

## Reference Checking



The purpose of reference checking is to ensure the candidate is a good fit for the position, obtain additional information regarding the applicant's work ethic, initiative, interpersonal skills and performance. Reference checking also helps avoid the risk of negligent hiring. Employment decisions can be challenged legally on a variety of bases. The best defense is to show that a reasonable decision was made. Checking references and verifying credentials is part of making an informed decision.

Reference checks should be conducted in compliance with all federal and state laws and regulations including the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Title VII of the Civil Rights Act. The American with Disabilities Act prohibits asking *non-job related* information from previous employers or other sources. Examples of questions to avoid include those regarding marital status, religion, age, race, health-related issues, child care, transportation, worker compensation claims, and other non-job related questions.

A minimum of two (2) references are required for each candidate. Reference checks should be done by the supervisor, except in the cases of classroom Instructional Assistants and Behavioral Health Specialists. Reference checks for these two classifications may be done by an Administrative Assistant III or Executive Assistant who has received training from the Human Resources department.

References should be a former supervisor or people who have knowledge of the candidate's work performance. References must be people that know the candidate in a professional capacity. Family, friends or employees of the candidate are not acceptable references. Only contact the references provided by the candidate. If you are unsuccessful in obtaining two professional references, please discuss this with the Human Resources department and we will assist you in obtaining additional references.

#### A few things to remember.....

When conducting reference checks be friendly and appeal to human nature. Introduce yourself and that you work at the San Luis Obispo County Office of Education. Tell them "we have been talking to (candidate's name) about a position with us and s/he has given us your name because you know them so well." Let the reference know you need just a few minutes and ask if this is a good time to talk. If it is not, reschedule a telephone appointment.

Reword a question in response to vague answers. Ask follow up or clarification questions if something isn't clear. Ask if the reference could elaborate. Listen "between the lines" to the tone of voice, inflection, and word choice. Take good notes. Document! Document! Document! Capture the "between the lines" conversation in your notes. Was the reference hesitant to provide information? Were the carefully chosen words or tone indicating there are additional concerns about the candidate? Include documentation of reference checks that produce no information. Do not ask questions "off the record" – no answers can be treated as "off the record."

All information obtained from a reference check is to be used only as part of the employment process and kept strictly confidential.

## Reference Check # \_\_\_\_\_ of 2

**Note: Please type, write legibly or re-write this upon completion so that the information obtained is clear to others who will be reading this.**

**Name of Candidate:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Position Applying For:** \_\_\_\_\_  
Describe the nature of the position:

**Person Doing the Check:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Reference Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Relationship to Candidate:** \_\_\_\_\_  
(Should be **professional** – not family/friend)

Note : You do not have to ask every question. Select those that are applicable to the vacancy.

### **QUESTIONS**

#### **Personal Knowledge**

1. How do you know this person? How long have you known them?
2. Tell me why you would /would not recommend this person for this position.
3. Give an example of a significant contribution to the organization? Is a great deal of supervision needed?
4. Technical questions applicable to person's performance, qualifications (job specific)
5. Why did this person leave your company?
6. Is there any reason why your company would not re-hire this individual?
7. Is there anything you would like to add that I did not ask?

#### **Organization**

8. Is s/he well organized? Can s/he prioritize their work?
9. Can s/he adapt easily to change? Are they flexible?
10. Were there any problems with attendance, tardiness, excessive use of sick time?
11. Does s/he teach in an effective manner? How is s/he viewed by (students)?

#### **Attitude:**

12. How does s/he get along with coworkers, including peers, supervisors?
13. Give some examples of how this person has worked independently and collaboratively.
14. Give an example of how this person has faced a crisis and how they handled it.
15. Is this person coachable and willing to improve?
16. How has this person responded to specific personal/professional growth objectives.

**Document the responses to the above questions here. Use the back of the paper, if necessary.**

**Type in the answers if possible:**

**Additional Space for documenting answers to questions:**

“Thank you for taking the time to talk with me. The conversation has been very helpful.”

**Name of person checking the reference:**\_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of person checking reference:**\_\_\_\_\_

**Date:**\_\_\_\_\_

**NOTE: If you are aware of vague answers or if you suspect that the applicant may have left under less than the best circumstances, and you think an agreement may have been reached about what the former employer will say on a reference check, you might ask this question.....**

19. Are you under any restriction to limit your discussion of the terms of his/her separation?

**{If the employer says ‘yes’, we need to contact the applicant to obtain a release to the former employers}**

