

Tips on Crafting the Best Nomination Letters

The Awards Committee, which includes international ATS leaders from all disciplines, invites nomination letters in each category for talented individuals from around the world. Every nominee will be thoroughly and fairly considered based on the materials submitted. Aside from the candidate's updated curriculum vitae, the nomination letter is the single most important component.

The difference between a clinician and/or scientist receiving recognition and one who does not rests squarely on the information contained in the nomination letter. Therefore, it is important that the authors of these nomination letters present the best representation of their colleagues. In this column, we will share examples of how this is best done, based on the many letters we have reviewed.

First, let's cover the basics. It is not generally considered appropriate for candidates to nominate themselves. It is also preferable that candidates are not nominated for multiple categories at one time. The Awards Committee may shift a nominee from one category to another that is more appropriate based on award criteria and nominee qualifications. It's always best practice to choose the best single category for the candidate to show that the nomination has been thoughtfully considered. We recommend that individuals consult with either the chair or vice chair of the Award Committee for suggestions regarding which award may be most appropriate for your candidate. Due to the high caliber of nominees we receive, it is common for individuals to be nominated several years in a row for an award before receiving the honor—in this case it isn't necessary to generate a new letter each time, an updated version will be requested and is usually sufficient.

Send one well written letter per candidate. The Awards Committee only accepts one nominating letter per nominee. We found multiple letters simply contained slight variations of the same information. That being said, it is incredibly important to have other colleagues endorse a single nomination letter to strengthen the support for an individual. A well-crafted concise letter that addresses the most important information, and that is signed by multiple parties, generally has been very well received by the awards committee. Letters that contain short, poignant quotes from different signatories are acceptable and can be an effective means of highlighting the breadth of contributions of individual nominees.

Show close ties to the nominee. Letters are more effective when the writer is someone who's had a close relationship with the nominee. It is effective when the nominators are enthusiastic about the nominee in a personal way. Nominations from trainees, mentors, and close colleagues of the candidate carry significant weight with the committee. It is perfectly acceptable to nominate a close colleague from your institution. (Note that only active members of the awards committee are excluded from submitting nominators.)

Clearly state the candidate's contribution to human health. Let's not forget a fundamental: What we're trying to do is improve the lung health of the world. As such, the letter should outline a nominee's impact on human health. Describe as clearly as possible how the nominee has contributed to the advancement of pulmonary, critical care, and/or sleep medicine. Highlights can include those associated with the nominee's contributions to initiatives of the ATS. A concise summary of accomplishments is very helpful to the award committee.

Include the candidate's clinical and scientific accomplishments, and emphasize his or her impact on the future generations of our field. In the previous section, you covered the candidate's contributions to human health, and in this section you will describe how the candidate is contributing to the clinical practice or body of science in his or her particular field. Pointing out how the field has changed or how the nominee's work has contributed to new directions in clinical and discovery science is an effective way to highlight the impact of his or her accomplishments.

A nominee's success can also be quantified by the successes of his or her protégés. A letter should show how a nominee has helped form a subsequent generation. Remember that we're judged not just on our accomplishments alone, but by the path of the people who come after us.

End on a strong note. The authors should finish the letter by quickly covering the highlights of the previous sections and stating the case once again for the candidate. This provides context for group discussion and comparison between nominees by the Awards Committee, and it ensures that the take home messages of the nomination letter are clearly communicated. Include names and institutions of anyone who supports the nomination. The list can include, current and former colleagues, protégés, students, etc.