

When asked for a letter

Evaluate whether or not you can provide a strong recommendation. Be honest with the applicant if you feel you cannot write a strong letter or give a good reference. It is better for him/her to make an alternate selection than to receive a weak reference.

Providing a strong reference

Be specific about the applicant's experience and abilities. Relate these to the opportunity for which s/he is applying (do not simply summarize his or her CV or coursework).

Use examples to demonstrate a personal understanding of the candidate's capabilities.

If the recommendation can be shared with the applicant, and you feel comfortable doing so, you may work with him or her to create a draft letter or choose talking points.

Technical tips for letters

- **1-2 pages** is good guideline for length; letters longer than 2 pages may frustrate reviewers who must read and evaluate many applications.
- If possible use **official letterhead**, whether the letter is submitted on paper or as an electronic file attachment.
- Submit **electronic files as PDFs**, not Word documents. When possible, sign electronic letters using a **digital signature**, and always **include your title and affiliation**.
- When saving and sending files, including the name of the candidate is useful to readers who may receive numerous letters all titled "reference."
- *Be organized:* save your recommendation letters so that you can easily write for the same applicant in future (at the same time, observe your institution's legal guidelines on personnel file management).

If you agree to provide a written reference, ask the applicant to provide you with the following:

- ❑ Deadline for submission
- ❑ Clear and complete submission instructions, including: the name of the individual and department to whom the reference should be submitted, the mailing or email address, and/or all online registration and submission information

For either a written or verbal reference, ask the applicant to provide you with the following supplemental information:

- ❑ A current resumé or *curriculum vitae*
- ❑ A description of the grant, fellowship, position, or other opportunity for which s/he is applying
- ❑ Drafts of any other application materials that will be submitted – for example, a letter of intent or a description of the research project
- ❑ Specific information that supports the candidate's application for the opportunity – for example, special qualifications, or specific related activities s/he has conducted that you did not supervise

Thank you! As a conscientious recommender, you have just provided a great service to your colleagues.

These tips were compiled by members of the AIC's Education and Training Committee, 2016.