

Achieving Excellence application SAMPLE

Part A1: Intro and Contact Information

NeighborWorks Achieving Excellence Program

Working Together for Strong Communities



Thank you for your interest in the *NeighborWorks Achieving Excellence Program*.

Please note that we are seeking candid responses to all of the following questions, from you and those providing letters of reference. The *NeighborWorks Achieving Excellence Program* (Achieving Excellence) is comprised of a diverse group from across the nonprofit sector, including different lines of business, strengths and weaknesses, organizational sizes, backgrounds, etc. Your honest responses will help us select a diverse group of various talents that will help each other achieve even greater success across the sector.

Please be advised that--though you are free to navigate through the application pages at your own pace--we ask that you provide a response to every question before finally submitting your application.

Once you have provided your introductory information, you will also be able to save your responses and return to the application at a later date and time (beginning on page 2 of your application, an option to Save & Continue will appear at the TOP center of your application screen (note that it is quite difficult to see)).

If you have any questions or issues, please email aeprograms@nw.org.

Complete applications must be received **TBD**.

Note that we will allow a few extra days for reference letters to be received.

We will notify all applicants of our decisions on or before TBD.

Full name (as you would like it to be appear on a formal certificate) *

Nickname you prefer to be called (if different from first name listed above)

Your email address *

Organization *

Title

Mailing Address

City

FYI ONLY -- COMPLETE the APPLICATION ONLINE

State

Zip Code

Phone Number

Part A2: Your Organization & Your Role Within It

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What is your organization's mission? Please limit your response to no more than 2-3 sentences.

Is your organization's mission or service area likely to change in a significant way in the near-future? If so, how and when?

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When was your organization founded?

Which best describes your organization?

Nonprofit
Public sector/government
Quasi-governmental
For-profit/private sector

How long have you been with this organization?

How long have you been in your *current* position?

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Please give us a **general** idea of the geographic focus (urban, rural, or suburban) of your organization's work. Please indicate the areas and provide approximate percentages of your organization's work/time that is focused on each. These can be rough estimates/"guess-timates"--we are just trying to get a sense of the work that you do. No need to be exact on these 2 questions.

(e.g.:

Rural 100%

or

Urban 50%

Suburban 50%)

Please give us a **general** idea of the types of your organization's work. If your organization focuses on more than one line of business, please indicate the appropriate lines below AND provide approximate percentages of your organization's work/time that is focused on each. You can define these terms as you see fit. Again, no need to be exact or list everything--we are just trying to get a sense of the work that you do. (for example:

Homeownership counseling 100%

or

Rehab for energy efficiency 50%

Home-based health services for elderly residents 50%)

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What is your organization's current staff size? (If possible, please just enter the number—no commas or words)

What was your organization's staff size five years ago?

How many employees do you supervise/oversee?

What is your organization's current annual operating budget? (Answer this to the best of your ability. In most cases this is a straightforward answer. If you have questions about how to define this, feel free to explain your answer here if necessary. Also--if possible--please just enter the number—no \$ or commas or words.)

What was your organization's annual operating budget five years ago?

What is the size of the budget for which you are responsible?

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LOGIC Show/hide trigger exists.

Is your organization an official chartered member of the NeighborWorks® network (note that you do NOT need to be a member to participate in AE-- this is just for our general information)?

Yes
No
Not sure

LOGIC Hidden unless: Question "Is your organization an official chartered member of the NeighborWorks® network (note that you do NOT need to be a member to participate in AE-- this is just for our general information)?" is one of the following answers ("Yes")

In what NW region is your organization?

Northeast
Southern
Western
Midwest

Part A3: Attachments

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We want to better understand your organization and your position within it. Please provide a copy of your organizational chart. This can be a graphic or, if that doesn't already exist, a written description of your role in the organization and in relation to others in the organization is acceptable.

Please:

- **Use the following naming protocol for this document:**
YourLastName_YourFirstName_OrgChart
- Submit in PDF format if at all possible
- Limit yourself to one attachment for this question
- If for some reason you are unable to attach your document, please use the same naming protocol noted above then email to CDeady@nw.org. No need to email if you have attached it here

Browse...

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In PDF format, please provide a résumé or CV that includes your work experience, education, etc.

