

Guidelines for Conducting Reference Checks

Reference checks must be completed for all final applicants under consideration for regular full-time, part-time, temporary or student positions whereby all relevant listed references are contacted.

Reference checks are used to diminish ambiguity, obtain specific job-related information, and verify the accuracy of a candidate's background. The reference checks may be conducted before or after the interview. The following are guidelines to check references.

- Begin your reference process by thoroughly reviewing information obtained in the application material submitted by the job applicant and identify the people you wish to reference. As a general rule, try to speak directly to the applicant's immediate supervisor when seeking employment references. Avoid references from friends and relatives.
- Contact at least two former employers for references before making a job offer.
- Inform the applicant that a reference check will be conducted.
- Ask the applicant to provide reference information if it is missing from the application including name, title, phone number and email address of the most recent employers.
- Prior to checking an applicant's current employer, ask the applicant's permission as this may place the applicant's current employment at risk. If the applicant objects, inform the applicant that you will respect their decision; however it may affect your ability to fully evaluate the applicant for employment.
- When introducing yourself to the employer, do not say that the applicant has "been selected", only that they are a finalist for a position.
- If you believe the employer is hesitant to provide information over the telephone, offer to have them call you back so that the person providing the reference can verify who you say you are. This will also allow the employer time to refresh their memory on the individual you are inquiring about.
- Consider whether performance problems reported by previous employers are in areas that might affect performance in the position you are filling.
- Be sure there is a business-related reason for asking specific questions and use of the information obtained.
- Do not raise any questions that fall under the Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) discriminatory practice areas, such as questions regarding gender, race, color, national origin, age, disability, or religion.
- Do not let letters of reference substitute for phone calls or e-mail inquiries.
- Inquire as to re-employment eligibility and reasons for leaving previous jobs.
- Maintain the highest level of confidentiality throughout the process. Do not delegate the reference gathering process to anyone outside the hiring process and share information gathered on a need to know basis only.

Guidelines for Providing References

Colorado Revised Statutes Section 8-2-114 provides immunity from legal action to employers who provide to a prospective employer information related to a former employee's (a) suitability for future employment, (b) the employee's "work-related skills, abilities, and habits," and (3) the reason for the employee's separation. In addition, the law states that employers may also not maintain a blacklist of former employees to prevent future employment.

Certain safeguards should be followed when providing references on current or former employees. The following are guidelines to follow when providing references.

- Verify the authority of the individual requesting information by using techniques such as arranging to call the person back to verify the person is who they claim to be.
- Provide facts, not opinions.
- Provide references only to persons with a legitimate reason to need a reference on a current or former employee.
- Be consistent in the type of reference information you provide.
- Draw upon specific examples and performance evaluations to give informative, concrete examples.
- Do not say anything to a reference about an employee's specific performance that you would not say directly to the former employee.
- Do not provide a poor reference or refuse to provide a reference because you did not like the employee.
- Do not make character judgments; only make statements related to the employee's job performance.
- Do not provide information "off the record."
- Do not falsely state that someone was a good employee in order to help that person get a job elsewhere and "out of your hair!"
- Document the information that you provided.

TELEPHONE REFERENCE EXAMPLE

Thank you for taking my call. My name is (name) from the University of Colorado at Boulder. (Applicant's name) is a finalist for the position of (job title) and has indicated that he/she was employed by your organization from (beginning/end dates).

1. Was he/she employed by your organization during this period of time?
2. What was the nature of the job?
3. What did you think of his/her work?
4. What are his/her strongest job skills?
5. What job skills are his/her areas for improvement?
6. How did he/she interact with other people on the job?
7. Why did he/she leave your organization?
8. Please comment on candidate's:
 - a. dependability
 - b. ability to assume responsibility
 - c. ability to follow instruction
 - d. degree of supervision needed
 - e. quantity and quality of work
 - f. ability to work independently
 - g. ability to work as a team member
 - h. ability to meet deadlines
9. Would you re-employ this person? yes no If no, why?
10. Do you have any final comment on his/her work performance?

*Thank you very much for talking with me about this candidate.
I appreciate your time.*