

UConn IDEA Grant

Asking for a Letter of Recommendation

UConn IDEA Grant
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The following information addresses common questions students have about asking for letters of recommendation for their UConn IDEA Grant applications. OUR Advisors are available to answer any specific questions you may have and to help you navigate the UConn IDEA Grant application process.

Who should I ask for a letter of recommendation?

Two letters of recommendation must be submitted as part of your UConn IDEA Grant application. The first letter should be from a member of the UConn community – faculty member, advisor, instructor, or other professional staff member.

The second letter may also be from a member of the UConn community or another university, a high school teacher or advisor, a current or former employer or supervisor, or a mentor in the wider community.

In addition, you have the option to submit a third letter of recommendation to support your project proposal. This is not required. The optional third letter may be from a project supervisor, faculty member, professional staff member, or other community mentor.

If you have secured project mentorship prior to applying you are encouraged to ask your mentor to write a letter of recommendation in support of your proposed project, and indicating their willingness to serve as your project mentor.

Letters of recommendation from family, friends, or other peers are not appropriate.

You want to ask recommenders who know you well and who can write a thorough and meaningful letter that speaks to your qualifications. They should be able to describe your work positively and be able to favorably compare you with your peers.

Your recommenders will also need to have a clear understanding of the project you're proposing, be supportive of you engaging in the proposed work, and speak to your potential to successfully complete the project. Recommenders should also know you well enough to be able to understand how this project fits with your academic and/or career goals and interests, and be able to vouch for the significance of the work in their letter.

How far in advance do I need to ask for letters?

Don't wait until the last minute to ask for letters. It's preferable to give your recommenders a few weeks lead time to craft a thoughtful, effective letter. Be respectful of your recommender's time; they have many competing obligations, and if you wait until the last minute to approach them they may not be able to accommodate your request.

How do I ask for a letter of recommendation?

Set up a meeting with potential recommenders to discuss the UConn IDEA Grant and your project proposal. Bring the following materials with you to this meeting:

- A copy of the Information for Recommenders instruction sheet. Plan to leave it with your recommender once they agree to write a letter on your behalf.
- A copy of your project proposal, personal statement, and other descriptive information from the application (drafts are fine) that may be helpful to discuss during the meeting.
- A current résumé or a list of your jobs, internships, activities, honors and any other background information that would be relevant to your project proposal.

Use the meeting as an opportunity to discuss and get feedback on your UConn IDEA Grant proposal, to share your interests in and motivations for pursuing the project, and to talk about what you've done thus far to prepare yourself to be successful in this undertaking. During the course of your conversation, politely ask if they would be willing to write a letter of recommendation on your behalf.

"Do you feel you know me (my academic record / my leadership qualities / skills and abilities, etc.) well enough to write a strong letter of recommendation to support my UConn IDEA Grant proposal?"

By asking this question, you've now given the professor (or other potential recommender) the opportunity to either agree to write a letter on your behalf, or if they don't feel as though they know you well enough to write a strong endorsement, to decline gracefully.

If the answer is "yes," then provide your recommender a copy of the Information for Recommenders instruction sheet and go over the timeline and process for submission.

If the answer is "no," don't push or get upset. Thank them for considering your request and move the conversation back to your proposal and any feedback or suggestions for improvement they may be willing to provide. It's essential to maintain your composure and professionalism; you don't want to lose the opportunity for future advising or mentorship.

Follow-up with your recommenders

After your meeting send a thank you note to your recommender letting them know you appreciate their willingness to write a letter on your behalf.

Prior to the application deadline, check in with the IDEA Grants Coordinator to confirm that both letters of recommendation have been received. If they have not, send a polite reminder of the upcoming deadline to your recommenders.

Keep your recommenders apprised of the outcome of your application and your project, checking in with them periodically and sharing updates.