

Letters of Evaluation

Letters of evaluation are required for the review of candidates for appointment, promotion and tenure. The letters provide essential information to reviewers on the evaluation of a candidate's contributions, achievements, and their academic reputation outside UMMS.

Faculty members are strongly recommended to develop a list of individuals who can be solicited for letters of evaluation at an early stage—ideally several years prior to their review for promotion or tenure.

Procedure for soliciting letters of evaluation ([APP Sections 3.12.b & 3.12.c](#))

The department chair or the GSN Dean is responsible for selecting evaluators and soliciting letters of evaluation.

1. A faculty candidate submits to their department chair or the GSN Dean a **proposed** list of individuals who might be solicited to write letters of evaluation.
 - The list should be divided into the categories described below and include complete contact information (title, affiliation, business address, email, telephone).
 - Faculty may contact individuals to determine their availability and willingness to write letters.
 - Faculty should NOT provide evaluators with templates or drafts of letters.
 - A faculty candidate may also submit a list, with written justification, of individuals whom the candidate believes may not be able to provide a fair and impartial evaluation.
2. The chair or GSN Dean selects the evaluators: they may use some or all of the individuals proposed by the faculty candidate and may add individuals. At least two individuals proposed by the candidate must be used.
 - Department staff send solicitation letters to the evaluators with the candidate's CV and narrative statement (if available). The OFA recommends that departments use the standard format provided by the OFA for the solicitation letter.
 - The candidate is **NOT** informed of the identity of the letter writers or the contents of the letters.
3. The letters of evaluation are received by the department and added to the candidate's Basic File.
 - All letters received must be added to the file.
 - For appointment or promotion the list of individuals solicited for letters of evaluation is not included in the candidate's Basic File. For tenure, however, the candidate's Tenure Dossier includes a list of the individuals solicited.

Letters of Evaluation are divided into **three** categories. The numbers of letters required in each category depend on the proposed academic rank.

Minimum Requirements for . . .	Category 1	Category 2	Category 3
Appointment/promotion to Instructor/Assistant Professor	minimum 3	not required	any number
Appointment/promotion to Associate Professor/Professor*	minimum 3	minimum 3	any number
Award of Tenure	any number	minimum 5	any number

***Note:** additional Category 2 letters, above the minimum of 3, can be counted as Category 1 letters to meet the required minimum total of 6 letters for appointment/promotion to Associate Professor/Professor.

Category 1 Letters — Attestations ([APP Section 3.12.c.i](#))

For appointment or promotion to any rank at least three letters are solicited from individuals who can attest to the candidate's qualifications. Such individuals may be UMMS faculty members, colleagues at the same or previous institution, or past or present mentors, supervisors or collaborators.

Instructor and Assistant Professor. Typically, these letters are solicited from individuals who can attest to the candidate's training and experience, competence, and readiness for an entry level faculty position. Evaluators might include current or former training program directors, research supervisors, mentors, and others who can comment on the preparation of the candidate.

Associate Professor and Professor. Typically, these letters are solicited from individuals who can attest to the candidate's performance in an Area of Distinction or in Academic Service. Evaluators might include current or former supervisors, such as a Division Chief, lab head, or course director, who can comment on the candidate's performance as a clinician, investigator or educator, respectively. Current or former collaborators and mentors, and referring physicians may also provide valuable information about the candidate.

Category 2 Letters — Unbiased External Evaluations. ([APP Section 3.12.c.ii](#)).

For appointment or promotion to the ranks of Associate Professor or Professor, at least three letters must be solicited from individuals who are at an academic rank equal to or above the rank proposed for the candidate (or in an equivalent position in a non-academic institution) and who are not UMMS faculty members. These individuals should not have a personal and/or professional relationship with the candidate that suggests ***a real or perceived conflict of interest or bias*** in evaluating the candidate. For example, the individual should not be a personal friend or relative, a close colleague at the same or previous institution, or a past or present mentor, supervisor or collaborator (as demonstrated by co-authored papers or joint funding).

Who May Write Category 2 Letters

1. UMMS uses the NIH Policy on Reviewer Conflict of Interest ([NIH-OD-13-010](#)) as a guide for screening. Individuals should **NOT** be solicited for Category 2 letters if they are **collaborators, co-authors or mentors of the candidate within the previous three years**, as demonstrated by
 - co-authorship on scholarly works, including meeting abstracts and presentations, but not including position papers, professional group or conference reports
 - being named with the candidate on a current, pending, or completed funding award (except for providing a resource or service that is freely available to anyone in the scientific community)
 - other evidence of a close personal, professional or financial relationship (as identified either by the candidate or evaluator)
2. Beyond this three-year window, potential evaluators should not have a real or perceived conflict of interest or bias that would cause a reviewer to question the evaluator's impartiality.

For example, Category 2 letters should not be solicited from individuals who have

- a close personal relationship with the candidate
- multiple papers or grants with the candidate
- served in an official capacity as a supervisor or training director for the candidate (e.g., former chair, lab head, fellowship or residency director)

All Category 2 letters for a candidate should not come from individuals at the same institution.

Individuals who do not meet the criteria for Category 2 may write Category 1 letters.

3. **Responsibility** for ensuring that category 2 letters meet the criteria occurs at four stages in the process:
 - the **candidate**, in compiling a proposed list of individuals to write letters;
 - the **chair**, GSN Dean, or their designee, in selecting individuals and reviewing the letters received;
 - the **DPAC**, in reviewing the candidate's Basic File; and
 - the **Office of Faculty Affairs** (OFA), in reviewing Basic Files submitted for review by school PACs.

If the chair, GSN Dean or DPAC determine that the letters received for a candidate do not meet the criteria for Category 2 letters, additional letters should be solicited before formal review of the candidate. Concerns about letters raised at a later stage of the process may delay review and approval of the candidate.

4. The **ideal Category 2 letter** is from an authority in the field who knows the candidate well enough to highlight their accomplishments and address unique aspects of their career but not someone who would be perceived as having a positive bias or conflict in evaluating the candidate. For example, Category 2 letters could be solicited from individuals:
 - who have worked with the candidate on a review panel, advisory board or committee for a public or professional organization
 - who work in the same field, but do not currently collaborate with the candidate, and may have witnessed the candidate present at meetings or other institutions

Category 3 Letters — Teaching and Mentoring. ([APP Section 3.12.c.iii](#))

Optional letters (no defined number) attesting to the candidate's effectiveness in teaching or mentoring may be solicited from students, trainees and/or mentees proposed by the candidate.

Individuals to be solicited for Category 3 letters should be included in the candidate's proposed list of individuals submitted to their chair or the GSN Dean; ***candidates should not solicit these letters themselves.***