



Lake Minnetonka District Advancement Committee

Reference Letter Overview, Questions & Answers



The Lake Minnetonka District Advancement Committee often receives questions about reference letters that accompany the Eagle application. Here is a general process overview and some of the most common questions and answers.

Overview:

- The scout selects 6 (or 5 if he does not have an employer) people to provide reference letters, contacts them to see if they are willing to write a reference letter, and lists those references and their contact information on the Eagle application form.
- The application form lists the types of references required, and include parents/guardians, religious, educational, employer (if any), and any two other references.
- Either an adult from the Troop or the scout himself sends out the request for references.
- References are sent directly to an adult in the troop...typically the Scoutmaster, Advancement Chair, Committee Chair, or Eagle Advisor. They are not sent to the scout or to anyone in the scout's family.
- The letters are sent to the Council office along with the application form and other paperwork.
- The reference letters are given to Board of Review members to review just prior to the Board of Review, then are collected by the District rep at the end of the Board of Review and destroyed.

Questions and Answers

Q: *How many references are required on the Eagle Scout application form?*

A: The Eagle application form calls for 6 references. The only reference line on the application form that can be left blank is the Employer if the scout is not employed.

Q: *If the scout doesn't attend a religious institution, who can write the Religious reference?*

A: The scout must list a Religious reference. If he does not currently attend an organized religious institution, or does not feel comfortable asking someone from his current religious institution for a reference letter, there are a few other options. The parents can provide the religious reference. A godparent, youth minister, confirmation sponsor, troop chaplain or another person familiar with the faith life of the scout can provide a letter. The scout may also write his own reference letter where he would indicate how he practices "Duty to God" in the Scout Oath and how the scout is "Reverent" from the 12th point of the Scout Law.

Q: *Who sends reference letter requests to the references listed on the application form?*

A: The scout should first ask references if they would be willing to be references before a written request is made. The unit leader or a designee (who could be the Eagle Advisor, Committee Chair, Advancement Chair, or even the scout himself) makes a written request to the references asking for a confidential reference letter on behalf of the scout to be returned to the unit leader (or a designated non-family member adult). It is advisable to include a stamped addressed envelope with the request and a copy of the Scout Oath and Scout Law.

Q: *Who receives the reference letters?*

A: Typically the unit leader or Eagle Advisor receives the reference letters, but any adult designee could receive them. The completed reference letters are not to be viewed by or returned to the scout. Doing so could discourage the submission of negative information.

Q: *Who gets to see the reference letters?*

A: Completed reference responses are property of the council and are confidential, only to be reviewed by Board of Review members. Once the Board of Review has been held, or an appeal process conducted, responses shall be returned to the district rep who sat on the Board and destroyed.

Q: *What if all of the references do not send responses?*

A: It is the responsibility of the Troop to gather responses. If after a reasonably diligent effort no response can be obtained from a reference, the Board of Review must go on without that letter. The scout is not required to submit additional references or provide replacements. The council prefers that all the reference letters be collected and turned in with the Eagle Scout application and paperwork prior to the Board of Review. However, paperwork can be submitted without all the reference letters to avoid a delay in holding the Board of Review after a scout's 18th birthday.

Q: *We used to be able to return the reference letters to scouts after their Board of Review. Why can we no longer do that?*

A: The Guide to Advancement, issued by National, no longer allows scouts to see reference letters. According to the Guide, "the responses are not to be viewed by or returned to the Scout. Doing so could discourage the submission of negative information. For the same reason, those providing references do not have the option of giving the reference directly to the Scout and shall not be given the option of waiving confidentiality."