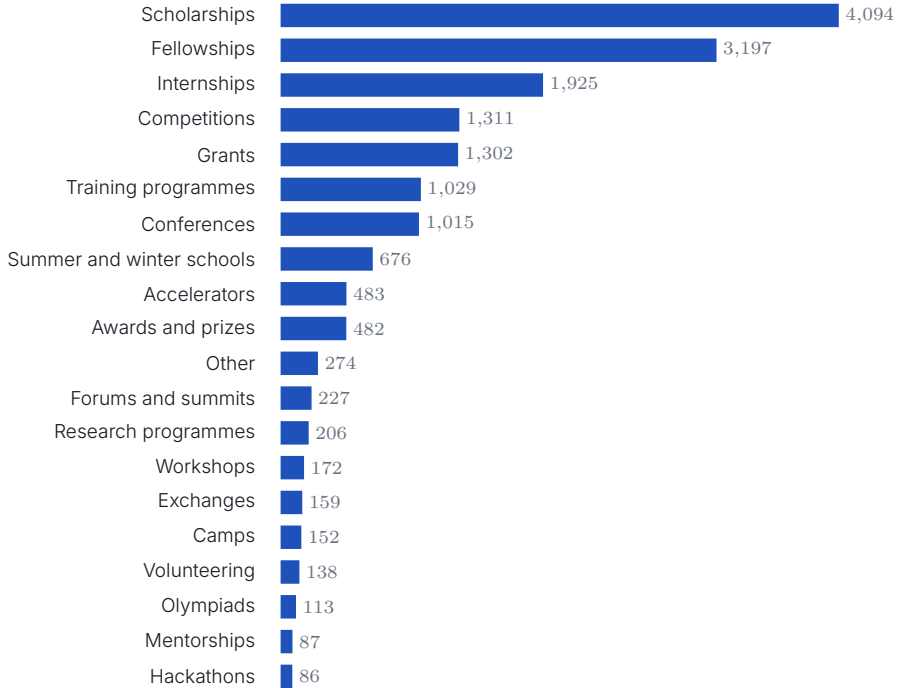


Figure 1.1. The 17,128 records in the database on 31 July 2026, by category. Scholarships and fellowships take 43 per cent between them. The categories at the bottom of this chart are the ones almost nobody searches for, which is also why they are easier to win.

Being chosen and measured. Competitions, olympiads, hackathons, awards. You produce something or perform against others, and the outcome is public.

Going somewhere. Summer and winter schools, camps, conferences, forums, exchanges. The value is the room you get into and the people in it.

Working and learning. Internships, training programmes, research programmes, volunteering, mentorships. Time is exchanged for skills, a line on your record, and sometimes a wage.

Part II of this book takes each family in turn. For now the useful thing is the realisation that the families behave differently. Money-for-studying programmes are slow, formal and document-heavy. Being-chosen programmes

are fast, brutal and repeatable, and you can enter four of them in a month. Going-somewhere programmes have the shortest applications in the whole system and are routinely oversubscribed by a factor of ten because the applications are short.

FROM THE DATABASE

The categories nobody looks in

Search traffic on our site is wildly uneven. Scholarships and internships absorb most of it. Meanwhile the database holds 676 open and past summer schools, 227 forums, 206 research programmes and 159 exchange programmes, many of them fully funded, most of them receiving a fraction of the applications that a comparable scholarship attracts. A fully funded two-week research school in Trieste and a fully funded two-year master's degree are advertised in the same tone of voice. One of them has forty applicants and one has four thousand.

1.2 Who pays, and what they want back

Nobody gives money away for no reason. Every opportunity in this book exists because an organisation decided that funding young people served a purpose it already had, and the purpose is almost always visible if you look. Reading it correctly changes what you write in your application, which is the entire practical point of this section.

Governments

The largest single source of degree funding on the planet is national governments paying for foreign students to study in their country. Britain runs Chevening through its foreign ministry. Germany funds the DAAD, which distributes several thousand scholarships a year across dozens of separate programmes. The United States runs Fulbright through the State Department and a network of binational commissions. Japan has MEXT, China has the Chinese Government Scholarship, Türkiye has Türkiye Bursları, Korea has the Global Korea Scholarship, Hungary has Stipendium Hungaricum, and there are forty more.

The motive is influence. A country that educates 2,000 foreign graduates a year acquires 2,000 people who speak some of its language, understand how it works, and will pick up the phone in fifteen years when they are running a ministry. Governments say this openly in their strategy documents, so there is nothing cynical in noticing it.