

Sample Solicitation for Letters of Reference Regarding a Candidate for Tenure

Dear _____,

I am writing you in my capacity as the Chair of the Promotion and Tenure Review Panel [or Scientific Director if an outside candidate] of the [IC spelled out] to request your evaluation of Dr. [candidate's full name]. Dr. [candidate's last name] is being considered for a tenured position as senior investigator in the [Branch or Lab name], [IC acronym]. At NIH, this tenured position is roughly equivalent to the rank of Associate Professor with tenure at a university. Tenure at the NIH represents the career-long commitment of salary and a long-term commitment from the Institute to provide resources enabling him/her to design and carry out a strong, independent research program.

[A brief background on the candidate's career path may be provided here, but no reference to what other bodies, such as the BSC, may think regarding tenure should be made. For example, "Dr. xxx came to the NIH initially for a post-doctoral fellowship, then successfully competed for a tenure-track position during a national search. She/he has been on the tenure track for x years, and will be considered for tenure based on his/her performance in this capacity."]

We hope that you will be able to assist the [IC] Promotion and Tenure Committee [remove the IC P & T Committee if outside candidate], as well as the NIH Central Tenure Committee who will also consider your evaluation in their deliberations, by evaluating Dr. xxx's accomplishments and potential. Your evaluation may be broad-ranging, but in particular we would like you to address the following:

1. Do you consider Dr. xxx to be an independent and productive scientist? If so, how do you rate his/her originality and the overall significance of the research compared to that of others at the same stage in the field?
2. What is your assessment of Dr. xxx's potential for future research productivity and significant contributions to this field?
3. Are Dr. xxx's achievements commensurate with recently tenured research scientists leading comparable research programs at your institution?

[the following paragraph is mostly applicable to candidates from the tenure-track and may be removed otherwise] Dr. xxx's level of intramural support has been determined, in large part, by [#] reviews by the Institute/Center (IC)

Board of Scientific Counselors (BSC), which is composed of extramural scientists with outstanding scientific credentials who are committed to provide rigorous, objective reviews of each investigator at the NIH. Please note that NIH intramural investigators are supported by the Intramural Research Program of each IC and are not eligible to receive extramural grant funds, although they may serve as unfunded collaborators on NIH grants.

To assist you with this endeavor, I am enclosing Dr. xxx's curriculum vitae, bibliography, and five reprints that Dr. xxx feels represent his/her major accomplishments. We realize that your time is valuable and we appreciate your efforts on our behalf. It would be most helpful if you could respond by [date].

Under the Freedom of Information Act, we may be required to supply your letter without your identification to the individual being reviewed if he/she requests it. However, such requests have occurred rarely at the NIH, and your letter would otherwise be handled in a strictly confidential manner.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at

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