

Case 2: A Transformational Scholarship

Emma loves serving as director of the foundation's Summer Scholar Program. Each year the program awards scholarships to talented high school women from the Midwest so they can participate in summer academic programs at selective colleges like Harvard, Brown, and Stanford. The experience often proves transformative for these students, and it is a big boost for them in the college admissions process. Emma knows this firsthand, as she grew up in a rural part of Michigan, and her own summer experience at Yale changed her path to college. Like the students the Foundation supports, Emma would not have been able to afford the program if she hadn't received a scholarship.

Each year, the Scholar Selection Committee evaluates applications along three dimensions: academic and intellectual qualities, leadership, and transformational potential. The Foundation typically exhausts its funds long before running out of talented students, so applicants are ranked and the Board of Directors determines where the funding cut-off should be.

The "transformational potential" rating is often challenging to determine. The mission of the program is to provide exposure and support to students who otherwise would not have the financial means or mentoring support to consider these highly selective colleges. A family's finances, whether or not a student has ever traveled out of the state or the Midwest, and if any family member has attended college – particularly an elite college – are all considerations.

Emma pulls up Tiffani Williams' application. Tiffani has excellent grades, and her teachers rave about her ability to move class discussions in new directions with her creative ideas. There is no question she is active in her community, as she has held leadership positions in her church youth group, student council, and peer mentoring program. However, Emma is unsure how to rate Tiffani for transformational potential. There is no question that Tiffani, who has never been far from home, would have a transformational experience, but Tiffani's older sister is an undergraduate student at Harvard. Neither of Tiffani's parents has been to college, but her older sister would undoubtedly be a good source of support, and Tiffani is likely aware of schools like Harvard because of her sister. Still, Emma knows that Tiffani will not be able to attend a summer program without a scholarship.

Emma is wrestling with whether to give one of the few remaining scholarships to Tiffani or to reserve the funds for another student with less exposure to these types of colleges – even though none of the remaining applicants has academic and leadership credentials as outstanding as Tiffani’s. In one sense, Tiffani seems to deserve the funding more. On the other hand, she also seems to need it less.

Study questions:

1. What should Emma do, and why?
2. To what extent should Emma’s decision be guided by the stated mission of the organization? How should this consideration affect her choice, if at all?
3. How should “transformational potential” be measured? Should it be a measure only of the increase in exposure and support a student would receive through the scholarship, or should it also take into account how the student would likely take advantage of those additional opportunities?

Author: S. Caroline Kerr is Chief Executive Officer of the [Joyce Ivy Foundation](#), a non-profit organization that supports the academic advancement and leadership development of talented young women from the Midwest. Through its [Summer Scholars program](#), the Joyce Ivy Foundation gives scholarships to female high school students to participate in pre-college academic programs at partner colleges, such as Harvard, Yale, Brown, and Stanford. Previously, Caroline worked in undergraduate admissions, and as a college counselor and educational consultant. She grew up in Ann Arbor, and is a graduate of [Dartmouth College, where she currently serves on the Board of Trustees](#), and the Harvard Graduate School of Education.