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The Scholarship Provider of the Year Award recognizes scholarship providers who demonstrate exceptional leadership, efficiency and impact in their support of higher education. Two winners are selected for this honor each year. Fastweb has sponsored this prestigious award since its inception thirteen years ago. Each winner receives a monetary award of \$2,500 designated for their scholarship fund.

Both of this year's winners demonstrate that scholarships are about more than just providing money for college. It's about eliminating all barriers to student success. These programs engage the scholarship recipients through proactive intervention efforts such as mentoring, counseling and community-building programs. They have demonstrated the effectiveness of their programs by tracking and evaluating measurable outcomes, such as above-average retention and graduation rates. Both of this year's winners have approached the challenges facing their students with creativity and innovation.

The first 2012 Scholarship Provider of the Year award winner is the I'm First Scholarship Program from the Center for Student Opportunity (CSO)

The I'm First Scholarship Program from the Center for Student Opportunity (CSO) awards \$2,000 4-year renewable scholarships to students who are first in their family to go to college. There are no minimum academic qualifications for applicants. A unique aspect of the scholarship program is the virtual mentoring activities. Scholarship recipients write blogs to chronicle their personal college experiences and to offer advice to other first-generation college students. Blogging helps them reflect on their college experiences and provides them with an outlet for working their way through challenges. It also lets them mentor and motivate other first-generation college students by providing them with insights and advice from a shared perspective. Through their blogs and other activities, they become spokespeople for first-generation college students. The I'm First staff also provide direct retention and persistence support to the scholarship recipients. The scholarship money is often used for transportation and textbook costs and to avoid student loan debt. The I'm First Scholarship Program has an 89 percent persistence rate.

The second 2012 Scholarship Provider of the Year award winner is the Taylor Michaels Scholarship Program from the Magic Johnson Foundation

The Taylor Michaels Scholarship Program from the Magic Johnson Foundation provides low-income minority students from underserved urban environments with 4-year renewable scholarships, laptop computers, carefully matched access internships and mentors and an annual Life Skills Leadership conference. Half of the students come from Los Angeles, with the rest coming from the New York, Houston, Detroit/Lansing, Chicago, Cleveland and Atlanta metro areas. The Taylor Michaels Scholarship Program applies a holistic support model to improving college completion. Each student is personally matched with a mentor and/or internship opportunities after a 1:1 counseling session. Peer support is provided through alumni volunteers. The scholarship recipients also participate in an intensive career, leadership and personal development advisory program. Over 85% of the scholarship recipients have graduated with a Bachelor's degree within six years and 63% within four years.

About Fastweb

Fastweb is the nation's recognized leader in helping students pay for school, by providing scholarship and financial aid information, as well as information about jobs and internships. More than 50 million* members have benefited from Fastweb's information and services. Fastweb lets students create a personalized profile that can be matched against its expansive databases of colleges and scholarships. As the oldest and most popular free online scholarship matching service, the database has more than 1.5 million scholarships totaling over \$3.4 billion. (*9 million are active users of the site.) For more information, visit www.fastweb.com.

About the National Scholarship Providers Association

The National Scholarship Providers Association (NSPA) is the national professional organization for scholarship sponsors, with more than 300 scholarship programs as members. NSPA's mission is to advance the collective impact of scholarship providers and the scholarships they award, by sharing best practices, providing professional development opportunities and promoting student access and success in higher education. For more information, visit www.scholarshipproviders.org.