

DATE: April 21, 2026
FROM: PY2026 Promotion Board Chairs / Assistant Surgeons General
TO: All Commissioned Corps Officers Considered for Promotion in PY2026
SUBJECT: OPEN LETTER OF CONGRATULATIONS, REFLECTIONS, AND
RECOMMENDATIONS

Congratulations to those officers selected for promotion in PY 2026!

As we continue to refine our promotion process, we remain committed to recognizing and advancing the most qualified officers. This year marks a continuation of the updated promotion categories (Medical, Dental, Applied Public Health, Allied Health, and Medical Services), the structured promotion zones (Below the Zone, In the Zone, and Above the Zone), and the option for officers to defer promotion consideration. While these policies are now well integrated, we encourage officers to thoroughly assess how these changes impact their promotion prospects and make informed decisions about their career progression.

We continue to be extraordinarily impressed by the high caliber of officers across all ranks and categories. After reviewing numerous promotion packets, we are humbled by the leadership, impact, and dedication demonstrated across all levels of our Service. It is clear to us that our officers serve in extraordinary ways—at every level of government, in remote and austere environments, and for some of the most vulnerable populations.

For those promoted, we are fully confident you will continue to excel in your expanded roles and responsibilities. With promotion comes increased expectations. We encourage you to seize new leadership opportunities and actively contribute to the growth and success of the Corps, your Agency, and the broader public health mission, including the priorities of Visibility, Readiness and Response.

For those officers who were not promoted, this does not diminish the value of your service. The promotion process is highly competitive, and while many exceptional officers were not selected this cycle, this does not reflect a lack of recognition for your contributions. We urge you to view this as an opportunity for growth and preparation for future promotion cycles.

The Chairs of the Promotion Boards – all flag officers – offer the following recommendations for your consideration to improve already solid promotion packages:

1. **Seek Multiple Senior Mentors to Review Your Packet:** Having one or more seasoned mentors—preferably from various agencies and categories—review your promotion packet is crucial. Their insights can help align your materials with promotion benchmarks and enhance clarity and impact.
2. **Prioritize a Clear, Concise, and Well-Formatted CV:** Board members have approximately **10-12 minutes** per packet to review and score. Ensure your CV is correctly formatted, well-organized, and makes it easy for board members to find key information quickly. A cluttered or unclear CV can significantly hinder the review.

3. **Utilize Board Review Comments and Self-Assessment:** Review the board comments carefully. If comments are sparse, compare your CV against promotion benchmarks with input from mentors and supervisors to identify areas for improvement.
4. **Ensure Timely Submission and Accuracy:** Start early, conduct a self-assessment, and invite others to review your packet. Verify the accuracy of your materials before submission to avoid errors.
5. **Enhance Readability and Minimize Jargon:** With multi-disciplinary boards reviewing packets, avoid excessive agency-specific or profession-specific jargon. Spell out acronyms and ensure that your impact statements clearly convey significance to those outside your specialty.
6. **Collaborate on Your COER and ROS:** Work closely with your rater and reviewing official to ensure your narrative clearly documents your impact, using quantifiable data whenever possible.
7. **Develop Strategic Impact Statements:** Be succinct yet impactful. Use the **SMART** framework (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-Bound) and include hard data (percentages, dollar figures, outcomes) to showcase your achievements effectively.
8. **Differentiate Yourself:** Identify what sets you apart and tell a story with your accomplishments. Explain your unique contributions to your agency and the Corps, and ensure these contributions are reflected in your ROS and throughout your packet.
9. **Emphasize Leadership and Impact Over Participation:** Membership in organizations is valuable, but leadership, innovation, and measurable impact hold greater weight in promotion evaluations. Demonstrate how your efforts have advanced your profession, category, or the Corps.
10. **Strongly Consider the Opt-Out Option if Needed:** Officers who feel they may not be competitive in the current cycle should carefully assess whether opting out is the best strategic decision. This option provides time to strengthen your record for future cycles.

In closing, we recognize the significant effort that goes into preparing each promotion packet. We are proud of your dedication and the vital work you do in service to our Nation. As we move forward, continue advocating for the professional development resources and support you need. Your success is the success of the USPHS Commissioned Corps.

In Officio Salutis

Promotion Board Chairs – Assistant Surgeons General