Please:

- **Use the following naming protocol for this document:**
YourLastName_YourFirstName_Resume
- Submit in PDF format if at all possible
- Limit yourself to one attachment for this question
- If for some reason you are unable to attach your document, please use the same naming protocol noted above then email to CDeady@nw.org. No need to email if you have attached it here.

Browse...

Part B1: Achieving Excellence Awareness

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How were you referred to the Achieving Excellence program (ie, how did you hear about it)?

Why are you applying to participate in the NeighborWorks Achieving Excellence Program and why now? *

Are you considering any changes in your work or life in the near future that may affect your availability or ability to fully participate in this intensive program (e.g., retirement, sabbatical, etc.)? If so, please provide a few details. *

Have you previously applied to participate in AE?

Yes

No

[LOGIC](#) Show/hide trigger exists.

Has anyone from your organization participated in Achieving Excellence?

No

Yes--Please list name(s):

FYI ONLY--COMPLETE the APPLICATION ONLINE

Logic Hidden unless: Question "Has anyone from your organization participated in Achieving Excellence?" is one of the following answers ("Yes--Please list name(s):")

Is the person that participated in AE still with your organization?

Lessons Learned

****READ****

Lessons Learned from Past Participants

There are a few points and "lessons learned" that are consistent across classes. Graduates of the program have asked that we share these with you as clearly as possible:

Cost Awareness

The cost for each participant in the NeighborWorks Achieving Excellence Program is greater than \$40,000, yet the participant tuition is only \$6,000-\$13,000 depending on the size of the organization. That is because the cost for each participant is heavily subsidized by NeighborWorks America and our partners/funders.

The program tuition that you would pay covers the 3 weeks of sessions at Harvard including the teaching, meals, lodging at Harvard and also lodging for the "Chicago meeting". It also covers the 16+ months of executive coaching for you and the facilitation of your peer group by the coach; several books and other reading materials; 2 group meals in restaurants (the first week of the program and the night before the "Chicago meeting") and other expenses.

In addition to your time and commitment, you will also be responsible for direct costs associated with the program. Please be aware that, as noted in the application materials, you are responsible for:

Tuition: \$6,000-\$13,000, depending on the size of your organization

Travel and travel-related costs: There will be approximately 6-7 trips for which participants are responsible:

- o 3 round-trips to the university
- o 1 meeting in Chicago in November/December
- o 2 meetings (at least) with your peer group at a location selected by the group and coach together (could be anywhere in the country; lodging costs for these meetings are the

responsibility of each participant).

Of course, travel costs will vary depending on locations, dates, etc. There will be other incidental expenses too, such as transportation from the airport to the university/hotel, etc. These costs are not covered by the program--these will all be the responsibility of you and/or your organization.

- **Some meals:** Most of the meals at the university are included in your tuition but sometimes there will be “dinner on your own” or planned dinners with your group, for which you are responsible to pay.
- **Other:** Possibly other expenses, such as purchasing souvenirs, etc.

Time commitment awareness

We want to be very, very clear that the greatest time commitment of the NeighborWorks Achieving Excellence Program is not in the time that you spend away from in-person gatherings, but the time that you dedicate to your performance challenge day after day back at the office over the 16 months of the program and beyond.

The performance challenge will be defined by you and your organization. It will be one of the most important issues that must be addressed for your organization to be successful. **Many participants spend 60-70% of their time working to address their organizational performance challenge.** You, too, will be expected to contribute the time necessary to achieve success. The program gives the time, the tools and the forum to focus intensely on one of the most important issues facing your organization so most of your time will probably be spent on it.

We are also making a significant investment in each participant by covering 70-85% of the cost of the program and we do expect each participant to invest whole-heartedly with their time and energy.

Return on Investment

The graduates have wanted us to be clear about those issues but to be equally clear that anyone that puts in the hard work will consider the return on investment much, much greater than the inputs.

