

Telephone Professional Reference Checking Fundamentals

The hiring process of resume review, candidate prescreening, and interviewing has drawn to a close. You and your team should feel confident that your selected candidate is the best fit for this position.

It can be tempting to dismiss professional reference checks as a formality; however, it is imperative to ensure that the selected candidate is positioned to succeed within GW.

What is the goal of professional reference checking?

The goal of reference checking is part of our hiring due diligence. By calling a selected candidate's professional references, you can learn about their past behavior and past performance to assess if they will be a good fit for your job opening; and more broadly, a good fit to the culture of your department/division/school and GW.

Former supervisors can help provide a fuller picture of the selected candidate by helping you understand what skills, values, and behaviors were exhibited in past positions. Through professional reference checking you should be able to gain the following information:

- *Hard data*: Confirmation of the selected candidate's track record, skills and competencies.
- *Qualitative data*: Examples that allow you to better understand the selected candidate's work ethic, style and approach to work.

How to prepare for a telephone professional reference check?

Talent Acquisition and Recruitment (TAR) advises that a professional reference check from two past supervisors is best practice.

Use the selected candidate's current resume to reference past experiences during the discussion.

The Recruitment Resource: Telephone Reference Check form should be used for professional reference checks. If you deviate from the questions provided on the form, you must ensure that your questions relate directly to the position being filled.

What if I am unable to contact two past supervisors or if the company policy does not allow a professional reference check?

Contacting the selected candidate and letting them know that you are having difficulty is the first step. The selected candidate should be able to provide you with alternative contact information, additional information, or perhaps a third past supervisor. If the selected candidate is young in their career and only has one or two past supervisors, another professional reference would be acceptable at this time. However, the non-supervisor professional reference should be a person that the selected candidate previously worked with and a person in a management position (i.e. not a peer colleague).

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What types of inquiries are impermissible?

All local, state, and federal discrimination and employment laws that apply to interviewing also apply to professional reference checking. Federal and local anti-discrimination laws prevent prospective employers from discriminating against job applicants based on their membership in a group with a common characteristic, sometimes referred to as a protected class. Therefore, the telephone screen should not involve discussion regarding the selected candidate's protected class information. Protected classes include:

- Information regarding protected classes
 - Protected classes include:
 - Race
 - Color
 - Religion
 - National Origin
 - Sex
 - Age
 - Marital Status
 - Personal Appearance
 - Sexual Orientation
 - Gender Identity or Expression
 - Family Responsibilities
 - Political Affiliation
 - Disability
 - Matriculation
 - Genetic Information

In addition, federal and/or local laws also prohibit inquiries regarding:

- Participation (as a complainant or witness) in a complaint or grievance
- Filing of a worker's compensation claim
- Protected medical leave
- Information about health conditions
- Criminal record information)
- Anything else that is not job related

If you find that the professional reference starts to discuss one of the above topics, kindly redirect the conversation to the selected candidates past job performance and proposed duties.

More Information

For any additional questions, please contact a recruiter within Talent Acquisition and Recruitment.