

Real Talk: Navigating Scholarships with Confidence and Clarity

A student-led conversation on finding, applying for, and winning scholarships



MTI Student and Alumni Association

November 13, 2025

Invited Organizations:



Webinar Agenda

MTI Student and Alumni Association

California Transportation Foundation (CTF)

Marnie Primmer

Women's Transportation Seminar (WTS)

Lizette Zavala

**Conference of Minority Transportation
Officials (COMTO)**

Mydria Clark

Faculty Letter of Recommendation (MTI)

Dr. Len Lira

Closing, Tips, and Questions



MTI Student Association

The Mineta Transportation Institute Student Association's purpose is to:

 support professional development

 build connections between students and alumni and

 host events that bridge classroom and career

SJSU | LUCAS COLLEGE AND
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS



2025 - 2026 MTI Student-Alumni Assoc. Executive Board



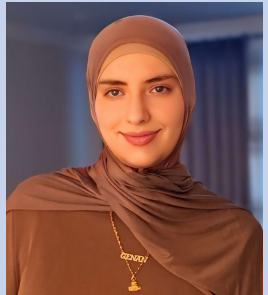
President

Enjoleah Daye
MTI Fellowship Recipient



Vice President

Joseph Faria-Poynter
*Lucas College of Business
Scholarship Recipient*



Secretary

Genan Suleiman
MTI Fellowship Recipient



Treasurer

Diamon Tesfay
COMTO Scholarship Recipient

“Together, we’re here to make scholarships feel accessible — not intimidating.”



Marnie Primmer

Executive Director



Our History

- CTF was established in 1988 as a 501c3 by former Caltrans Chief Deputy Director Heinz Heckeroth
- Simple mission: recognize, remember, educate
- Since our founding we have awarded over \$2 million in scholarships



RECOGNIZE



CTF honors excellence in transportation at the annual CTF Transportation Awards ceremony, where top honors in 18 different categories are awarded each year.

Nominations are now open for 2025 projects and programs!

REMEMBER

Since 2021 CTF has provided support to the families of 32 fallen transportation workers

CTF supported 9 more workers and their families who have been injured on the job.



EDUCATE



SYMPOSIUM

- CTF has hosted for 30 years
- Two-day mentoring event for college juniors/seniors
- Career development for pros
- Recruiting for entry level staff
- Pipeline for new talent into industry

EDUCATE

- 47 scholarships
- High school, undergraduate and graduate students studying related fields.
- Endowed, partnered, and CTF-owned
- CTF supports others (WTS, ITS-CA, SCAG, etc.)



Apply for a CTF Scholarship

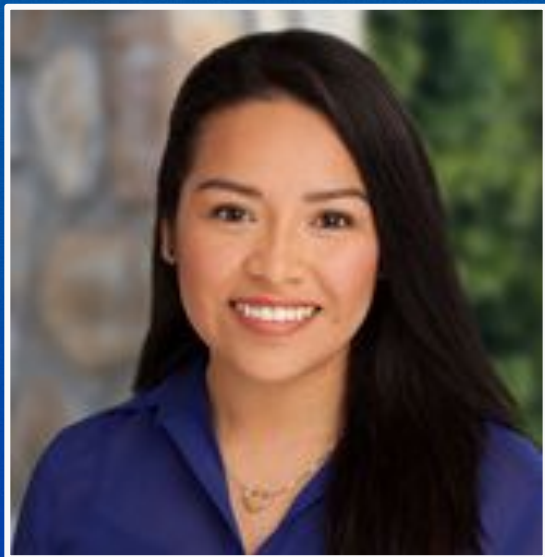


Visit the CTF website at
www.the-ctf.org/scholarships

To see the scholarships we offer and link to
open scholarship applications.

CTF uses the Kaleidoscope platform for
applications.





Lizette Zavala

Bennett Engineering Services
Scholarship Co-Chair





Advancing women
Advancing transportation

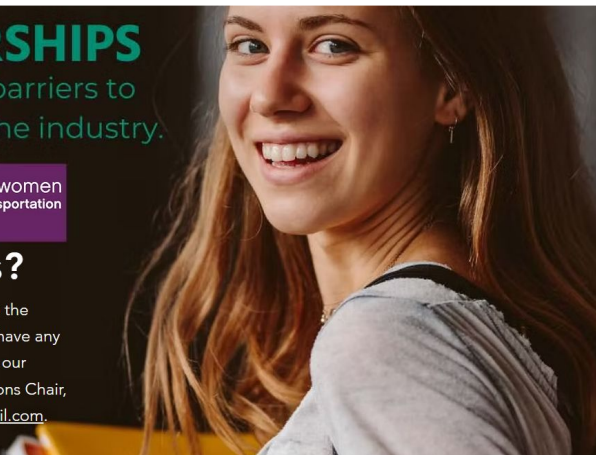
- Scholarship Requirements vary
- For students pursuing studies in transportation or a related field
- Several Education Levels
- Applications:
 - ◆ Open in the Fall
September/October
 - ◆ Close typically
November/December
- 2025 Scholarships closed on November 3rd
- <https://www.wtssacramento.org/scholarships>
- Social Media: Sac_WTS

