

TIPS FOR REQUESTING LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

Letters of recommendation are a vital component of nearly every fellowship application. Review committees rely upon them in order to gain a complete impression of a candidate. You should thus consider quite carefully those individuals you will ask to write on your behalf.

- Don't be scared to ask for a letter of recommendation! Faculty members, supervisors and employers are most likely accustomed to being asked. On the other hand, make sure that you **ASK whether the individual is interested and has the time** to write on your behalf, rather than demanding or assuming that he or she can and will do so.
- You should think hard in advance about **which individuals know you best** and can speak to your abilities and character most fully. The best letters will come from those who know you the best!
- **The typical number of recommenders** (sometimes called "referees") is 3, but each fellowship is different. A few require only 2, some expect 4, and the Rhodes requests up to 8!
- It is wise to consider HOW potential recommenders know you and **whether the group you are considering would, as a whole, provide a comprehensive picture of you**. You don't need 3 individuals all speaking to your leadership capabilities if a fellowship weights academic accomplishment as highly as leadership, for instance.
- When you approach a potential recommender, be sure to let him or her know which fellowship you are applying for, as well as **information about the program and why you are interested** in pursuing it. They will be equipped to write a stronger, more specific letter if they are provided those details.
- You should be prepared to provide the recommender with a current **resume or CV**, a draft of your **project proposal or statement of grant purpose**, and a draft of your **personal statement**.
- Some fellowships specifically request that referees **address one aspect** of the candidate - such as academic ability, leadership, service, or ambassadorial potential. If you are applying for a fellowship with this expectation, make certain you inform each recommender which of those areas s/he is to address.
- Most applications are completed online, but be sure you **KNOW the mechanism** that they will be using to submit their recommendations. If it is old-fashioned "snail mail," inform them of that and provide a stamped, addressed envelope. If it is email, alert them to the email address from which they will receive their instructions.

- **It is imperative that you provide your recommenders with ample TIME to plan, write and submit their letters!** Whenever possible, reach out to them a full month, or even two months, in advance of the deadline - keeping in mind that summer and holiday schedules may necessitate even more advance notice.
- **If a potential letter writer says “no,”** accept graciously, but don’t become too disheartened. It may be that s/he didn’t feel s/he had adequate time or that s/he knew you well enough to write a strong enough letter.
- **If you are uncertain** about the best individuals to approach, simply make an appointment with the Graduate Fellowship Advisor to discuss your options.
- Be sure to **thank each individual** who agrees to write on your behalf! Also, keep your recommenders apprised of the outcome of your application. If they have taken the time to write for you, they will want to know.