

Letters of Recommendation, Collaboration, Support, etc.

5 CFR 2635.702 (b) states that employee shall not use or permit the use of their title or authority in a manner that could reasonably be construed to imply that the Agency sanctions or endorses the personal activities of themselves or others.

5 CFR 2635.702 (c) states that employee shall not use or permit the use of their title or authority to endorse any product, service, or enterprise.

Scenarios:

A partner has asked me to write a letter to include in a grant application package. We plan to work with this group on this particular project if they are awarded the grant.

May I write the letter?

Yes. You may provide one if the Agency has committed to working on the project AND if the letter states only facts. The letter may not contain any opinions of the validity or value of the project or in any other way endorse the outside organization.

A partner has asked us to write a letter to bolster their grant application package. We aren't specifically collaborating with them, but we do think its work is valuable to our mission.

May I write the letter?

No. If the Agency is not going to collaborate on the project, the only purpose of this letter is to endorse the partner and its work, which is prohibited.

A partner has asked us to write a letter to add to their grant application package on previous work we've done together. We have no plans to collaborate on this specific project.

May I write the letter?

Maybe. The Agency may write a letter of fact stating details (not opinions) of previous collaborations. The letter should not add value to the partner or its work. However, it is rare for a grantor to request this type of letter. It is more likely the applicant really is asking for letters as outlined in the scenarios above.

Helpful Hints

- Quite often the title of the letter doesn't always reflect the intent. If you are unsure, please confirm with the requestor what they really want to achieve with the letter; if possible, ask for the language from the application package itself. It is the content of the letter, rather than the title, that determines if it is appropriate or not.
- You may always say "no." Just because you may be permitted to write a letter does not mean that you are required to. You may want to consider how you will handle multiple requests of this nature in the future. Are you comfortable picking and choosing between partners? Do you have the ability to write letters to everyone with whom the Agency is collaborating?

Questions? Click [here](#) to find your USDA Ethics Specialist.