Scholarship & Education Level	Award Amount Sacramento Chapter / International
Helene M. Overly Memorial <i>Graduate Student</i>	\$7,500 / \$10,000
Bridgette Beato Leadership Legacy <i>Graduate Student</i>	\$7,500 / \$5,000
Sharon D. Banks Memorial <i>Undergraduate Student</i>	\$5,000 / \$5,000
Bimla G. Rhinehart Leadership <i>Undergraduate Student</i>	\$5,000 / \$5,000
Jr. College/Trade School <i>Community/Tech/Trade College</i>	\$3,500 / \$2,500
Will Kempton <i>Current High School Senior</i>	\$3,000 / \$2,500
Doris Matsui Diversity and Inclusion <i>Current High School Senior</i>	\$3,000 / No International Equivalent

- **Meet the criteria**
 - ◆ Included all attachments
 - ◆ Highlight goals
- **Be organized and timely**
 - ◆ Transcripts and letters of recommendation take time
 - ◆ Ask questions
 - ◆ Proofread!
- **Submit a complete on time application**

TIPS:

- Make the application flow easily
- Reviewers rely on the application form itself, reference points throughout your application
- Personalize letters and personal statement to each scholarship



SCHOLARSHIPS
» Removing barriers to
transform the industry.

WTS Advancing women
Advancing transportation
» Sacramento

Questions?
If you wish to be added to the
application distribution list or have any
questions, please contact our
Scholarship and College Relations Chair,
at sac.wts.scholarships@gmail.com.

Research and Apply, Apply, Apply!!





Mydria Clark

VST Engineering Inc.

Vice President II and Scholarships Co-Chair



Eligibility Requirements

- Undergraduate or graduate students who are U.S. citizens and reside and/or attend school in Northern California
- Demonstrated intent to pursue a career in transportation
- Commitment to improving the local community
- Grade point average (GPA) of 2.0 or above

Application Period

- Opens in early September, closes in mid to late October (2025 Scholarships closed on 10/17)
- Scholarships awarded at annual gala in early December (2025 Gala is on December 5th)

Award Levels*

- ❖ Rosa Parks Award
- ❖ Curtis Green Award
- ❖ Sharon Banks Award
- ❖ Shirley Douglas Chapter Merit Awards
- ❖ Norman Mineta Graduate Student Awards (2)

** Award amounts vary per year*

**COMTO National Scholarship Program
Opens January 1, 2026**

<https://comto.org/programs-events/national-scholarship-program>



2025 Application Materials and Scoring

- Completed Application Form (10%)
- Career Interest Essay (25%)
- Challenge-Solution Scenario (25%)
- Financial Need Statement (15%)
- GPA & Transcript (10%)
- Resume (5%)
- Two Reference Letters (10%)

Application requirements and materials may change each year, so read the entire application closely!

What We're Looking For

- Demonstrated path toward a career in the transportation industry
- Involvement in community activities and organizations, including COMTO
- Clear demonstration of financial need

JOIN COMTO -

Student Membership is FREE!

<https://comto.org/membership/become-member>

IMPORTANT TIPS FOR ESSAYS

→ BE CLEAR

- ◆ Answer the entire question
- ◆ Provide specific details
 - Example: “I was involved in COMTO...” vs. “I served as Scholarships Co-Chair for COMTO for three years...”

→ BE CONCISE

- ◆ Use fewer words to meet word count
 - Example: “I came to the realization that...” vs. “I realized...” (saves 4 words)

→ BE COMPELLING

- ◆ Use personal anecdotes and experiences
 - Answer the question first, then supplement your response with enough relevant details to help you stand out



Len Lira
Professor



A Professor's Perspective on Letters of Recommendation

A strong letter of recommendation begins with a strong relationship.

