



## Letters of Recommendation

Letters of recommendation play a critical role in the application and selection process for the majority of national merit scholarships. The content of your application provides the selection committee with a wealth of information about you. Letters of recommendation are meant to provide the context of your accomplishments, an additional perspective from which to view your achievements and validates the strength of your candidacy. It is important to choose recommenders that know you personally and academically, and who can provide concrete examples of your talents and abilities that distinguish you from others.

### How to choose recommenders

- Pay attention to the stipulations in the scholarship application; many scholarships have specific requests regarding the number of letters and preferences for recommenders.
- Select individuals that are aware of your accomplishments as it relates to the focus of the specific scholarship, i.e. if the scholarship emphasizes academics, ask a professor that has supervised your academic work.
- Ask someone who personally knows you well and will be able to discuss your credentials and specific details that set you apart from others.
- Recommenders should be able to relate significant anecdotes about a recent (past 2-3 years) project, a paper or an office discussion that demonstrates your exceptional talent, commitment, and achievement.
- If the scholarship is looking for multiple qualities such as public service and academic excellence, select recommenders that can cover the different aspects of your accomplishments.

### Approaching potential recommenders

- Contact recommenders at least one month before the deadline.
- Request should be done in person. Make an appointment to meet to discuss your goals, the scholarship and your reasons for applying.
- Ask if they have the time and feel that they know you well enough to provide a strong letter of support.
- If they say *no* or *I really don't know you that well*, graciously accept their response. A lukewarm letter of recommendation will not help advance your nomination and it is better to find someone else.
- Waive your right to see the letter if applicable.

### Once you have your recommenders

- Provide details on the scholarship you are applying for, what the scholarship seeks to support and/or foster, the selection criteria, and your planned course of study or research.
- Provide a copy of your academic and extracurricular record, a copy of your personal statement and project proposal.
- Recommenders should have a clear understanding of your educational and career goals and how the scholarship supports those goals.
- Give recommenders written instructions for submission and deadlines. If the scholarship requires institutional endorsement or nomination, make sure you know to whom the letters of recommendation should be submitted. Include a stamped self-addressed envelope if appropriate.

**Follow-up with recommenders**

- Contact all recommenders one week prior to deadline to ensure that the letters have been completed.
- Send a personal thank-you note expressing your appreciation for their guidance and support.
- **Keep recommenders updated as the scholarship process moves along.**