

AWG-PNW Janet Cullen Tanaka Scholarship FAQs for 2020-2021

Over the years we've gotten a number of questions about the Association for Women Geoscientists' Pacific Northwest Chapter's scholarship and received applications that indicated that some people didn't understand what we're looking for in an application. We've put together some additional information in the form of questions and answers.

Q. I'm studying environmental science and have taken a few geology classes. Am I eligible for the Janet Cullen Tanaka scholarship?

A. No. Your major (or apparent major, based on classes taken) field of study must be a recognized geoscience (i.e., geology, geoengineering, hydrogeology). Other marginally related fields we consider ineligible include atmospheric sciences, civil engineering (unless there's a strong geotechnical emphasis), and forestry.

Q. I'm a resident of Washington (or Oregon) state but am attending college in another state. Am I eligible?

A. No. You must be attending an institution that offers at least three geoscience classes (2-year colleges) and has a dominantly geoscience or earth science faculty member, or be attending a geoscience degree-granting institution (4-year colleges or universities) located in Washington or Oregon. You do not need to be a permanent resident of Washington or Oregon.

Q. Do I need to be a US citizen?

A. No, as long as you are enrolled in a college or university in Washington or Oregon and reside within those states.

Q. I'm a sophomore and have taken only one or two geology classes. Am I eligible?

A. Yes. However, unless you've taken at least two geoscience classes AND several supporting science/math classes AND have received generally good grades in them, you're unlikely to have a competitive application. You might want to wait a year to apply. That said, we have historically awarded scholarships to sophomores, including students at community colleges. Beyond course work, it would be helpful to mention any independent study you've done in the geosciences, including high school science fair projects or Girl Scout projects.

Q. I applied last year and didn't receive the scholarship. Can I apply again?

A. Yes, as long as you still meet the eligibility requirements we encourage you to reapply. In fact, your application will likely be stronger because you'll have more course or special project work supporting it. In addition, your financial needs may be greater. The general quality and needs of the pool of applicants varies considerably from year to year. In fact, even if you have received a scholarship from us in the past, you may reapply.

Q. Do you review incomplete or late applications?

No. We will review only **complete** applications which are received by December 15, 2020.

Q. Do I need to ask my school registrar to send an official transcript?

A. No—photocopies and scanned copies of transcripts are accepted.

Q. Do I send the Reference letters to you, or does the person referring me?

A. Please ask each person who is providing a reference to email the letter directly to avg.pnw.scholarships@gmail.com. In fact, you can submit your entire application via email to that same email address, including a pdf version of your transcript, which does not need to be an official transcript. Please bear in mind that we review only **complete** applications which are received by the deadline (December 15, 2020), so you may ask additional people to submit reference letters, just to make sure we receive at least three references on time. You may use a family member as one of the three Referrals to support your statement of financial need.

Q. How do you judge the applications?

A. The Scholarship committee chair first reviews each application for eligibility and completeness. (Completeness is critical – you may wish to remind each of your references to send or email their letters a few days before the deadline.) Then, a committee of three to five AWG-PNW Chapter members (professional geoscientists, none of whom are college educators) carefully reviews those applications deemed eligible. We rank applications and assign points among three major criteria:

- Financial needs and current resources, as based on the applicant’s essay and the non-academic Letter of Reference.
- Commitment to a geoscience career (which may include plans to teach earth science), based mostly on the applicant’s essay and the academic letters of reference. We also look at supporting course work and the quality of writing in the essay to help assess the likelihood of success in a geoscience career.
- Academic achievement, based primarily on GPA and the rigor in chosen course work, both in geoscience courses and the supporting math/science course work. We also look at the academic letters of reference for evidence of achievement that may not be directly reflected in grades. We do take into account recent improvements in grades – we realize that many people take a year or so to figure out college – and we may discount poor grades earned in earlier attempts at college, before an applicant chose her path in geoscience.

Then we each add up our scores and rank the applications. Occasionally, one application will stand out and our choice is easy. More typically, there will be a cluster of two or three applications at the top, and we’ll need to break a virtual tie. We discuss the top applicants as a group and discuss/defend our scores. In general, financial need is a tie breaker since our ultimate goal is to award the scholarship to the woman for whom we think it will make the most difference in reaching her goal of becoming a geoscientist.

Q. Are there any restrictions on what the scholarship cash award can be used for?

A. No. If you use it for tuition or books, that's great. If you need to use it for rent or food or utilities or transportation or child care, that's good too.

Q. Besides the \$1500 cash award, is anything else included with the scholarship?

A. Yes, the PNW Chapter will sponsor a one-year student membership in AWG for the recipient if not already a member. However, the recipient must send us a completed membership application form for us to forward to AWG with a check from the chapter. In addition, we try to arrange a chapter meeting or social event to honor the recipient and give her a certificate. However, this isn't always possible given how spread out our chapter is and how busy the recipient may be. If no meeting can be arranged, we'd appreciate a recent picture of the recipient to include in our newsletter. We would also appreciate a short article within a year or two for our newsletter, giving our membership an update on how your geoscience studies or early career is working out.

Q. If I receive the scholarship, why does it take until late winter or spring to receive the money?

A. Once we select a recipient, which this year we will do by mid-February 2021, we then have to get the AWG Foundation (our source of matching funds) to issue and send the check, which can take up to a month. You may receive it before midwinter, but we can't guarantee it.

Q. So, who is Janet Cullen Tanaka?

A. Janet is one of our chapter's (originally the Puget Sound Chapter) "founding mothers" and served several years as our first treasurer. She was the one who first insisted, back in 1989, that the chapter offer a scholarship. She's now long retired, but professionally she was a volcanic hazards management specialist. Among other things, she edited the (now defunct) *Volcano Quarterly* for several years, and is the author of *Fire Mountain*, about a hypothetical major eruption of Mt. Rainier - her take on the steamy disaster novels so popular at the time. She wrote it in the mid-1970s to stay sane while working on her University of Washington Masters thesis on the likely hazards associated with an eruption of Mt. Rainier. However, no one would publish it until after Mt. St. Helens erupted because it was considered too far-fetched. Although it's been long out of print, inexpensive used copies of *Fire Mountain* are available on Amazon, and well worth the read.