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Have you read the "Lessons Learned from Past Participants" page and do you understand that the time commitment necessary is less about the few weeks that you spend away from your office with your peers and more about the work you put in at the office with your board, staff and other stakeholders to accomplish the performance challenge and are you willing to make that time commitment, if accepted? *

- Yes, I will make the time commitment
- No, I'm not willing

Are you willing to be pushed outside your comfort zone and to learn new ideas and approaches? *

- Yes
- No

If accepted, are you willing to support your peers and be an active contributor to your AE peer group in order to help others achieve success? *

- Yes
- No

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The time at the in-person sessions will give you the tools, approaches and support you need to be successful. The university sessions, the guidance from your coach and the input from your peers are all carefully designed to set you up for success as you work on your challenge. If accepted, do you understand and agree to a.) attend all in-person sessions because they are **mandatory** (note that you will know the dates of the sessions before you sign an Acceptance Form to commit to the program) and b.) participate fully in each and every in-person session, coaching call and otherwise wholeheartedly participate in the program? *

- Yes
- No

Do you understand that there will be substantial costs in addition to the tuition and, if accepted, are you willing to incur those costs as a part of your participation in the program? *

- Yes
- No

Part B3: Short Answer--Peer Group & Coaching Interaction

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In just a few words, please describe yourself when you are a participant in working with new groups of people--for example, introverted, extroverted, leader, organizer, mediator, cheerleader, etc. There is no correct answer, we just seek a diverse group and we may use this information when putting peers together in a group.

A key component of this program includes working one on one with a professional coach whose focus is to support you in working toward achieving your performance challenge while deepening your knowledge and use of the AE tools and principles. Please say a few words about what you would be looking for in a coaching relationship.

If accepted into the program, what would you like your coach to know about your communication style and approach toward growth and learning?

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Your greatest organizational challenges drive the content of the program and are the focus of the essay questions below. All of the resources of the program are focused to help you tackle your challenge. Your firm commitment to spend at least 16 months addressing this challenge, with coaching from our consultants, training from the university faculty, and feedback from your peers, is fundamental to admission.

A note: In your own words, please just tell us about the challenges you face, what outcomes you hope to achieve, etc. We will not be assessing this information on grammar or use of big words--we merely want to understand what you are facing and what you hope to get from this program.

Your essay should be comprised of three focused parts. **There is one essay box below--please include ALL responses in that one box.** You may want to answer these offline then paste your full responses here.

PART I: Please limit your response to less than 750 words total (about 1.5 pages) to address the following questions:

1. What is the most substantial challenge facing your organization over the next 2-4 years?

By this we mean an issue that affects the organization and its potential success or failure in the future; something that is so big you cannot tackle it by yourself (ie, you also need the support and contributions of other people in the organization and/or outside); you may or may not know how to address the issue, but you know it needs to be addressed; it is something that you would need to spend substantial time addressing in your day-to-day work in the coming year whether you participate in AE or not.

NOTE: We understand that the program may not start for several months and so we understand that this "challenge" may change or be tweaked before and/or during the program. In fact, the first several months of the program are spent working to properly define the challenge. Therefore, there is no need to feel that what you write here will absolutely be the challenge that you address in AE (it may or may not be).

2. Please include (either bulleted like below or within the text of your answer) the following:

- a. How does this challenge relate to the core mission or work of your organization?
- b. Describe how you see your role in the current situation--how you played a role in the current situation coming to be as well as the role you would need to play to successfully tackle this challenge?
- c. What are the risks inherent in taking on this challenge for your organization and your constituency?
- d. Whose engagement and support will you need to succeed?

PART II: Please limit your response to less than 250 words total (about half of one page) to address the following questions:

1. What does "success" in the Achieving Excellence program mean to you? Specifically, what are the most important outcomes for the challenge you've described that you seek to accomplish through your participation in AE? What will be different about you, your organization, your community for having committed 16+ months to this program?

PART III: Please limit your response to less than 250 words total (about half of one page) to address the following questions:

1. Tell us about an experience that you struggled with in your work--you were stuck, you made a significant mistake, etc. What caused you to get stuck or what led to the mistake and how did you address that? What did you learn from it? Did it lead to any changes in your work, behavior or thinking? *

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Part D: Co-commitment and Partnership Letters

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Applicants are asked to provide a co-commitment letter from either their organization's board (for applying Executive Directors) or their organization's CEO/President/Executive Director (for applying senior managers). This letter is intended to help us learn a little more about you and also to help that person/entity understand that they and all or most of the organization will necessarily be a part of the program with you, even though only you will attend the sessions. Since you will be helping transform your organization, it is important that others are brought into the process with you and understand what may come. More information in the attached.

