

AASLH Leadership in History Awards Letters of Critical Review

Instructions to Guide Reviewers in Writing Letters

Thank you for agreeing to provide a letter of critical review for the American Association of State and Local History (AASLH) Leadership in History Awards program. AASLH bestows Leadership in History Awards to establish and encourage standards of excellence in the collection, preservation, and interpretation of state and local history in order to make the past more meaningful to all people. By publicly recognizing superior and innovative achievements, the Leadership in History Awards serves as an inspiration to others in the field.

Every nomination for the AASLH Awards requires two (2) letters of critical review. Critical review letters are extremely important in the award review process. Critical review should be in the form of specially written letters (of approximately two pages in length) that evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the nominated project and the quality of the history presented in the project. These letters should not be letters of support, but should provide critical review of the nominated project. Be sure to include specific examples to support your evaluation; this will greatly assist the awards committee in their review of the nomination. For samples of critical review letters, visit the awards webpage at aaslh.org/programs/leadership-in-history-awards and click the “Tips” tab.

In the case of large projects that have multiple components, please be sure to clarify with the person who requests your review what aspects of a project are being nominated (better yet, ask for a draft of the nomination narrative). It is important that your review focus on relevant activities and address the same elements that the awards committee will be assessing.

One of the critical review letters should address the scholarship involved with the nomination. This letter should be from someone who was NOT involved in the development of the project itself.. The other critical review should address the outcome and effect of the project on the organization and/or the community or constituency(ies) served. This letter can come from someone involved in the development of the project or a member of the community or group that was served. The nominee will tell you which aspect to focus on.

Letter 1: The project’s scholarship

Areas to focus on in this review:

- Scholarship of work
- Quality of sources consulted
- Contribution of new research to the field of state and local history or significant and/or innovative reinterpretation of existing research
- Areas of improvement that could have strengthened the project

- Your area of expertise in providing the critical review and a brief statement of how you conducted your evaluation of the project

Letter 2: The project's outcome and effect on the organization and/or the community or constituency(ies) served

Areas to focus on in this review:

- Scholarship of work and how it was communicated to the public
- Outcome and effect of the project: what were the outcomes? Please be specific as possible regarding all groups that will use and/or benefit from the project. Explain how this project will reach and benefit the citizens of the community. How will the project change or improve the lives of the intended audience? How will it make a difference?
- How the project was evaluated (attendance figures, surveys, grant reports, comment books, news articles). How was success defined? What are the measurable results?
- How the project strengthened the organization or Contribution to the field of state and local history
- Areas of improvement that could have strengthened the project
- Your area of expertise in providing the critical review and a brief statement of how you conducted your evaluation of the project

Why and how the critical reviewers are qualified to provide critical testimony should be either clearly stated in the testimony itself or attached in a short biographical statement (no more than 250 words).

Please contact AASLH staff at abain@aslh.org or 615-320-3203 if you have any questions. Thank you for your support of award-worthy history projects!