Illinois Dollars for Scholars:
The Process of Reaching its Utmost Potential

Survey of Member Chapters

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Executive Summary

Illinois Dollars for Scholars Board of Directors and Executive Director, Dick Dystrup, initiated this research as they desired to better understand the workings of their local chapters. A self-administered survey was sent via regular mail to all 155 chapter members in order to gain insight on what the organization itself could do to improve the process of raising, administering, and awarding college scholarships to local students.

I was looking to explore what procedures and measures the successful chapters were utilizing, as well as to detect recurring problems that the more unsuccessful chapters were currently experiencing. A number of variables were explored, such as the number of volunteers, what sort of fundraisers the entities utilized the most, the use of the website and newsletter.

The study's results cannot be fully generalized to the entire Illinois Dollars for Scholars organization due to an overall response rate of 24%. However, respondents proved to represent a variety of geographic regions in Illinois, therefore adding somewhat to the diversity of the population.

The feedback from this survey provides insight as to certain patterns of success (or, in some cases, a lack of success), in which IDFS can adhere to the chapters' needs and make the appropriate adjustments.

The survey questions focus on the importance of each chapter utilizing the resources that IDFS provides to them. For example, there were a high number of respondents who indicated that they do not use the organization's website. Furthermore, the number of individuals who do NOT use the chapter portal (which includes forms, the chapter guidebook, etc.) exceeds the number of people who do make use of this resource.

This study also indicates that there is no direct relationship between the number of volunteers within a chapter, and the size of its fundraisers. This finding illustrates that each established chapter proved to have certain methods and means that better pertain to their own wants and needs.

It is also important to note that although many chapters do not coordinate their program with other organizations who distribute scholarships, they did indicate that this process was one of their goals. The majority of chapters do, however, affiliate themselves with local high schools, which may prove to be very beneficial to their organization, as this connection can provide more access to not only volunteers, but other resources as well.

Through this research, many patterns and trends were uncovered which will hopefully help this organization to provide each chapter with as much help as they need, making Illinois Dollars for Scholars an effective instrument in helping others to provide scholarships to college students, resulting in a better education for students now and in the future.

Introduction

Overview and Background

Illinois Dollars for Scholars (IDFS), a branch of Scholarship America, one of the largest, volunteer-driven scholarship organizations in the United States has steadily raised nearly three million dollars to contribute to the education of Illinois students. This program is currently working to expand its outreach to its local chapter members, as well as fine-tune their operations and adjust certain problems or challenges each may have. As this is the first thorough look into the Illinois Dollars for Scholars organization since its establishment in 1997, the purpose of this research is to shed light on a number of important questions that would benefit the organization as a whole.

The IDFS Board of Directors and Executive Director initiated this research because they desired to better understand the workings of their local chapter entities, such as how successful individual chapters were in terms of distributing scholarships, as well as which chapters needed specific assistance for the betterment of the organization.

IDFS asked for Illinois College's help to identify what procedures and practices their successful chapters were utilizing, as well as to uncover recurring problems that the more unsuccessful chapters were experiencing. This organization was interested in better understanding the dynamics of its various chapters in order to help each chapter take full advantage of the range of resources (including the chapter portal and newsletter). Assisting their chapter members in utilizing these resources, they felt, would help each chapter to function as effectively as possible.

Statement of Problem

The problem that my research sought to address was: which chapters of the Illinois Dollars for Scholars Program need assistance, and what can IDFS do to provide

this help? I also explored what certain successful chapters were doing that may benefit other local entities. A third area of focus was to determine how the program itself could help its chapters to be more effective in raising, administering, and awarding college scholarships to local students. This included a focus on the key factors behind each program's success or lack of success in financing scholarships, and investigated how the program could best distribute its scholarship funding to ensure its ongoing status as an effective and successful statewide organization.

Research Questions

As there is little research that specifically pertains to the success of the Illinois Dollars for Scholars organization, this research focuses on a few key questions. Overarching questions include:

1. How can IDFS be of greatest help to its chapters?
2. What resources are currently being utilized by the chapters to ensure success?
3. Are the member chapter goals being met?
4. Overall, does each chapter appear to be satisfied with their experience in the IDFS organization?

From these questions, sub-questions that I developed include:

1. What specific type of help do the chapters need?
2. What tactics do entities employ to ensure success?
3. What flaws in an entity lead to failure?

