

Ethics Guidance for Recommendations and Character References

Executive Branch employees must consult 5 CFR § 2635.702 and 18 USC §205 before using their official title in a verbal or written recommendation or character reference for friends or colleagues to prevent misuse of the employee's public office for personal gain.

Follow the flowchart below to determine if you can provide a recommendation or character reference and use your official title.

START

Is the United States the intended recipient of the recommendation?

YES

Is the individual one of your supervisors or able to influence the content of your recommendation?

NO

NO

Do you have firsthand knowledge of the individual's ability and character?

NO

YES

No, you may not provide a recommendation for an individual who may influence the content of your letter.
See 18 U.S.C. §205(a)(2)

No, you may not provide a recommendation. You should only provide a recommendation for an individual you know well.

Do you have personal knowledge of the ability or character of the individual from working with them during your federal employment?

YES

NO

YES

Yes, you may provide a recommendation for this individual using your official title or office stationery.
See 5 C.F.R. 2635.702(b)

Are you recommending the individual for federal employment?

YES

NO

No, you may not provide a recommendation for this individual using your official title, position, or authority. You may provide a recommendation in your personal capacity.