

Supplement 03

Reference Check Guidelines

Reference Check: Reference checks are one of the most important tools when screening for new employees or selecting volunteers. However, references are not helpful unless you follow through and talk to the references. A reference check should always occur prior to hiring or volunteer service.

Consider asking the potential employee or volunteer for a list of current and previous employers, volunteer supervisors, and personal references as a part of a written application (see Supplement 01: Written Applications for Employees and Volunteers) or as a separate document (see sample reference release form).

You should view references as data points that help verify the person is who they say they are and that they do not have any concerning behavior from previous employment or ministry service. Employment references should be verified for accuracy and job performance. Other churches or ministries where the applicant has served should be contacted regarding those positions and the individual's interactions with children, youth, and other vulnerable persons should be discussed. If after checking the provided references you have reservations, consider speaking with someone from a previous church not listed by the potential employee or volunteer as a reference.

REFERENCE CHECKS

Other churches or ministries where the applicant has served should be contacted regarding those positions and the individual's interaction with children and students. It can also be helpful to obtain a reference from a past church, a family member, or at least one person of the opposite sex. Some questions that may be informative while interviewing references are as follows:

- Please verify the position, responsibilities, and start and end date of the applicant.
- What was your relationship with the applicant, and how long did you know him/her?
- Please describe the applicant's interaction with children/students.
- Please describe the applicant's interaction with supervisors and those in authority.
- What strengths does the applicant possess in working with children/students?
- What weaknesses or challenges did the applicant have in working with children/students?
- Have you ever seen the applicant push boundaries or break policies?

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- **Do you have any hesitancy in recommending this applicant to work with children/students?**
- **Would your organization hire this person again, given the opportunity?**

It is crucial to be persistent in following up with references, because some references may be reluctant to share negative information with prospective employers. Follow up with the reference by phone. Be sure to keep a record of the recommendation in a permanent file.

Be sure, when checking references, to note and follow up on discrepancies between information given by an applicant and by references.

Job applicants may sometimes be uncomfortable with their current employer being contacted as they may not want their current employer to know they are looking for another position. If that is the case, you may postpone contacting their current employer, but as the process continues and you seek to hire the applicant, the employer should be contacted for a reference before hiring the individual.

Some employers and organizations may be reluctant to share information about past employees or volunteers out of a fear of liability or defamation. One option for relieving these concerns and ensuring you receive full and candid information from references about applicants is to ask the applicant to sign a reference release form. This form protects references, past employers, and organizations with which the employer has been involved.

We are providing a template release that can be used as a part of your application materials. You should consult with an attorney in your area/community before using this form, but this form has been reviewed.