F31 Reference Letters

Selecting a Referee

- At least three, but no more than five, reference letters are required unless otherwise specified in the funding opportunity.
- The letters should be from individuals not directly involved in the application, but who are familiar with the fellow/candidate's qualifications, training, and interests.
- The sponsor/co-sponsor(s) of the application cannot be counted toward the three required references.
- Resubmission applications do not need to use the same list of referees but do require new reference letters from all referees chosen.
- Make sure you include a list of referees (including name, departmental affiliation, and institution) in the cover letter of the application so NIH staff is aware of planned reference letter submissions.
- Tip from the Workshop: you may want to draft the reference letters, maybe providing some bullet points focusing on your positive characteristics and how the training plan will move you and the science forward. This will assist the referee as they then only have to rewrite/polish what you provided rather than starting from scratch. Do this for each referee, making each letter different.

Instructions to Provide Referees

Include in the Letter:

Name of Fellow *(First & Last Name as shown in the eRA Commons)*: _____

Fellow's eRA Commons Username: _____

Opportunity Number: _____

The fellowship candidate indicated above is applying for an individual fellowship award. The purpose of this award is to provide support to promising candidates with the potential to develop the skills necessary to conduct health-related research in NIH (and where relevant, AHRQ) mission critical research areas that prepare them for productive careers within the biomedical research workforce.

The purpose of this letter is to help the committee to understand the candidate's preparedness and likelihood for success in the proposed research training plan and defined career path. In two pages or less (PDF format), describe the qualities and potential of the fellowship candidate for the research training for which support is being requested (predoctoral, postdoctoral, or senior fellow).

Referees should consider including the following information about the candidate:

- **Examples of personal characteristics** (for example, skills, abilities, traits, attitudes) that are likely to contribute most significantly to further advancement in the candidate's defined career path. Take into consideration relevant indicators for success, such as scientific curiosity, resourcefulness, and persistence.
- **Areas for development** to improve the candidate's prospects of transitioning into a productive career in the biomedical research workforce. Areas may include the following skills: technical (e.g., new techniques or technical methods, quantitative or computational approaches), operational (e.g., practices that promote rigorous, reproducible, and responsible research) or professional (e.g., management, leadership, communication, teamwork). Indicate whether the

proposed training plan will address these areas and contribute to the candidate's development and attainment of the stated career goals.

- **An overall assessment** of the candidate's preparedness and likelihood for success in the proposed research training plan. Provide examples, such as scientific or intellectual contributions, that highlight the likelihood of achieving the stated goals.

Referees may provide any additional, related comments that they believe will help reviewers evaluate the merit of the fellow's application.

Submitting Reference Letters

Please insert the name of the fellowship candidate at the top of the letter. Also, be sure to include your name and title in the letter.

Letters must be submitted directly to the eRA Commons at: https://public.era.nih.gov/commonsplus/public/reference/submitReferenceLetter.era.

Watch a demo on Submitting Reference Letters through eRA Commons.

Reference Letters are due by the application receipt deadline date but may be submitted any time after the funding opportunity opens. Reference Letters can be submitted before the grant application submission and will be held and later linked to the appropriate application once they are received at NIH.

Note

Referees DO NOT need to login to eRA Commons to submit their letters.
- Referees must provide the following information with their reference letter:
  - PI's (fellow/candidate's) eRA Commons username.
  - PI's first and last name as they appear on the PI's eRA Commons account.
  - Number of the funding opportunity (e.g., PA-25-422) to which you are applying.
- Referees and the fellow/candidate receive confirmation emails from eRA Commons upon reference letter submission.
  - The confirmation sent to a referee includes the mentee and applicant's names, a confirmation number, and the date the letter was submitted.
  - The confirmation sent to a fellow/candidate includes the referee's name and the date the letter was submitted.
- The eRA Commons links the reference letter up with the application based on eRA Commons username and funding opportunity number.
- The fellow/candidate is responsible for reviewing the status of submitted reference letters and contacting referees to ensure that letters are submitted by the due date.
  - The fellow/candidate may check the status of submitted letters by logging into their Commons account and accessing the "check status" screen for this application.
  - While the fellow/candidate is able to check on the status of the submitted letters, the letters are confidential and the fellow/candidate will not have access to the letters themselves.

You will be requested to enter the following information on-line at the time of submission:

Referee Information:
- Referee First Name (Required)
- Referee Last Name Required)
- Referee MI Name (Not Required)
- Referee e-mail (Required)
- Referee Institution/Affiliation (Required)
- Referee Department (Required)

Fellowship Candidate Information:
- PD/PI (Fellowship candidate) Commons User ID (Required)
- PD/PI's Last Name, as it appears on the PI's Commons account (Required) (will be validated to ensure they match)
- Opportunity Number (Required and must match the number of the funding opportunity under which the application is being submitted)
- Reference Letter Confirmation Number (Required only if resubmitting a letter; not required otherwise)
- Reference Letter must be no longer than **two pages maximum**. Letters must be in PDF format. Letter can be printed, signed, and scanned to create the PDF, but do not add a "digital signature" to the document. Additional tips for creating PDF files can be found at http://grants.nih.gov/grants/how-to-apply-application-guide/format-and-write/format-attachments.htm.

After you have submitted your Letter of Reference, both the sponsor and the candidate will receive a confirmation of receipt by e-mail. The sponsor e-mail confirmation will include a Reference Letter Confirmation Number. The Confirmation Number will be required when resubmitting reference letters. It is strongly recommended that the sponsor print the confirmation e-mail and maintain for their records. Please keep in mind that the candidate will not have access to the content included within the reference letter submitted by the fellowship sponsor.