

FAQ for Referee Letters: Understanding External Letters

Referee letters are an essential component of the appointment or promotion review process at Tufts University School of Medicine. Please note it is one of **the most frequent reasons for delays in the process are not having the correct amount and type of external letters**. Referee letter solicitation is often the most time consuming part of the promotions process.

Soliciting the Letters:

- The candidate provides a list of referee names to the Chief.
- Faculty candidates cannot solicit letters directly.
- Your Chief will solicit the letters on your behalf.
- All letters, regardless of recommendation, will be included in your final dossier.

Qualities of an External Referee Letter:

- Referees should be at or above the rank for which the candidate is being proposed
- For professor tracks, all peer letters should hold that rank.
- The majority of letters should come from external evaluators who can objectively evaluate your accomplishments based on your CV.
- Listing more referee contacts than required is preferred since it can be helpful to expedite the process.

How Many Letters Are Needed?

For Associate Professor (all tracks)

- Minimum of 4 external peer letters
- Minimum of 2 internal peer letters (cannot include a letter from your Chief)
- Two to four student or trainee letters

For Professor (all tracks)

- Minimum of 5 external peer letters
- Minimum of 3 internal peer letters (cannot include a letter from your Chief)
- Two to four student or trainee letters

External Referee Criteria:

An external referee is someone who is not a MMC or TUSM faculty member and with whom the candidate has not had a working relationship as colleague, collaborator, trainee, or student, within the last 3 years.

Professionals within the same discipline might know of the candidate and still be classified as external referee if they are “arm’s length” referees whose knowledge of the candidate comes from their awareness of the candidate’s work through publication, presentation, or even personal exchange, so long as that personal exchange is not in the context of a mentor, boss, or co-worker.

External Referees Include:

- Faculty you know informally through professional organizations and specialty

- societies, scholarly presentations, review panels (study sections, advisory boards, etc.)
- Leading experts in field, or individuals at peer institutions.
 - Editors or section editors of journals for which you review.
 - Chairs and colleagues of committees at the national level on which you serve.
 - Chairs and colleagues:
 - Who have invited you to do a visiting professorship or give an invited lecture
 - Who are on grant review boards with you
 - Who have invited you to speak at national meetings
 - National officers of your specialty society.

Do Not Use These as External Referees:

- Family, friends, and anyone with a potential conflict of interest.
- Current or former colleagues, collaborators, or co-authors. Or those who had a significant role in your professional development (e.g. mentors, thesis advisors, program directors), unless it has been more than 3 years.
- Co-investigators on a presently funded research project or within the past 5 years (with the exception of very large clinical trials where investigators have a distant relationship.)

For questions, please contact your Chief, or Patti White, Department of Medical Education at WHITEP2@mmc.org or 207-662-0511.