Methodology

This research entailed the use of quantitative data collection strategies, utilizing survey research. This particular type of survey research was used in order to adhere to the specific wishes of the client for whom I was conducting this research.

I also felt that this method would provide a quick and convenient way of gathering basic assumptions and ideas from a population that was too large to observe directly.

Study Sample

IDFS is a volunteer-driven organization. Its chapters are located throughout the state of Illinois. There are currently 155 Illinois Dollar for Scholar's Chapters. Each chapter is administered by a local organization that may exist exclusively for awarding scholarships, or may include scholarships among its other purposes. Therefore chapter members within the IDFS organization vary in size and type. Furthermore, I was not given any information on the specifics of each representative with whom I interviewed, or his or her organization.

Data Collection

The measurement instrument that was used for the study was a mail survey. An initial survey had previously been drafted by Illinois Dollars for Scholars, under the direction of Executive Director, Dick Dystrup. Melissa Pantier (Illinois College Director of Corporation and Foundation Relations and IDFS board member) and I fine-tuned the survey questions. Grant seekers mailed the finalized survey along with the IDFS "Scholarship Bits" newsletter to all of the Illinois Chapters.

Data Analysis

Thirty-eight of the 155 chapters completed and returned the survey. This represents a response rate of approximately 24%. Respondents were slightly more representative of small rural areas than suburban areas in the state of Illinois. Furthermore, most of the respondents were located in the northern region of Illinois, followed by the southern area.

In the following discussion, each survey question will be indicated, as well as a table provided to illustrate the frequency and percentage of responses. (Please note that each variable and percentage is derived by the total number of respondents to the survey, which is noted below the table title).

In reference to Table 1, since the inception of Illinois Dollars for Scholars chapters, 21 of the 38 respondents (just over 55%) indicated that they had not attempted to coordinate their scholarship program with other organizations that also provide scholarships within their community. Of the 38 respondents, an even lesser number of respondents, 17, indicated that they had attempted to do so.

Table 1. Coordination of IDFS chapters with Other Organizations
(N=38)

Response Categories	(N)	%
Have not attempted to coordinate scholarship program	21	55.3
Attempted to coordinate scholarship program	17	44.7

When asked what goals the chapters were looking to achieve, of those who indicated they had attempted to coordinate their program, 28.9% of the respondents stated that one of their goals was to explore or establish a cooperative relationship between organizations (Table 2). Following this, 23.7% of the respondents said that they hoped to distribute their scholarships more equitably. Finally, 15.8% of the respondents stated that one of their goals was to adopt one universal scholarship application form.

Table 2. Goals that Chapters were Seeking to Achieve

(N=38)*

Response Categories	(N)	%
Explore or establish a cooperative relationship between organizations	11	28.9
Distribute scholarships more equitably among yearly applicants	9	23.7
Adopting one universal scholarship application form for all applicants	6	15.8
Other goals	0	0

*The reason the numbers do not add up to 38 in the (N) column is because the respondents were given the option to choose all that applied, meaning a different total number for each category. The number is derived from the total respondents to the survey itself.

Table 3 shows that small events are among the most popular fundraising approaches systems. Of the respondents, over 10% indicated that 1-25% of their fundraisers are small events (under 100 guests), such as pancake breakfasts, raffles, carwashes, etc. An even greater amount of respondent (15.8%) indicated that up to 50% of their fundraisers are smaller events. Larger fundraising appeared to be the least popular as 73.7% of the respondents indicated that they did not use larger fundraisers (250+ guests), such as golf tournaments, galas, dinner dance, theatre productions, etc. Furthermore, the percentage of respondents who claimed that **ALL** of their fundraisers were small (34.2%) greatly exceeded the number of respondents who claimed that **ALL** of their fundraisers were mid-sized or large, which were both respectively 7.9% of the respondents.

Table 3. Size of Fundraising Events

(N=38)

	1-25%	26-50%	51-75%	76-99%	100%	No fundraisers in this category
Response Categories	%	%	%	%	%	%
Small	10.5	15.8	5.3	0.0	34.2	34.2
Medium	5.3	13.2	0.0	5.3	7.9	68.4
Large	5.3	10.5	2.6	0.0	7.9	73.7

NOTE: A number of chapters also included what other types of fundraisers they were involved with, in addition to the examples that were mentioned previously. These included: basketball game concessions, teacher donations, school newsletters, and donations from cities/villages.