Please indicate who will be supplying your co-commitment letter:

- Board Chair
- CEO/President/Executive Director
- Other and reason that letter is not from Board Chair or CEO/ED:

Please provide the name of the person providing this co-commitment letter:

FYI ONLY - COMPLETE THE APPLICATION ONLINE

Is the person writing the letter a graduate of the *Achieving Excellence* program?

- No
- Yes

If you are an Executive Director applicant, please click [HERE](#) to download the appropriate form, to be completed by your Board Chair.

If you are a senior manager applicant, please click [HERE](#) to download the appropriate form, to be completed by your CEO/President/Executive Director.

As also noted in the attachment, completed forms/letters should be submitted **by e-mail (preferably)** or mail:

E-MAIL: aeprograms@nw.org

NeighborWorks Achieving Excellence Program
NeighborWorks® America
ATTN: Christina Deady
939 North Capitol Street NE, Suite 900
Washington, DC 20002

Part E: Additional Reference Letter(s)

NeighborWorks Achieving Excellence Program

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We'd like to get to know you better and also to better understand your potential challenge. To help us, please secure **at least one additional letter of reference** (no more than two) from a professional partner--perhaps a funder, a partner in local government, a peer in the nonprofit community, etc.

It is **very strongly preferred** that this letter come from someone with whom you may be working on the performance challenge you outlined above. If, for example, your challenge would include partnering with another organization, then a letter from that CEO may be helpful. If you have not yet established the relationships for the partnership, then please do not rush that in order to get a letter. But, to the extent appropriate, a letter from someone relevant to the challenge is preferred.

The letter(s) should include the length of time the individual has known you and in what capacity. Please provide the attachment below to the person and ask that they include it as the letter's cover sheet.

Please provide the name of the partner providing your reference letter:

Do you plan to request a letter from another person (a second letter)?

- Yes
- No

1. **OPTIONAL** (only necessary if submitting a second letter:) What is the name of the person providing your second letter?

Please click [HERE](#) to download the form, which should be attached as the cover sheet of your partner's reference letter.

Completed reference letters should be submitted by e-mail (preferred) or mail to:

E-MAIL: aeprograms@nw.org

NeighborWorks Achieving Excellence Program
NeighborWorks® America
ATTN: Christina Deady
999 North Capitol Street NE, Suite 900
Washington, DC 20002

Part F: Additional Support Materials (OPTIONAL)

NeighborWorks Achieving Excellence Program

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OPTIONAL: If you would like to provide a web address that would be helpful in describing your organization or work, please do so below:

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OPTIONAL: If you would like to supply any other materials for consideration, you may do so here.

Notes:

- Please only include documents in PDF format, if at all possible
- This software will only accept a maximum of 3 files, with a maximum file size of 750 KB
- Please use this naming protocol if submitting any documents:
- YourLastName_YourFirstName_DescriptiveTermofDocument

Browse...

(untitled)

Congratulations and thank you! You have completed the application and appear ready to submit.

NOTE: IF YOU HIT "SUBMIT" BELOW, YOUR APPLICATION WILL BE CONSIDERED COMPLETE AND WILL BE SUBMITTED TO NEIGHBORWORKS AMERICA. Please be sure that you are ready to submit the completed application before you hit the button below. If you do submit in error, Christina Deady (CDeady@nw.org) may be able to send you a link to re-enter the application.

Thank You!

FYI ONLY - COMPLETE the APPLICATION ONLINE

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Congratulations! Your application has been submitted.

Please be advised that this application and attachments must have all been submitted **TBD**, though we'll allow a few extra days for letters from your references to arrive.

E-MAIL: aeprograms@nww.org

NeighborWorks Achieving Excellence Program
NeighborWorks® America
ATTN: Christina Deady
999 North Capitol Street NE, Suite 800
Washington, DC 20002

Everyone that submitted an application on time will be notified of our decisions on or before TBD.

If there are any changes to the timeline or any announcements, we'll notify all applicants in advance.

Thank you for your interest in the *NeighborWorks Achieving Excellence Program!*

FYI ONLY - COMPLETE THE APPLICATION ONLINE

**Board Co-commitment Letter for CEO/Executive Director Applicants:
CONSIDERATIONS BEFORE APPLICATION**

Dear Board Chair,

The success of your CEO/executive director in the NeighborWorks Achieving Excellence Program (Achieving Excellence) will be aided by strong support from the Board. This program requires an intensive commitment to solve one of the most critical issues facing your organization in the coming years. It will bring changes to the organization and perhaps even major transformations. The CEO will be the organizational representative in the program, but the entire organization will be involved. Therefore, the Board's commitment to supporting the participant in this program is critical. Note that we are not asking for a "nomination letter" for your CEO to participate in the program—we are seeking your commitment to the work that the organization will undertake as part of this program and your support of the CEO as he/she does so.

