

Reference Guidelines

Do I need the applicant's permission or a signed release to check references?

The on-line application for unclassified and university support staff positions contains a release authorizing the University to check references, unless otherwise stipulated by the applicant. An application submitted electronically is the same as providing a signature. Although this provides a release to check references, it does not mean that off-campus employers are required to comply with a request for information.

What should I do if someone calls me with an unsolicited reference about an applicant?

It is recommended that such contacts be avoided so that the appearance of impartiality can be maintained. If the individual insists on providing either positive or negative information about a candidate, you can instruct them to contact Human Resources/Equal Opportunity.

Do I really need to check references, particularly if the applicant had a really good interview?

Since the interview is a competitive process, some applicants may be tempted to inflate their qualifications hoping to be selected for the position. Reference checks can help the interviewer to validate the applicant's knowledge, skills and abilities for the job. Remember, the best way to predict future performance is by verifying past performance.

Is a letter of recommendation an acceptable substitute for a reference?

It is always a good idea to try and make phone contact with the references to collect information that individuals may not have felt comfortable placing in a written recommendation. A sample reference contact form for this purpose is available at http://www.hreo.ku.edu/files/documents/reference_contact_form.pdf.

Who should I contact for a reference?

While some applicants will provide personal references, it is best to check work related references in order to get a clear assessment of job skills. As a general rule, try to contact at least three references that have evaluated the applicant's job performance including the current or most recent supervisor. While some applicants may understandably not wish their current supervisor to be contacted, unless they are a finalist for the position, you should let them know that prior to making the final hiring decision you will need to contact their current (or most recent) supervisor. For those applicants just starting their careers, who may not have three work related references, consider contacting past teachers, coaches or volunteer organizations.

When is the best time to check references?

Most of the time hiring departments will wait to check references after interviews; however, there may be occasions when it's appropriate to check references prior to interviews. Such an occasion might be when a search is being conducted on a national level and there is considerable travel expense involved to bring people to campus for interviews.

What kinds of questions can I ask?

Questions must be job related and must follow the same Equal Employment Opportunity guidelines as in the interview process. Guidelines on checking references can be located at

http://www.hreo.ku.edu/files/documents/UPS_USS_Recruit_Guideline.pdf (Chapter 8, Page 17),

http://www.hreo.ku.edu/files/documents/giving_references.pdf.

What can I say if I'm contacted for a reference on a current or past employee?

Guidelines for providing references are different for on-campus employers vs. off-campus employers. If a non-KU employer contacts you for a reference, be sure to obtain a signed release from the employee authorizing you to discuss his or her employment with an off-campus employer. If contacted for a reference by another KU department a release is not required. Remember when providing references to limit your comments to work-related information and information that can be documented. It is best not to say anything that you would not be willing to say directly to the employee in question. Before providing a reference, it is a good idea to review the guidelines for providing references at

http://www.hreo.ku.edu/files/documents/giving_references.pdf.