

NRF FOUNDATION®

2026 - 2027 Next Generation Scholarship

Application Requirements

The 2026 - 2027 [NRF Foundation Next Generation scholarship](#) application process consists of two phases. In the first phase applicants are required to submit an essay, personal brand video, resume, headshot and school transcripts. The application deadline for phase one is **Tuesday, May 26, 2026**. Final submissions are due on our [scholarship platform Kaleidoscope here](#) by May 26, and the NRF Foundation will provide checkpoints, resources and guidance along the way. There will be a short review period during which applicants will be selected to move on to the second phase of the application process.

In the second phase, applicants will be required to complete a case study created in collaboration with **Under Armour** and interview with assigned retailers. Applicants will be notified by **June 24, 2026** if they have been selected to move on to this phase and will receive their assigned project. Applicants will also be asked to submit an updated resume in August.

Next Generation Scholarship Application - Phase One

Essay

Compose an essay in response to the question below. Responses should be in paragraph format and a **maximum of three pages**. Only .doc, .docx and .pdf files will be accepted.

Essay topic

AI in Retail: Enhancing Customer Journey

Artificial intelligence is rapidly changing how retailers interact with customers, from personalized marketing to seamless checkout experiences and post-sale engagement. By leveraging AI, retailers can better understand shopper preferences, anticipate needs, and deliver tailored experiences across digital and physical channels.

Select one retailer and explore how AI could be used to enhance the customer journey, from discovery and engagement to purchase and post-sale support. In your essay, describe a specific AI application that the retailer could implement (such as virtual assistants, predictive analytics, automated customer service, or another idea) and explain how it could improve the overall customer experience. Discuss the potential benefits or opportunities for both the retailer and its customers. Consider any challenges or ethical considerations involved in implementing your solution. Conclude your essay with any final recommendations for the implementation of your idea.

**All responses must be your own original work. All responses will be reviewed using AI detection software and applications containing AI generated content may result in disqualification.*

Personal Brand Video (maximum of two minutes)

Create a video that reveals who you are and what you are passionate about. Consider including an experience that has shaped you and influenced your career aspirations. Show us the impact you have made in your communities and what motivates you to strive for success.

We ask that you be in front of the camera for a minimum of 30 seconds. There are no other format requirements, so be creative. Keep in mind, we are looking for applicants who will be industry ambassadors and inspire the next generation of students to pursue a retail career. This is not a video

NRF FOUNDATION

resume. It is your chance to tell your story and differentiate yourself from other applicants. Be authentic and memorable.

Video must be 2 minutes or less. **You will need to submit a URL as part of your application along with uploading your video.**

Tips to create your video:

- Search for 'NRF Next Generation Scholarship' on YouTube to view examples from previous years.
- Focus on sound quality and consistency throughout your video and identify locations with low background noise.
- [6 Steps to Create your Personal Branding Video](#)
- [7 Keys to Developing Your Personal Brand Story](#)
- Consider using the following video tools:
 - o iMovie
 - o Windows Movie Maker
 - o Adobe Spark
 - o Shotcut
- *Please be sure to double check that your video link has open viewing permissions so that it can be viewed by judges.*

Recommendation

For this section, you should list a name and email for an academic reference or university advisor.

*Note: You do **not** need a letter of recommendation, please just list your academic reference.*

Resume

You must upload a current resume as part of the application package.

Transcript

You must upload a copy of your college transcript (does not have to be official transcripts) to verify your GPA.

Headshot

You must submit a high-resolution color headshot, at least 300 dpi in jpg or tif format. Photographs will be used for promotional purposes to feature recipients of the Next Generation Scholarship.

Next Generation Scholarship Application - Phase Two

Company Project

Applicants selected to move on to phase two, 25 semifinalists, will be assigned a case study created in collaboration with **Under Armour** on **June 24**, due on **August 10**. Additional details regarding the project will be provided at that time.

Virtual Interviews

Applicants selected to move on to phase two will be required to complete two virtual phone interviews with retailers as assigned by the NRF Foundation to be completed by the end of July. Additional details will be provided for applicants on June 24.