- Ask Early
- Be Specific
- Provide Materials
- Follow up

Application Tips



Do

- Read instructions carefully
- Start with your school/program
- Be specific in essays
- Save content for reuse
- Track deadlines
- Request letters of recommendation early
- Use templates
- Explore national scholarships



Don't

- Go off topic
- Exceed word count
- Skip spell check or proofreading



From Confusion To Confidence



Scholarship Links

Transportation-Focused

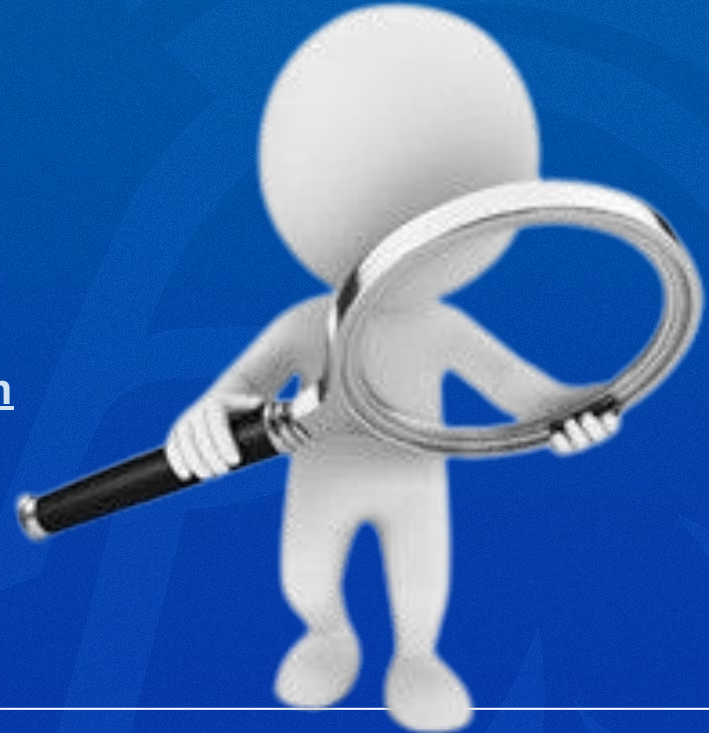
- [CTF](#)
- [COMTO](#)
- [WTS](#)
- [American Bus Association](#)

National & Professional

- [American Planning Association](#)
- [American Public Transportation Foundation](#)
- [ITS California](#)

MTI Opportunities

- [MTI Fellowship](#)



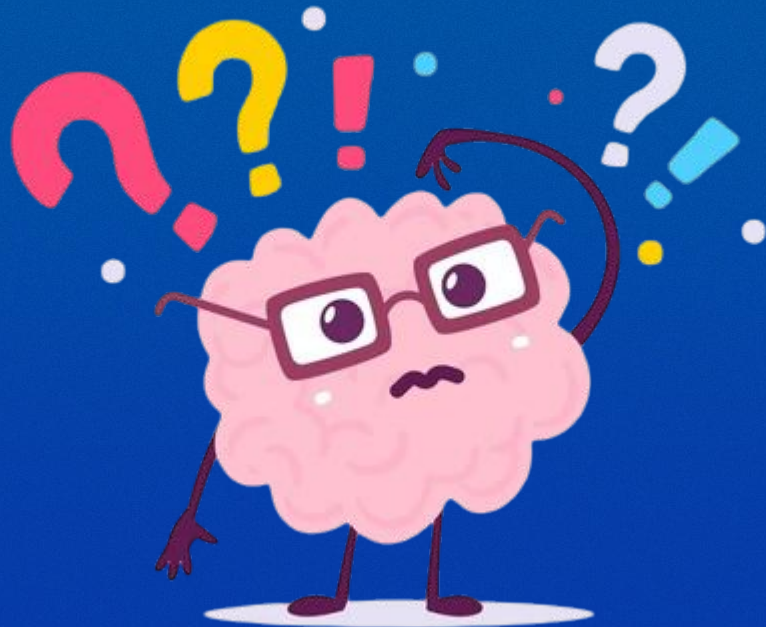
Upcoming Webinars & Events

Winter 2025–2026

- **Dec 5: SF Salesforce Tower Tour** (MTI SA & Eric Eidlin) at 3:30 PM
- **TBD: United Facilities Tour (SFO)** (MTI SA & Sean Thomas) at 7:00 PM

Spring 2026

- **Mar 14: Licensing & Certifications Webinar** (MTI SA) at 12:00 PM
- **TBD: Econolite Facility Tour**
- **TBD: Port Hueneme Tour**



Q&A Session

An aerial photograph of the San Jose State University campus, featuring a prominent Gothic-style building with a tall tower in the center. The image is overlaid with a solid blue color. The text is centered over the image.

Questions or Suggestions?

Email us at...

mtisa.sjsu@gmail.com