Letters of Recommendation

The ideal reference letter comes from someone who knows the student well in the context of the specific fellowship, who can evaluate her/his performance and potential in detail, and who will write on her/his behalf with obvious interest and enthusiasm.

Effective Letters

A strong letter of recommendation needs to be tailored to the aims of the foundation, and it must address the student's suitability for a particular fellowship.

- Before writing a letter, review the information about the award and the student’s personal statement and proposed project or course of study.
- Ask the candidate who else is writing a letter of support and what the other writers will most likely emphasize. This will help you write a letter that will complement the other letters.
- In your letter, explain how the student exemplifies the specific criteria of the fellowship at hand.
  - Discuss how long you have known the student and in what context and evaluate her/him in relation to other students who are in the field or who have applied for this particular fellowship.
  - Comment on how the student will contribute to the particular fellowship program, school, or academic program
  - Explain how the fellowship and/or what it enables will make a difference in the candidates' personal or intellectual growth.

Tips

- Letters of recommendation for major fellowships are typically one-and-a-half to two pages single-spaced.
- If you are writing multiple letters for the same candidates, check your final copies to make sure the letter references correspond to the fellowship.
- Be sure to keep copies of your letters.
- If you are submitting letters of recommendation electronically, you will be prompted by the foundation with login and password information. Please hold on to this information until the competition cycle has ended. You may need to access the system later again.
- Feel free to say "No" to a request for a letter - letters for fellowship applications need to be tailored to the fellowships for which the student is applying. If you do not have time to prepare a special letter of recommendation for a student; if you cannot be emphatically positive in support of them; or if you think you are not the best person to write the letter, you should decline to write it.