

## Letters of Reference for RTPC Faculty Promotion

Academic units have a long history of using faculty members to review the accomplishments of a candidate for promotion at every rank and track. After all, who would know better than another faculty member the challenges they face and the outcomes they achieve.

**The chair of your academic unit is the only person who will choose the referees, and the only person who is authorized to send a letter from USC requesting they serve as a referee.** It would be a violation of professional ethics for the candidate to be directly involved or to be told the names of referees.

As a candidate for promotion, the faculty may make suggestions for inclusion or exclusion, but this is advisory. The chair is under no obligation to follow these suggestion(s).

The referee letters are held in strict confidence with only the chair, administrator, ad hoc committee members, the Faculty Development Committee and the Dean(s) having access.

There are three basic categories for referees:

- 1) Referees who know the candidate and the candidate knows them.  
Other names for this category are colleagues, collaborators, former students, and/or classmates.
- 2) Referees who do not formally work with the candidate but do know faculty of similar qualifications. These are called external and/or at “arm’s length” to signify their independence from the candidate.  
They may have heard the candidate speak, or may share membership in a professional society, or may work/volunteer in the same hospital/organization but the referee and the candidate have no more than a casual connection. The candidate may have shared work referee for a professional society, but creative material for publication has not been and is not planned to be authored by the referee and candidate  
These referees are likely to have similar values and goals to those of the candidate, but they will not have shared publications, nor have they been classmates at any time, nor will they have financial ties.  
Another characteristic is that these referees can be “candid” and “balanced” in their review.
- 3) Individuals with whom the candidate have had professional conflicts. The candidate may ask the chair to consider excluding them.

Each of the three referee types can offer unique insights during the review of the faculty dossier that reflects the candidate’s career and their letters are useful to the promotion review process.

**Finally—confidentiality has no time limitation. The candidate may have no contact with these potential referees regarding the promotion process.**