

TIPS FOR RECOMMENDERS

You have been asked to write a letter of recommendation for a candidate to The Paul & Daisy Soros Fellowships for New Americans. These letters are very important to the decision process and are read by specialist readers and selection panelists alike. A letter that reads as if the writer does not really know the candidate ("X was in my class of 200 and got an A minus in an otherwise quite difficult exam. Yours sincerely...") might as well not been written at all.

- The letter should complement the rest of the applicant's materials, mentioning and elaborating on themes raised in the essays and application.
- Make clear how long you have known the applicant and in what context.
- Directly address the scholarship criteria, discussing how well you feel the applicant fits them. For instance:
 - ***Creativity, originality, and initiative demonstrated in any area of his/her life.*** This criterion can be demonstrated in a many ways: creative expression in the arts, original thinking when faced with a difficult choice or situation, strong leadership, etc.
 - ***Accomplishment, activity that requires drive and sustained effort.*** This can be shown through either academic or extracurricular achievement and should reveal the candidate's dedication and capacity for hard work.
 - ***Commitment to the values expressed in the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights, which includes activity in support of human rights and the rule of law, in opposition to unwarranted encroachment on personal liberty, and in advancing the responsibilities of citizenship in a free society.*** A bit more amorphous, this criterion can be well exemplified in many ways. Any activity that shows the candidate exercising the rights given him or her by the U.S. Constitution or the Bill of Rights would apply. Examples include organizing a voter registration campaign, working for Amnesty International, being active in a political group, working in a public health clinic, producing art that expresses opinions that might not be allowed in other countries, etc.
- Give vivid, concrete examples of the qualities you admire in the applicant. Evidence is more useful and interesting than adjectives, however glowing.
- Note any change or development you have observed in the applicant.
- The best letters are between 1 ½ and 2 ½ pages in length and reflect quite a lot of time and thought invested by the writer.
- Making the deadline of November 1st is key. Letters that arrive after that date have diminished effect. If you know that you cannot make the deadline, let the candidate know so that he or she can find another recommender.