***Considerations for Boards of Directors with a President/CEO/ED
participating in Achieving Excellence***

- Make sure that the performance challenge that the participant(s) will work on has your full support, that you know this is who you want working on that challenge and that you will authorize the participant(s) to make transformational change in your organization
- Be sure that the rest of the organization knows that the AE participant has your full support in pursuing this challenge
- Encourage open communication and specific feedback about what you can do – or stop doing - to be more helpful in supporting performance challenge goals
- Check in with your participant(s) on their progress
- Encourage and support their ongoing learning and growth
- Allow time and space for their performance challenges and coaching calls
- Welcome this opportunity to strengthen your governance team and to model honest and useful communication even when the going gets tough. To realize adaptive challenges participants may need to raise difficult issues with you – how can you work to create a "safe space" for this conversation – perhaps even being explicit about it.

**Board Co-commitment Letter for Executive Director Applicants:
COVER SHEET**

Applicant Name _____

Applicant's Organization _____

Name of Recommending Board member(s) (Your name) _____

City _____ ST _____

Telephone Number _____ E-mail Address _____

ANONYMITY & HONESTY

Please note that we are seeking candid responses to the questions below and an even-handed assessment of your CEO's abilities from your perspective. This information will never be shared with the applicant unless YOU choose to share it.

The NeighborWorks Achieving Excellence Program is comprised of a diverse group from across the nonprofit sector, including different lines of business, strengths and weaknesses, organizational sizes, backgrounds, etc. Your honest responses will help us select a diverse group of various talents that will help each other achieve even greater success across the field.

We recognize that you may want to avoid sharing any 'opportunities for improvement' in case they would negatively influence our decisions, but everyone has areas for improvement and knowing these will help us better match the applicant with a coach and appropriate peer group to actually achieve improvement in those areas.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1.) Please include in your letter at least the following information:
 - Three most significant professional assets, especially how he/she demonstrates leadership in the organization;
 - Three of his/her professional limitations;
 - In as much detail as possible, please tell us specifically how you plan to provide support to the candidate during their time in the program working to accomplish the organizational performance challenge
- 2.) If at all possible, please convert your letter to PDF
- 3.) If at all possible, please combine this cover sheet WITH your letter so they are 1 PDF document
- 4.) **When you submit, please use this naming protocol:**
NomineesLastName_NomineesFirstName_Nomination_YourName (for example, Smith_John_Co-commitment_Sally Jones)
- 5.) **Submit by email to aeprograms@nw.org** (you can also use this contact if you have any questions)
- 6.) Note that you should receive a response immediately or very soon after your email. If you do NOT get a confirmation email within 24 hours, feel free to contact aeprograms@nw.org to get confirmation that it was received.
- 7.) If you would like further information about the NeighborWorks Achieving Excellence Program, please go to www.NeighborWorks.org/ae

**CEO/President/Executive Director Co-Commitment Letter for
Senior Manager Applicants:
CONSIDERATIONS BEFORE NOMINATION**

Dear CEO/President/Executive Director,

Strong support from you is essential to the success of your senior manager in this program. Your commitment is critical to the participant successfully tackling the organizational challenge that you identify together as one of the most important issues facing your organization in the coming years.

Note that we are not asking for a "nomination letter"--we are seeking YOUR commitment to this program as your staff member is the organizational representative in the program, but the entire organization will be involved.

