

MSW Program: Tips for Recommenders

Thank you for supporting an applicant to our Master of Social Work (MSW) program at MSU Denver. Your recommendation provides important insight into the applicant's readiness for graduate-level social work education and practice. Please review the guidance below to help you submit a strong letter.

We use recommendations to understand:

- The applicant's professional and/or academic strengths
- Their readiness for graduate study and social work practice
- Their interpersonal skills, ethics, and ability to work with diverse populations
- Evidence of their commitment to social justice and service

General Guidance:

- You will submit your recommendation through our online portal
- Recommendations **must** be received by the deadline for the application to be considered complete. We cannot consider incomplete applications for admission.

What You Will Be Asked to Evaluate:

- You will briefly state the nature and length of your relationship with the applicant
- Rate the applicant on key competencies identified in the recommendation form
 - Academic potential
 - Emotional Capacity
 - Responsiveness
 - Leadership
 - Team Work
 - Effective Communication
- Respond to the short-answer prompts provided in the form; an additional letter is **not** required. Prompts include:
 - If the applicant is admitted to the Master of Social Work program at MSU Denver, what will be the greatest strengths they bring with them to graduate school?
 - If the applicant is admitted to the Master of Social Work program at MSU Denver, what will be their greatest area of growth?



- We recognize that individuals can serve as both leaders and members of teams, depending on the setting and situation. Describe times when you have observed the applicant acting as a leader and/or team member in a group setting.
- Describe a situation where you observed the applicant demonstrating effective communication, meaning the message could be received by their audience within the setting.
- Please share anything else you think would be important to help us determine the applicant's potential for success in graduate study and/or the field of social work.

Strong Recommendations include:

- Clear context: How you know the applicant and in what capacity
- Specific examples: Concrete situations that demonstrate their skills (such as how they handled a challenging situation, worked with clients/peers, or demonstrated leadership)
- Evidence of readiness: Indicators they can succeed in graduate study (e.g., analytical thinking, professionalism, time management, reflective capacity)
- Honest and balanced assessment of applicant's strengths and areas for growth

Writing Equitable Recommendations:

Your thoughtful, specific perspective helps us evaluate applicants equitably. To support fair and inclusive admissions decisions:

- Focus on **observable behaviors and achievements**, not personality traits alone
- Avoid language that unintentionally minimizes the applicant's accomplishments (e.g., "pleasant," "nice," "hardworking" without evidence)
- Emphasize **skills, competencies, and impact** rather than assumptions about potential
- Check your letter for balance: Are you describing this applicant's skills and impact with the same level of specificity you would use for any strong candidate? Replace general praise with concrete examples of behavior, outcomes, or contributions.

Thank you again for supporting this applicant! If you have any questions, please email mswadmission@msudenver.edu.