Table 4 indicates that just fewer than 50% of respondents maintain a volunteer force between 6 and 15 volunteers. These volunteers are those individuals who are actively involved in operating their chapter each year. Following this, 26.3% of the respondents indicated that they had only 1-5 volunteers who are actively involved. There was only one responding chapter member that had volunteers exceeding 100. It should also be noted that only one person indicated that their chapter was too early in its stages to indicate the amount of volunteers it had.

Table 4. Number of Active Volunteers

(N=38)

Number of Volunteers	1-5	6-15	16-30	31-60	61-100	100+	Too new to tell
Respondents who fall within range	26.3%	47.4%	18.4%	2 .6%	0.0%	2.6%	2.6%

Table 5 indicates that of the 38 respondents, more Illinois chapters actively recruit new volunteers (57.9%) as compared to the percent of chapters that do not (42.1%).

Table 5. Chapters who Actively Recruit Volunteers

(N=38)

Response Categories	(N)	%
Actively recruits new volunteers on regular basis	22	57.9
Does not actively recruit new volunteers on regular basis	16	42.1

Table 6 indicates that the majority of responding chapters (86.8%) communicate regularly with one or more of their local high schools. Only four respondents (10.5%) indicated that they do not communicate regularly with one or more local high schools.

Table 6. Regular Communication with Local High Schools

<u>(N=38)</u>

Response Categories	(N)	%
Communicates regularly with one or more local high schools	33	86.8
Does not communicate regularly with one or more local high schools*	4	10.5
No response**	1	2.6

*   Two chapters who stated they did not communicate regularly with a local high school indicated that they would start to do so.

**   One chapter that did not respond indicated that they communicate somewhat with one or more local high schools.

Table 7 indicates that the majority (69.7%) of the respondents who stated that they do communicate regularly with one or more local high schools (as seen in table 6) also indicated that they communicate to local high schools the benefits of the Illinois Dollars for Scholars Collegiate Partner Program for their yearly scholarship recipients.

This program offers colleges, universities, and other accredited posts-secondary institutions the chance to participate in the scholarship awarding process and even offers benefits such as matching the scholarships that a student brings in. Nearly one-third (30.3%) of those who previously indicated they maintain interactions with high schools do not communicate these benefits to the high schools they work with.

**Table 7. Communication of the Benefits of Collegiate Partner Program
to Local High Schools
(N=33)**

Response Categories	(N)	%
Communicates the benefits of the Collegiate Partner Program to local high schools	23	69.7
Does not communicate the benefits of the Collegiate Partner Program to local high schools	10	30.3

Table 8 shows that more than half, (55.3%) of the respondents, do not use the chapter's portal (www.scholarshipamerica.org) to file chapter reports. The chapter portal is part of the Scholarship America website that chapters can use to receive and share information. The chapter portal also includes forms, the chapter guidebook, a forum for sharing information with other chapters, tips, newsletters, etc.   Of the 38 respondents, 39.5% do use the portal to file their reports. Two respondents also indicated that they are currently in the process of doing so.

Table 8. Use of Chapter Portal to File Chapter Reports
(N=38)

Response Categories	(N)	%
DO NOT use chapter's portal to file reports*	21	55.3
Use chapter's portal to file reports	15	39.5
In Process of using chapter's portal to file report	2	5.3

*Two of the respondents who do not use the portal indicated that they had tried; however, the chapter portal had not been available to them lately.

In an effort to see if the chapter dues influenced whether or not a chapter remained associated with IDFS, Table 9 indicates that the majority of the respondents (71.1%) believe that maintaining the chapter dues at the current rate of $150 is an important factor in their chapter's continued affiliation with Illinois Dollars for Scholars and does not affect their choice of continuance. Ten of the respondents (26.3%) believe that maintaining these dues are not important.

Table 9. Importance of Maintaining Chapter Dues

(N=38)

Response Categories	(N)	%
Believe that maintaining the chapter dues are important	27	71.1
Do not believe that maintaining the chapter dues are important	10	26.3
No response	1	2.6

When the chapters were asked what IDFS could do to better serve their needs as a chapter, over 75% of respondents indicated that additional cash incentives would be either very helpful or somewhat helpful (as seen in Table 10). This was followed by the number of respondents (over 70%) who indicated that methods by which chapters can cultivate relationships with Collegiate partners would be very helpful or somewhat helpful. A significant number of respondents (31.6%) indicated that tips to assist their chapter in improving the connections between themselves and their community school would not be helpful.

