

Resource: Volunteer Reference Checks

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It is important to ensure that you are familiar with what you can and cannot ask in regards to the Human Rights Act. Any question that cannot be asked during an interview with the volunteer also cannot be asked as part of a reference check.

WHO SHOULD BE A REFEREE?

During the volunteer's application process, request the name and contact details of at least two referees, and permission to contact them. Ideally the referee should be someone who supervised them in a role. If they are unable to provide a suitable work referee, they may consider work colleagues, teachers or lecturers. It is advisable to only use a personal referee if there are no other options.

CONTACTING REFEREES

- Have a script and list of questions prepared
- Identify yourself and organisation
- Let them know that the applicant has listed them as a referee
- Ask if now is a good time to talk or if they would rather schedule another time
- Give a brief description of the role you are considering them for, so they can comment in context
- Give them time to answer your questions, don't cut them off or finish their sentence

- Close with an open ended question e.g. Is there anything else you'd like me to know about this individual?
- Thank them for their time

WHAT DO I ASK?

It is important to tailor a reference check to suit your organisation and the role they are being considered for. You should have questions that cover the following areas: personality, work ethic, interpersonal/social skills and job specific skill. Some examples of common questions

- How do you know the applicant? How long have you known the applicant?
- What job did the applicant do for you and what were their main responsibilities?
- Was the applicant successful in fulfilling their duties?
- What unique skills did the applicant bring to your organisation?
- What were their strengths?
- What were their weaknesses or areas that needed improvement?
- Do you think the applicant is suitable for the position he/she has applied for?
- Would you reemploy the applicant?
- Is there anything else you would like to add?

A simple list of questions will help you to select the best person for your role, your organisation and your clients. Spending a little time completing reference checks as part of your recruitment process may just help you avoid issues with unsuitable volunteers later.

Source: Volunteering Waikato May 2020