The Bridge Program is unique in that we are specifically focused on evidence of academic preparation, research experience and personal experiences and characteristics that support the potential for graduate success rather that GPA and GRE scores. Please see below for some specific questions to consider as you prepare your letter. Note especially that honest appraisal of strengths and weaknesses are more useful than generic praise; our most successful students often have gaps in background or preparation but strong indicators of potential, and we work with students to realize their full potential.

**Be candid**

If you feel you can only provide at best a neutral review, then please consider working with the student to identify another recommender.

**Academic Preparation**

Do you feel the student is prepared for Master’s level coursework? Are there specific areas where they may need additional training or review? Please comment on the student’s overall academic trajectory even if there was a rough start and/or rough patches along the way.

**Fire in the Belly**

We are looking for students who are passionate about pursuing the PhD. How have they demonstrated that this is the path they truly wish to pursue? Have you seen evidence of perseverance when faced with obstacles or failures?

**Research Experience**

Please elaborate on your interaction with them on research projects if appropriate. How has their level of technical competence improved? Have they indicated a desire to take ownership of a project? Do they show evidence of correct data interpretation or provide suggestions as to next steps? We do not expect all students to be fully independent researchers, but please comment on the student’s potential toward independence and creativity in research, and highlight specific areas of technical proficiency or natural inclination.

**Communication**

Have you had an opportunity to observe their oral or written communication skills, either with science or personal communications? How does it compare to other students you have mentored in the past? How responsive and communicative is the student in general?

**Leadership or Community Involvement**

We are looking for students with evidence of community involvement or leadership skills that will be active participants in the program community. Please provide any examples of activity, either within or outside the scientific community, or both.

**Psychological Preparation and Maturity**

Do you feel the student is prepared to handle/ or has experienced constructive criticism, high stress levels and the inevitable obstacles of a graduate career? When faced with a new concept or technique, how does the student respond? Has the student begun to identify long-term goals or career aspirations?

**Strengths and Weaknesses**

Please provide a general overview of the student’s strengths and any critical weakness you think they possess. No student is perfect and all will have some areas in need of improvement, but does the student appear to have an awareness of their skills and/or limitations?