***Considerations for Executive Directors who have an organizational leader
participating in Achieving Excellence***

- Make sure that the performance challenge that the participant(s) will work on has your full support, that you know this is who you want working on that challenge and that you will authorize the participant(s) to make transformational change in your organization
- Be sure that the rest of the organization knows that the AE participant has your full support in tackling this challenge
- Encourage open communication and specific feedback about what you can do—or stop doing—to be more helpful in supporting performance challenge goals. Check in with your participant(s) regularly on their progress--you may want to ask if there is anything more you can do to support this work, maybe even to ask if you are doing anything that is blocking progress
- Consider this an opportunity to strengthen your internal leadership ladder by delegating more responsibilities of substance, by focusing the organization on performance outcomes and by holding people accountable for results
- Encourage and support their ongoing learning and growth
- Allow time and space for their performance challenges and coaching calls
- Welcome this opportunity to strengthen your management team and to model honest and useful communication even when the going gets tough. To realize adaptive challenges participants may need to raise difficult issues with you—consider and implement ways that you can create a “safe space” for this conversation, perhaps even being explicit about it.
- Provide an opportunity for the AE participant to share their performance challenge with the Board of Directors, to consult with you about where the Board or individual members might be helpful, and to update the Board periodically on progress.

If one of your senior staff is accepted into Achieving Excellence, please share and discuss these commitments with them at an early stage in the program.

CEO/President/Executive Director Co-commitment
Letter for Senior Manager Applicants:
COVER SHEET

Nominee's Name _____

Nominee's Organization _____

Name of Recommending CEO/President/ED (Your name) _____

City _____ ST _____

Telephone Number _____ E-mail Address _____

ANONYMITY & HONESTY

Please note that we are seeking candid responses to the questions below and an even-handed assessment of your senior manager's abilities from your perspective. This information will never be shared with the applicant unless YOU choose to share it.

The NeighborWorks Achieving Excellence Program is comprised of a diverse group from across the nonprofit sector, including different lines of business, strengths and weaknesses, organizational sizes, backgrounds, etc. Your honest responses will help us select a diverse group of various talents that will help each other achieve even greater success across the field.

We recognize that you may want to avoid sharing any 'opportunities for improvement' in case they would negatively influence our decisions, but everyone has areas for improvement and knowing these will help us better match the applicant with a coach and appropriate peer group to actually achieve improvement in those areas

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1.) Please include in your letter at least the following information:
 - A description of this person's scope of authority (he/she should have principal responsibility for leading a large, substantive segment your organization)
 - Three most significant professional assets, especially his/her demonstrated leadership in the organization
 - Three of his/her professional limitations
 - In as much detail as possible, please tell us specifically how you plan to provide support to the candidate during their time in the program working to accomplish the organizational performance challenge and how, together, you decided on the challenge that the participant will work to address while in the program
- 2.) If at all possible, please convert your letter to PDF
- 3.) If at all possible, please combine this cover sheet WITH your letter so they are 1 PDF document
- 4.) **When you submit, please use this naming protocol:**
NomineesLastName NomineesFirstName Nomination YourName (for example, Smith_John_Co-commitment_Sally Jones)
- 5.) **Submit by email to aeprograms@nw.org** (you can also use this contact if you have any questions)
- 6.) Note that you should receive a response immediately or very soon after your email. If you do NOT get a confirmation email within 24 hours, feel free to contact aeprograms@nw.org to get confirmation that it was received.
- 7.) If you would like further information about the NeighborWorks Achieving Excellence Program, please go to www.NeighborWorks.org/ae

Reference Letter

Nominee's Name _____

Nominee's Organization _____

Name of Recommending CEO/President/ED (Your name) _____

City _____ ST _____

Telephone Number _____ E-mail Address _____

INSTRUCTIONS

As part of the NeighborWorks Achieving Excellence Program selection process and to better inform our small group selection process within the program, we'd like to get to know the applicant better. The applicant would like you to write a letter of reference for him/her.

- 1.) Please provide a letter of reference that includes the length of time you have known the applicant and in what capacity.
- 2.) Please include this cover sheet when you submit your letter of nomination
- 3.) To submit:**
 - a.) If at all possible, please convert your letter to PDF
 - b.) If at all possible, please combine this cover sheet WITH your letter so they are 1 PDF document
 - c.) When you submit, please use this naming protocol:**
NomineesLastName NomineesFirstName Reference YourName
(for example: Smith John Reference SallyJones)
 - d.) Submit by email to aeprograms@nw.org** (you can also use this contact if you have any questions)
 - e.) Note that you should receive a response immediately or very soon after your email. If you do NOT get a confirmation email within 24 hours, feel free to contact aeprograms@nw.org to get confirmation that it was received.
 - f.) For further information about the program, please go to www.NeighborWorks.org/ae