Letters of Recommendation

Your letters of recommendation for national and international scholarships and fellowships should come from people who know you well. They should support and amplify other parts of your application.

Requesting a Letter of Recommendation

The letters should come from people who know you well in the context of the specific fellowship, who can evaluate your performance and potential in detail, and who will write on your behalf with obvious interest and enthusiasm.

As soon as you become interested in a fellowship:

- Analyze the fellowship’s purpose and criteria
- Review any instructions to select letter writers who can speak to particular criteria
- Set up meetings with your potential referees to discuss your interest in the award. Make an appointment at least a month in advance. Seek their advice and ask if they would support your application.
  - Discuss with them your interests in the award, your background, your future goals, and relevant experiences that you believe qualify you for the fellowship
  - Tell each letter writer why you selected her/him, what you’d like them to address, and who else will write from a different angle.
- Leave Room For a "No" – If they do not have time to prepare a special letter of recommendation for you, allow them to decline to write the letter. Don’t take it personally. Thank them for their time.

Effective Letters (when they say “Yes”)

To ensure that you get the strongest letters possible, give your referees enough advance notice and provide them with the materials they need to tailor the letter to the fellowships for which you are applying:

- The recommendation form itself (if any).
- Specific information: the deadline; to whom the letter(s) should be addressed; information about how and where the letter needs to be sent.
- A description of the fellowship and your specific project or program.
- A copy of the essay(s) you have written for the fellowship.
- A copy of the resume and/or activities list you plan to submit as part of your application
- A summary paragraph of any significant work you did with your referees.

Tell your referees that you welcome their feedback on these documents if they have time to provide it.

Follow Up

Check to make sure the letter has been sent before the deadline. Feel free to give a gentle reminder, if necessary. Send thank-you emails after everything has been submitted.