About Reference Checks

Personal References

Except in very unique circumstances, you should make a practice of requiring that all references are past employers. If your potential hire has never before been employed, chat with someone who has worked with them in a volunteer or extracurricular capacity.

Check References

Letters of recommendation often lack candid and specific assessments of work performance. Therefore, check appropriate references before making a formal job offer. This task can be accomplished in ways that give the supervisor appropriate and accurate information about an applicant while protecting the rights of the applicant. First, obtain written releases from applicants before checking references, and obtain an applicant’s permission before contacting a current employer. Second, collect the information in writing rather than over the telephone. Third, request only job-related information that can be verified, such as dates of employment, job titles and duties, length of service in each position, promotions, demotions, attendance, salary, reason for termination, and other information for which the responder may have documentation. Many employers maintain policies of providing only the date of employment and last position held. Do not ask for subjective information or information that could be considered discriminatory; if the information is offered, ignore it. Fourth, because information gathered through reference checks is confidential, communicate it only to those who have a business need to know.