Table 10. Amount of Helpfulness
Possible Methods of Assistance can Provide

(N=38)

Response Categories	Very Helpful		Somewhat Helpful		Not Helpful	
	(N)	%	(N)	%	(N)	%
Additional Cash Incentives	24	63.2	6	15.8	4	10.5
Training to enhance local chapter operations	3	7.9	20	52.6	10	26.3
Tips to assist your chapter in better connecting with your community school	5	13.2	17	44.7	12	31.6
Methods by which chapters can cultivate relationships with Collegiate Partners	9	23.7	18	47.4	7	18.4
Additional programs on college costs and financial aid	11	28.9	12	31.6	11	28.9

NOTE: Other suggestions included: Programs and college costs offered directly to school district; Articulation of partnerships with college, vocational schools, nursing programs, etc.; Reminders on how to reserve additional funds; and Fundraising assistance.

Table 11 indicates that the percentages for the chapters who use and do not use the IDFS website are similar. Only a little over half of the respondents (52.6%) use the website, while nearly 45% of respondents do not.

Table 11. Use of Illinois Dollars for Scholars Website

(N=38)

Response Categories	(N)	%
Use the web site	20	52.6
Do not use the web site	17	44.7
Do not use the web site often	1	2.6

Table 12 indicates that the majority of the respondents (92.1%) read the IDFS "Scholarship Bits" newsletter. Only one respondent indicated he or she does not read the newsletter at all. Out of the 38 respondents, two (5.3%) indicated they read it on occasion.

Table 12. Use of Illinois Dollars for Scholars Newsletter

(N=38)

Response Categories	(N)	%
Read the newsletter	35	92.1
Do not read the newsletter	1	2.6
Do not read the newsletter often	2	5.3

Table 13 indicates that of the 20 respondents who said they use the website, six (30%) found this tool to be very helpful, while 14 (70%) of the respondents found it to be only somewhat helpful. Of the 35 people who indicated they read the newsletter, only nine of the respondents (25.7%) found it very helpful, while 74.3% found it only somewhat helpful. No respondents indicated that they did not find the web site or newsletter to be helpful.

Table 13. Amount of Helpfulness Provided by the Website and Newsletter

(Website N=20)*
(Newsletter N=35)*

	Very Helpful		Somewhat Helpful		Not Helpful	
Response categories	(N)	%	(N)	%	(N)	%
Helpfulness of web site	6	30.0	14	70.0	0	0.0
Helpfulness of newsletter	9	25.7	26	74.3	0	0.0

* The total number varies for both the web site and newsletter response categories; the percents are based on the respondents who indicated that they **DO** make use of these resources (see Tables 11 and 12).

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In an open-ended question on the survey, the respondents were asked to provide suggestions for ways in which IDFS could improve the website and/or newsletter. All of the suggestions that were given pertained only to the use of the website. One recurring suggestion was that many of the respondents indicated the need for more technical support for navigating or working with the website. Many chapters did not realize that certain resources were online and if they did, they had problems accessing them. Other chapters were having trouble filing chapter reports online. Some other suggestions that pertained to specific chapters included:

- Quick on-line advice and answers for scholarship coordinators and their questions.
- Gearing of the website toward smaller organizations, as well as the larger ones.
- A section that lists deadlines for scholarship organizations.
- On-line practice sections on ways to fundraise.

Table 14 indicates that 36 of the respondents (94.7%) claimed that their chapter is satisfied with the level of interaction between themselves and the Illinois Dollars for Scholars organization. No respondent indicated dissatisfaction with the current level of interaction.

Table 14. Satisfaction with Level of Interaction by Number of Respondents (N=38)

Response Categories	(N)	%
Satisfied with level of interaction between IDFS and chapter	36	94.7
Not satisfied with level of interaction between IDFS and chapter	0	0.0
No Response*	2	5.3

*   It should be noted that the two chapters who did not respond indicated elsewhere in the survey that they were new to the process. One of these chapters specifically mentioned that they needed help getting started.

Table 15 indicates that a majority of respondents (84.2%) thought that the amount of reporting and documentation that they complete on their chapter activities is appropriate. Those who did indicate that it was too much (5.3%) stated that they were just getting started and needed some additional help.

