Transcript – How to Submit an NIH Reference Letter

Welcome to this video tutorial on how to submit a reference letter on behalf of an NIH applicant. The submission of reference letters are typically requested for various fellowship and career development funding opportunities offered by the National Institutes of Health, NIH.

If you are asked by an applicant to submit a reference letter, meaning you are a "referee," here are key points you will need to keep in mind.

- You should not have any role in the proposed application or project, but you should be familiar with the applicant's qualifications, training and interests.
- All reference letters must be submitted through eRA Commons, they cannot be accepted through any other means.
- You will need three key pieces of information to successfully submit the letter:
    1. The applicant's unique eRA Commons User ID.
    2. The correct spelling of the applicant's last name as it appears in eRA Commons.
    3. And, the funding opportunity announcement (FOA) number to which they are applying.
- You do not need an eRA Commons account to submit a reference letter.
- Reference letters can be submitted at any time from the open date or the earliest submission date listed in the FOA, up to the application submission deadline.

The applicant should provide you with their Commons ID, their last name and the FOA number so that you can successfully submit the reference letter.

The requirements of the reference letter are:
    It cannot be longer than two pages
    It cannot be password protected
    And it must be in simple PDF format (a flattened, non-fillable PDF format)
    Letters should be submitted on organization letterhead and should provide any specific information requested in the FOA and application guide instructions.

To begin the process of submitting a reference letter, you will go to the eRA Commons login page at https://public.era.nih.gov/commons/

Approximately in the middle of the page you will find a section with the title, Submit a Reference Letter. This is followed by some text that provides links to information and resources concerning reference letters should you need them. Click on the bold Select a Reference Letter text.

This will open the Submit Reference Letter screen. As the referee, you will provide all the information about yourself in the Referee Information section. Required fields are identified with a red asterisk.

In the Applicant Information section, add the information provided to you by the applicant. If this is the first time you are submitting a reference letter for this applicant and this funding opportunity announcement, you can ignore the Reference Letter Confirmation number field. This is only used if you are revising a reference letter that has already been submitted.

When you have finished filling out all the fields, click Continue. This will open the reference letter upload screen. To upload your reference letter, click on the Choose File button in the center of the Reference Letter section. You will navigate to your reference letter and select it.

Once uploaded, the upload screen will show the name of the file. You will use the View button if you wish to review the letter you uploaded, or you can click Submit to send it to NIH. If you click Cancel, all information added to the forms to this point will be deleted and you will be brought back to the initial Submit Reference Letter screen.

With the reference letter submitted, you will see a confirmation window that will include a confirmation number. This number is important should you want to revise the letter you just submitted.

Shortly after clicking submit, you will receive a confirmation email with all the information regarding the submission of the letter. It will include the confirmation number and instructions on how to revise the reference letter.

There are a number of resources available to assist you with Reference Letters. If you need technical help with submitting a letter, please contact the eRA Service Desk.
- Have a Referee Submit a Reference Letter –
  https://era.nih.gov/applicants/reference-letter.htm
- eRA FAQs –
  https://era.nih.gov/faqs.htm#XII
- Grants & Funding Reference Letters –
  https://grants.nih.gov/grants/how-to-apply-application-guide/submission-process/reference-letters.htm
- eRA Service Desk –
  https://grants.nih.gov/support/

This concludes this video tutorial on how to submit a reference letter on behalf of an NIH applicant. Thank you for watching.