

TELEPHONE PREEMPLOYMENT REFERENCE CHECK

The typical manner to conduct a reference check would be to contact the professional references by phone.

1. The hiring authority of the prospective employee who will be making the hiring decision should make the reference check. For a faculty position, if a faculty interview committee so desires, one faculty member will join the manager in checking references.
2. Prior to conducting reference checks, obtain permission from an applicant to call his/her present employer. Only references of final candidates need be checked.
3. Ideally, the hiring authority should contact two to three references. At least one reference should be from a person who had direct supervision over the applicant. Do not attempt to get reference information secondhand. Human Resources or Payroll can verify dates of employment and termination but they are not usually in a position to give valuable information regarding the job applicant's former work habits, performance, personal habits, etc.
4. Prior to commencing reference checking, prepare a questionnaire/guide to be used during the telephone conversation.
5. Do's and don'ts to consider:
 - a. Leave a call-back if the person is not available. A message conveying the purpose of the call to discuss the applicant may be left.
 - b. When contact with a reference is achieved, identify yourself immediately, explain your position and tell the party why you are calling about the applicant.
 - c. Assure the person called that any discussions will be held in confidence.
 - d. Try to establish rapport with the person being calling. Many times a freer exchange of information comes about when the individual identifies with the District, or some other mutual point of interest.
 - e. Tell the person about the position for which the applicant is being considered. A better evaluation can be made if done in relation to a specific job. The job must be explained completely enough to have meaning.
 - f. Ask a general question such as, "How do you think the applicant would fit into our vacancy?" After the person responds, lead in with more specific job related questions, such as:
 - 1) What is your current company and official title?
 - 2) What was your company and title at the time of employment with (applicant's name)?
 - 3) What was (applicant's name) official title? (For example peer, supervisor, lead, etc.)
 - 4) What were the approximate dates you worked with (applicant's name)?
 - 5) What were (applicant's name) job duties and how did he/she perform?
 - 6) What three things would you say stand out as (applicant's name) strong points? (What were his/her technical strong points?)
 - 7) Would you say there are any areas of needed improvement?
 - 8) How did (applicant's name) get along with peers, supervisors, and customers?
 - 9) How was (applicant's name) general attitude?
 - 10) What was (applicant's name) motivation for leaving the position in which you worked with him/her?
 - 11) Given the opportunity would you care to work with (applicant's name) again?

- g. Let the person talk freely in answering for as long as he or she wishes without interrupting. Often a question at the wrong time will shut off further information.
- h. Follow-up and probe when the contact is reluctant to discuss certain factors. Many times a further explanation will elicit the desired information.
- i. Be alert for obvious pauses in answering questions. Often these are signs that further questions may bring additional information not otherwise received.
- j. Do not be concerned about how long the conversation takes.
- k. Do not hang up until the opinion of the person is determined. Frequently, ambiguous answers will be provided. The person called may give very little useful information. However, a technique that often works is to summarize the conversation by making either of the following two statements:
 - 1) "I take it that you do not recommend the applicant for the position,"
 - or
 - 2) "I take it that you highly recommend the applicant for the position."
- l. Glance at the checklist of questions and be sure everything is covered.
- m. Always end the call by asking the person, "Would you re-employ the applicant?" Often this question brings forth information not obtained by other questions.
- n. Be sure to thank the contact for his or her help.
- o. Be absolutely sure to ask the same questions about each of the referenced applicants. Document the responses and file the reference check records with the other selection materials.
- p. **IMPORTANT:** Be uniform. Solicit the same information for each candidate. Proceed through reference checks for all the candidates on the reference check plan before a final decision is made.