Table 15. Satisfaction with the Amount of Documentation
(N=38)

Response Categories	(N)	%
Appropriate amount of documentation	32	84.2
Too much documentation*	2	5.3
No response**	4	10.5

* One of the chapters who stated that too much documentation is involved also indicated that they were confused as to what they needed to report. The other chapter indicated that this holds especially true when the officers handling financial reports are new.

** Two of the chapters who did not respond indicated elsewhere in the survey that they were new to the process.

Discussion and Recommendations

Through several of the open-ended questions, I found that many of the new chapters that recently joined the IDFS organization are having a difficult time adjusting to the process. Most of these chapters indicated that they were confused about certain practices, mainly documentation and using the web portal. Several indicated specifically that they need help. In order to ensure a smooth transformation to becoming a successful local chapter, IDFS may want to consider focusing some of their time on assisting these newer chapters, especially with technical support.

Each established chapter member proved to have certain methods and means that better pertain to their own wants and needs. Based on the survey, each chapter chose to maintain a different number of volunteers according to what would be best suitable for their organization. For example, one chapter indicated they only had four volunteers, whereas another chapter stated that they had 188 volunteers. These statistics may also be an indication of the size of the communities in which these chapters are located.

The survey questions also focus on the importance of each chapter utilizing the resources of fellow chapters. In Table 2, a majority of respondents (28.9%) were seeking to explore or establish a cooperative relationship with other organizations. However, Table 1 indicates that 55.3% of the respondents indicated that they had not attempted to coordinate their scholarship program with other organizations. This may show the importance of communication and interaction between all chapter members, as well as local organizations. Several chapters stated that their city or village and local schools are big contributors in their fundraising process as well, so this may be an important problem to address.

Cultivating these relationships may lead to great opportunities to further the progress of each chapter. However, it is interesting to note that a majority of respondents (86.8%) indicated that they communicate regularly with their local high schools (Table 6). This may show how high schools can provide an easier means to provide access to a number of useful resources, such as student and parent help, as well as to coordinate and organize events such as fundraisings. Coincidently, Table 3 indicated that 34.2% of the respondents relied solely on smaller based fundraisers, which may indicate the importance of such smaller connections, such as student or parent-based groups.

One focus of this research was to find out what IDFS resources the chapters are currently utilizing. The study indicated that the number of individuals who do NOT use the chapter portal (which includes forms, the chapter guidebook, a forum for sharing information with other chapters, etc.) to file their reports is higher than those who do use the portal (Table 8). It must also be noted that there were a number of chapters that did not make use of the website provided to them by IDFS. A recurring theme among these chapters was the range of problems that were associated with accessing the website. It was interesting to note that, based on these numbers, a greater percentage of respondents indicated that they found the website to be more helpful than the newsletter. This may indicate that a number of chapters feel that the website is useful and provides each with many important resources to assist their organization. Certain changes may need to be made to ensure it is always functioning.

Overall, Illinois Dollars for Scholars seems to be supporting their chapter organizations effectively. Thirty-six of the 38 respondents (94.7%) indicated they were satisfied with the level of interaction between IDFS and their chapter (Table 15). As is

the case with all organizations, chapter members indicated that there is also room for improvement. Many chapters voiced their opinions and listed suggestions to improve certain aspects of the larger IDFS organization.

Limitations

As mentioned earlier, of the 155 chapter members who received this survey via mail, only 38 responded. This reflects a response rate of 24%. Because of the small size of the responses, this study cannot be fully generalized to all of the Illinois local chapters. I feel that the accuracy and representativeness of this information may have improved with more respondents. However, these findings do provide an initial idea of what chapters are looking to achieve in their experience with IDFS. They also provide insight into the specific resources and assistance IDFS chapters may find useful in order to develop themselves more fully as prosperous organizations. In addition, due to the fact that the research pertaining to Illinois Dollars for Scholars is limited, it was extremely difficult to anticipate any of the specific dynamics either common or unique to the various chapter organizations.

Next Steps

The survey findings described in this report are only one of the methods I utilized to obtain information for the betterment of IDFS. Following this analysis, it seemed appropriate to include additional qualitative strategies that would help IDFS as a whole to gain better insight and perspective on the actual feelings and attitudes of the chapters themselves. The purpose of this additional research was to provide more in-depth and purposeful information that would continue the IDFS effort of becoming as effective as possible. Through this qualitative approach, I will conduct six telephone interviews with

IDFS chapter representatives. The analyzed data from these interviews will be presented

to IDFS in a subsequent report.