

DOWNLOADABLE 1

AWARD LETTER BREAKDOWN CHECKLIST

Confirm the Full Cost of Attendance

Categories	School 1	School 2	School 3	School 4
Tuition				
Housing				
Meal Plan				
Books and Supplies				
Transportation				
Personal Expenses				
Mandatory Fees				
Full Cost Total				

- Tuition—This is a standard price Full-time enrollment at the Colleges and Universities
- Housing—When calculating housing, include the deposit amount if it is not included in the actual housing cost
- Meal plan—Meal plans can fluctuate in cost. Discuss with your child if the standard meal plan will suffice. Will you supplement the meal plan with store purchased items. Do not accept the larger plan if does not fit the actual need.

Common Meal Plan tiers and Monthly Costs

Plan Type	Monthly Cost	Meals/Week	Features
Basic	\$200 - \$250	10 meals – 14 weeks	Standard dining hall access
Standard	\$250 - \$350	14meals – 21 weeks	Dining Hall + some Flex dollars
Unlimited	\$350 - \$450	Unlimited	All-you-can-eat + flex dollars for campus cafés

- Books & supplies—This category typically covers: Required books (digital and print); Lab manuals and access codes; course specific materials (e.g., art supplies, calculators);

Technology needs (laptops, software, etc.); General school supplies (notebooks, pens, folders) This cost ranges from \$1,240 to \$1,370 depending on the institution and student choices

- Transportation – calculate the cost for you child to travel from home to school and from school back home for every break.

- Personal expenses

Common categories include:

- **Laundry and toiletries** — detergent, soap, haircare, skincare
 - **Clothing and seasonal gear** — coats, shoes, campus apparel
 - **Cell phone bill** — often \$50–\$100/month
 - **Entertainment and social life** — movies, outings, events
 - **Dorm and household items** — cleaning supplies, bedding replacements
 - **Health and wellness** — over-the-counter meds, small copays
 - **Technology upkeep** — chargers, headphones, small repairs
- Mandatory fees

Common Mandatory Fees

- **Technology fee** — Funds campus Wi-Fi
- **Student activity fees**—Supports student organizations, campus events, and student government
- **Health services fee** — Covers access to on-campus clinics, wellness programs, and basic medical services.
- **Athletic or recreation fee** — Supports gyms, recreation centers, intramural sports, and athletic facilities.
- **Campus facilities fee** — Helps maintain buildings, libraries, and shared campus spaces.
- **Transportation fee** — Covers campus shuttles, buses, or transit partnerships.
- **Orientation or first-year fee** — One-time charge for new student programming and onboarding.

- **Laboratory or course-specific fees** — Required for certain majors (STEM, art, nursing) to cover equipment and materials.

Separate Free Money From Borrowed Money

Free Money	School 1	School 2	School 3	School 4
Grants				
Scholarships				
Total Gifts				
Debt				
Federal Loans				
Parent Plus Loans				
Private Loans				
Total Debt				
Income				
Work Study				
Job				
Total Income				

- Grants
- Scholarships
- Federal loans
- Parent PLUS loans
- Private loans
- Work-study

Identify Hidden Costs

- One-time freshman discounts
- Housing increases
- Meal plan upgrades
- Lab/program fees
- Travel home

- Loan interest

Calculate Your True Out-of-Pocket Cost COA – (grants + scholarships) = Your real cost

Categories	School 1	School 2	School 3	School 4
Cost of Attendance (COA) Total cost amount above				
Grants And scholarships Total gift amount above				
Your out-of-pocket cost				

Ask These Critical Questions

Questions	School 1	School 2	School 3	School 4
Grants Renewable	(yes)/ (no)	(yes)/ (no)	(yes)/ (no)	(yes)/ (no)
Scholarship GPA				
Cost increases/Year				
Work Study Guaranteed	(yes)/ (no)	(yes)/ (no)	(yes)/ (no)	(yes)/ (no)

- Are these grants renewable? (if it is not renewable, deduct this amount over the next three years)
- What GPA is required to keep scholarships?
- How much will costs increase each year? (Most colleges raise costs by **3–5% per year**)
- Is work-study guaranteed?

What is the four-year total out of pocket cost?

Categories	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Total Cost
School 1					
School 2					
School 3					
School 4					

