

WISEST INITIATIVES / *POSTDOCTORAL PROGRAM* / *Post-doc Institute*

Recommendation letters: Whom should you ask?

Cynthia J. Jameson

This is a follow-up on the December Post-doc session presentation on “Cultivating your sponsors”

Required:

1. Your Ph. D. advisor
2. Your Post-doc Advisor

Unflattering questions arise if they are not included on your reference list, which may be enough to put your file into the discard pile.

Additional ones, choose them carefully:

3-4 Other professors who have intimate knowledge of at least part of your research work, best is a well established researcher in your field from another institution (better yet if you have two of these). If you do not have any of these, start cultivating your sponsors now. Find them at conferences, once you have found them, make sure they are aware of all the excellent work you have done and the recognition received by same.

5. If applying to a small college: choose someone who will specifically speak about your teaching ability: someone who has observed or supervised your teaching. If applying to a research university, skip this.

Do not choose a “lightweight”, i.e., someone not respected in your field. Choose someone who is known to write effective letters. Make sure that every one on your reference list has a copy of at least your CV, better yet a copy of your entire application package.

Review of Identifying and Cultivating your Sponsors:

Find them in your own field, discover them in conferences

Seek them out in annual conferences to maintain the connection

Through third parties you may hear about people in your field who like your work

Alumni of your past research groups provide good “third parties” for channeling such information

Give a talk or poster in at least one conference a year to maintain such connections

These sponsors are not only helpful as references for the job search, they will be writing your letters of recommendation for special national awards, for election to Fellow of this or that professional society; they may be asked to anonymously referee your proposal, or a manuscript submitted for publication, or your tenure/promotion evaluation.