

Reference Guide

Best Practices for Selection

University of Nebraska at Omaha – Human Resources

7/9/2021

Reference Checks

Always check references of your top candidates regardless of your impressions of their qualifications. A mistake is costly in time, energy, and money; take the time to check references before making a job offer.

Reference checks can reveal information about an applicant's behavior with prior employers that could be critical to your decision, regardless of the applicant's skills, knowledge, and abilities. Failure to check references can have serious legal consequences for the University. If an employee engages in violent, harmful behavior similar to that which occurred during previous employment, which would have been revealed in a reference check, the University can be held legally responsible for negligent hiring.

Check references of your top candidates after the interview. Checking references before the interview can create false expectations and affect your ability to evaluate the applicant's qualifications objectively. This includes University references.

Advise all the candidates that you will be checking references and ask whether it is okay to talk with the current/past supervisor(s). If not, ask why.

Ask the candidate for other references (other supervisors, co-workers, customers, etc.). Make sure to allow each candidate to provide you with the same number of references.

Develop a set of job-related questions to be used on all reference checks. As with interview questions, target your questions to the knowledge, skills, abilities, and behaviors needed in the job.

Example: "This job involves writing and editing job listings and promotional material for the unit with minimal supervision. Did the candidate perform similar duties? If so, what is your assessment of the candidate's writing and editing skills?"

Use a written questionnaire form that allows you to write notes next to the printed questions and to document the reference check.

Use the following guidelines when you are conducting all telephone reference checks, whether the candidate is a campus employee or an outside applicant:

- o Introduce yourself and state the purpose of your call.
- o Confirm that it is a convenient time to talk.
- o Briefly describe the position for which the applicant has applied.
- o Confirm the relationship between the person giving the reference and the applicant. (The most relevant information often comes from the former immediate supervisor.)

- o Verify basic data such as job title, duties, salary, and dates of employment.
- o For a campus employee, you may ask to review the candidate's personnel file.
- o Be consistent. If you check references for some applicants, do not hire another applicant without checking references.
- o Ask the same basic questions about all applicants. Weigh information you receive in the same manner for all applicants; what disqualifies one should be the basis for disqualifying any other.
- o Consider the source. Remember that the information is limited by the perception of the person giving it. If you receive negative information about an applicant, weigh it with data from other references before using it to make a decision.

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Alternately, references may be requested by email or the PeopleAdmin system.

When using email, you may email a form to the reference or request a letter of recommendation. If a form is used, the guidelines for telephone reference checks should be observed.

When using the PeopleAdmin System, a letter of recommendation will be requested via email when the reference check is triggered by the Search Chair.

Reference Checking Procedure

The results of reference checks must be sent to Human Resources with the interview summary prior to an offer being approved. Results should include the name of the reference, questions asked, responses, the name of the person checking references and the date checked. A form should be used for ease of record keeping. A sample form can be found on the next page. This form can also be sent via email to reference providers.

Reference Form Example



Candidate Name	
Position Offered	
Department	
Name of Reference Collector	
Date	
Name of Reference Provider	

Good morning/afternoon. My name is _____ and I'm calling from the _____ department at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, because _____ gave me your information as a reference. I just have a few questions. Is now a good time to chat?

_____ has applied for _____

What is your relationship to _____?
Please describe _____'s characteristics (as an employee, if applicable). Share some knowledge and abilities.
Were they able to form and maintain positive relationships with supervisors, coworkers and customers/clients?
How would you describe their time management skills?
What are their biggest strengths and weaknesses?

What makes them a good fit for this job?
(Department question)
(Department question)
(Department question)
Is there anything else you want me to know that I haven't asked about?


Reference Collector Signature


Date