

Conducting Reference Checks



Past performance can be a predictor of future behavior, so thorough reference checks are a critical part of the selection process.

The agency Human Resource (HR) section or a member of management should conduct reference checks. The person conducting the reference contacts former employers listed on the application and references provided by the applicant. The purpose is to verify the employment and experience of the candidate. HR should verify job history with the state.

Former employers who are reluctant to give a reference without the written consent of the candidate can be sent a reference release, signed by the candidate at the time of the interview.

EMPLOYER OR SUPERVISOR REFERENCES

Having a discussion with a former employer will net useful information. Generally, the best source of information about a candidate's workplace behavior, habits, and dependability is the candidate's former supervisor. Supervisor and professional references are recommended.

Keep reference information confidential. Reference information, like interview panelist's notes, may be discoverable. Contact DOJ Labor and Employment at 503-947-4600 or DAS CHRO if reference information is requested by the candidate or another party chro.policy@oregon.gov.

QUESTIONS TO ASK IN A REFERENCE CHECK

Avoid asking questions or noting comments made by a reference about a candidate's personal life. Start reference check conversations by telling the reference your name and title, where you work and your purpose for doing a reference check. Tell the reference it is practice in your agency to check references of all finalists before making a hiring decision. Tell the reference; either you got their name from the candidate's application as a previous or current employer, or the candidate provided them as a reference. Offer to fax a reference release form, signed by the candidate.

- Are (were) you (name of candidate)'s supervisor?
- What is your association with (name of candidate)?
- When was (name of candidate) employed at your place of business?
- What was (name of candidate)'s job title?
- Please describe the duties (name of candidate) performed.
- These are the needs of our position (list needs). What strengths would (name of candidate) bring to our agency?
- If you were to coach the person, what would you identify as areas for improvement?
- Were there disciplinary issues with (name of candidate?) Please explain.
- Excluding protected absences, how was (name of candidate)'s attendance and punctuality? Please elaborate (if necessary).

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- How did (name of candidate) handle the pressures of the office? Please elaborate.
- How did (name of candidate) get along with coworkers and customers? Please elaborate.
- Would you rehire (name of candidate)? Why or why not?
- What is your experience working on projects with (name of candidate)? Please elaborate?
- Was (name of candidate) reliable and willing to assume responsibility for projects?
- Were (name of candidate)'s contributions well thought-out, useful and timely?
- Do you feel (name of candidate) has a working knowledge of the profession?
- If you were the hiring manager, would you hire (name of candidate)? Why or why not?
- How does (name of candidate) handle multiple tasks?
- If you were the hiring manager, would you hire (name of candidate)? Why or why not?

TIPS FOR "GETTING THROUGH" TO REFERENCES

Tip 1. Send the reference a signed reference release form. If that doesn't work...

Tip 2. Explain that the candidate is a "finalist" and cannot be further considered without a reference. If that doesn't work...

Tip 3. Contact the candidate and tell them they are a finalist, but that you cannot proceed unless you can check references and ask the candidate to help you obtain the reference.