

Reference checks

Hiring department search committee representatives conducts reference checks using questions reviewed by Employment Services.

Why is it important to check references?

- Important part of the selection process
- Help ensure successful hires
- Avoid probation failures
- Can avoid charges of 'negligent hiring'

Obtaining multiple references (at least two) allows the committee or supervisor to look for consistency among comments and to demonstrate that reasonable care was used in the hiring process.

Specific job-related questions should be developed for the telephone reference check. A good question to ask the reference at the end of the discussion is, "Would you rehire the applicant if given the opportunity?"

Who should conduct reference checks?

The supervisor of the position being filled should be the person who contacts the candidate's references.

Who should be contacted as a reference?

It is often best to contact those people who have supervised the applicant or have received or somehow reviewed the results of work performed by the applicant.

How to conduct a reference check

Reference checks may be completed by phone, in person, by mail, internet or fax. A personal phone call is usually best. Indicate you have written consent for the reference check or that the applicant listed that person as a reference.

Review the duties of the position and review the application materials. Make a list of facts or qualifications to verify and a list of questions to ask. Ask follow up questions to clarify information from the interview. Areas of possible inquiry could include:

- Sociability – How well does the applicant get along with and relate to others?
- Work habits/ability – How well does the applicant know the work and perform on the job?
- Personal character- Is the person trustworthy, honest, and dependable?

Evaluating the information you collect

- Compare information from different sources to see how they match up.
- Never allow the individual to give you "confidential" or "off the record" information.
- Weigh information in the same manner for all applicants. What disqualifies one should be the basis for disqualifying any other.
- All reference checks should be returned with the Staff Hiring Activity Record.

Legal Pitfalls of Reference Checking

NEVER conduct a reference check without a signed release that limits your liabilities. You could find yourself and the institution being sued for invading the privacy of others or for damages in the case where a would-be employee loses the job or fails to receive a promotion because of your reference checking.

Recordkeeping

All information obtained from reference and any other background checks should be used only as part of the employment process and kept strictly confidential. Information gathered should be sent to Human Resources as part of the hiring process. Be sure to document the position applied for, applicant's name, reference name and phone number, date of the contact, and who "checked" the reference.