

Reference checks

- a. Reference checks are a critical part of the selection process. There are two primary reasons to conduct reference checks:
 - a. Employers need to be able to demonstrate that they have made reasonable efforts to find out about a future employee's previous work performance. Employers who don't do their best to check references can be held liable if the candidate hired has known violent tendencies or other tendencies that could have been discovered through reasonable efforts, especially if those tendencies result in threats or injuries to others in the new workplace.
 - b. Employers can minimize the risk of hiring an employee who won't be able to succeed in the new job if they take the time to try to find out about previous job performance. The best predictor of future performance is past performance. Even if it proves difficult to obtain information from previous employers, the prospective employer can still demonstrate that a good faith effort to check references was made.
- b. Reference checks may be conducted relatively early in the hiring process to assist in identifying a smaller group of finalists, or at a later stage, to help select one candidate from among finalists, or after a final selection has been made, but before an offer of employment as a means of verifying job-related information.
- c. Check references following an agreed-upon format – email, phone, zoom.
- d. The search committee should check references and review letters of recommendation. Remember that all questions asked and issues raised from references must be job related and similar for all candidates. Some inquiries are not permitted because they request or allow use of information that may lead to an unfair (and illegal) biased decision.
- e. Don't just rely on letters of reference or personal references provided by the job applicant. A telephone reference check takes less time than a written reference check and usually more information is gained. Forms rarely uncover negative information. Employers hesitate to put into writing what they may say in a conversation.
- f. Try to contact the same number of references for all candidates. Ask the candidate if there is anyone you should not contact and why you should not contact this person.
- g. Ensure that all references are individuals who have worked with the candidate in a professional capacity or who have knowledge of the candidate's skills, abilities and performance record. When calling an applicant's reference: identify yourself immediately; tell the reference about the position for which the applicant is being considered. Verify dates of employment, titles, educational credentials and licenses. Ask only job-related questions and document all answers. Avoid questions that can be answered with only a "yes" or "no." Instead, ask open-ended questions such as "Describe the applicant's ability to..."
- h. Develop a standard set of questions to be asked of all references, based on the requirements for the job. Job-related questions are the key to a good reference check. Follow-up questions may be asked but must be job-related. Remember that the inappropriate questions used for interviewing also pertain to reference checks.
- i. The most important question to ask is whether the previous employer would rehire the applicant you are considering. If you get no other response, try to get this question answered.

- j. Search committees and/or hiring officials should check the references of an internal candidate in the same manner as any other applicant, including contacting current and former supervisors.
- k. Check more than one reference, making every effort to check a similar number of references for all candidates.

Download these forms for checking references:

- [Reference Checking Form: Long](#)
- [Reference Checking Form: Short](#)