

Office of Vice President for Information Technology

Guide to Reference Checking

Resource Information for Search Committee Chairs and Members

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Introduction

Search committee chairs are responsible for verifying information provided by potential employees on applications, resumes, and during interviews. Previous and present employers can provide pertinent information about an applicant's background that will assist you in the selection process. This Reference Checking Guide has been prepared to aid search committees in the process of making comprehensive and responsible hiring decisions. The guide provides:

- Basic information regarding reference checking
- Internal IT Sr. Management requirements and best practices to follow in reference checking
- Required and suggested questions to be used when conducting a reference check

For more information on conducting reference checks please contact your department Human Resource representative.

Reference Checking Process

- **Reference Checking is required**

Under the Vice President for Information Technology reference checks are required to be completed on all potential employees.

- Search Committees must contact at least three employment references. Reference sources should be former or current direct supervisors. Other recommended employment reference sources are Human Resources, peers, or subordinates but they should be considered secondary.
- It is required to make three attempts to contact each reference source. And all attempts should be documented.

- **Inform the candidate that you plan to check references**

Candidates may not anticipate the need to provide this during the interview. When you invite applicants to the interview, request that they come prepared to provide at least three employment references. The list should include the organization, address, name, title, and phone number of the reference. Your top candidates should be verbally advised at the interview that references will be checked.

- **Obtain authorization to conduct reference checks**

Written approval must be obtained before you can check employment references with current or former employers; to include current or former direct supervisors, Human Resources, peers, and subordinates.

- Candidates must sign their state application during the interview process. A statement is in the agreement section of the application that indicates the employee is giving authorization to Virginia Tech to verify past and present employment, supervisors or personal references.
- Candidates that were past or current Virginia Tech employees must be asked to complete the Virginia Tech, Consent for Prospective Supervisor to Review Personnel File, obtainable at http://www.hr.vt.edu/employment/files/Release_of_Information.doc. Chairperson sends this form to department HR representative.

- **Who is responsible for reference checking**

Search committee chairpersons are responsible for ensuring that reference checks are conducted. Committees can assign someone within the committee to conduct the reference checking.

- **What to Ask**

Focus reference check questions on the knowledge, skills, abilities, and job-behaviors related to the needs of the specific vacancy and office. Be consistent and ask the same basic questions about all applicants. This doesn't preclude you from asking follow-up questions.

- **Check References by phone, not by email**

Provide the contact with your name, title, the office you represent, and the purpose of your call. Try to establish a rapport with the person you are calling. Describe the position and the responsibilities of the position. Allow time for responses and use follow-up questions to clarify responses and get the details you need.

VT personnel files must be reviewed for candidates that were past or current VT employees. Contact your Recruiting Specialist in University central HR to schedule a time to review the candidate's personnel file.

- **Document**

- Document reference checks using Reference Check Record and attempts to contact reference sources. Provide a blank list of the questions used to conduct reference check and the notes from all conducted reference checks. Reference check documentation must be retained for three years with the recruitment retention file.

Questions for Reference Checks

Questions that should be asked:

- I. Did you directly supervise, manage, or teach the candidate?
- II. How long did the candidate work for you (months and/or years), and how were they employed by the company?
- III. What was the candidate's job title and primary duties with your organization?
- IV. What are his/her strong points?
- V. What areas of improvement or development could the candidate focus on?
- VI. Please give detailed comments on his/her:
 - i. Attendance and dependability
 - ii. Initiative and motivation to take on additional tasks
 - iii. Ability to get along with others
 - iv. Degree of supervision required
 - v. Professionalism
 - vi. Overall attitude
- VII. Can you tell me what prompted the candidate to leave your company (if applicable)?
- VIII. Would you rehire him/her (if applicable)?

Additional Question:

- I. How would you rate his/her problem solving skills?
- II. How would you rate his/her communication skills? Please provide detailed comments on his/her listening, oral, and written communication skills.
- III. How does he candidate react to changes in assignments? In the organization?
- IV. How adaptive is the candidate to new or changing work conditions?
- V. How would you describe his/her performance in comparison with other people?
- VI. How does the candidate get along with peers? Clients? Supervisors?
- VII. How does the candidate respond to feedback?
- VIII. What do you see as the next step in the candidate's career?
- IX. Can he/she successfully juggle multiple projects and initiatives at once, while meeting the objectives for the most important priorities?
- X. Would you recommend him/her for the position he/she has applied for?
- XI. What type of environment do you think that the candidate would thrive in? (Management style, culture, workload, etc.)
- XII. What do you see as the next step in the candidate's career?

APPENDIX A

Reference Check Record

Name of Applicant:

Position Title & Number:

Company Name and Phone #:

Reference Provider's Name & Title:

Reference Provider's Phone/Email:

Approximately 10 to 15 employment related questions.

1. Did you directly supervise, manage, or teach the candidate?
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4. What are his/her strong points?
5. What areas of improvement or development could the candidate focus on?
6. Please give detailed comments on his/her:
 - a. Attendance and dependability
 - b. Initiative and motivation to take on additional tasks
 - c. Ability to get along with others
 - d. Degree of supervision required
 - e. Professionalism
 - f. Overall attitude
7. Why did he/she leave your company (if applicable)?
8. Would you rehire him/her (if applicable)?

Additional Suggested Questions:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Reference Check Conducted By:

Date & Time:
