

# SUPPLEMENT 03

## Reference Check Guidelines

**Reference Check:** Reference checks are one of the most important tools when screening for new employees or selecting volunteers. However, references are not helpful unless you follow through and talk to the references. A reference check should always occur prior to hiring or volunteer service.

Consider asking the potential employee or volunteer for a list of current and previous employers, volunteer supervisors, and personal references as part of a written application (see Supplement 01: Written Applications for Employees and Volunteers on page 2) or as a separate document (see sample reference release on page 8).

You should view references as data points that help verify the person is who they say they are and that they do not have any concerning behavior from previous employment or ministry service. Employment references should be verified for accuracy and job performance. Other churches or ministries where the applicant has served should be contacted regarding those positions and the individual's interactions with children, youth, and other vulnerable persons should be discussed. If after checking the provided references you have reservations, consider speaking with someone from a previous church not listed by the potential employee or volunteer as a reference.

### REFERENCE CHECKS

Other churches or ministries where the applicant has served should be contacted regarding those positions and the individual's interaction with children and students. It can also be helpful to obtain a reference from a past church, a family member, or at least one person of the opposite sex. Some questions that may be informative interviewing references are as follows:

- Please verify the position, responsibilities, and start and end date of the applicant.
- What was your relationship with the applicant, and how long did you know him/her?
- Please describe the applicant's interaction with children/students.
- Please describe the applicant's interaction with supervisors and those in authority.
- What strengths does the applicant possess in working with children/students?
- What weaknesses or challenges did the applicant have in working with children/students?
- Have you ever seen the applicant push boundaries or break policies?
- Do you have any hesitancy in recommending this applicant to work with children/students?
- Would your organization have this person back in the future?

It is crucial to be persistent in following up with references, because some references may be reluctant to share negative information with prospective employers. Follow up with the reference by phone. Be sure to keep a record of the recommendation in a permanent file.

Be sure, when checking references, to note and follow up on discrepancies between information given by an applicant and by references.

Job applicants may sometimes be uncomfortable with their current employer being contacted as they may not want their current employer to know they are looking for another position. If that is the case, you may postpone contacting their current employer, but as the process continues and you seek to hire the applicant, the employer should be contacted for a reference before hiring the individual.

Some employers and organizations may be reluctant to share information about past employees or volunteers out of a fear of liability for defamation. One option for relieving these concerns and ensuring that you receive full, candid information from references about applicants is to ask the applicant to sign a reference release form. This form protects references, past employers, and organizations with which the employer has been involved.

Below is a template release that can be used as a part of your application materials. You should consult with an attorney in your state before using this form, but this form has been reviewed by lawyers from several states.

## SAMPLE AUTHORIZATION AND RELEASE FORM

I authorize and request the companies, ministries, and organizations identified on Exhibit A (the Organizations), including any members of the Organizations, to share with [Your Church or Ministry's Name] (the Church) information and opinions of any kind relating to my employment, volunteer work, or other service with the Organizations.

I release the Organizations and their members from any restrictions which might otherwise make the information or opinions confidential or privileged.

I also release the Organizations, their members, and the Church from any liability and any claim for damages I might have because of this request for information and opinions, or because of the information and opinions which are shared because of this request.

I understand that the Church is considering me for a position of ministry. I am giving permission to the Organizations and their members to share information and opinions of a religious and ecclesiastical nature arising out of my previous ministry.

I have read this Authorization and Release Form and had the option and opportunity to consult with my attorney about it. I am signing this Authorization and Release Form willingly and with full understanding that I am waiving some of my legal rights.

\_\_\_\_\_ Signature of Applicant

\_\_\_\_\_ Name of Applicant

Exhibit A: List of Reference Organizations

**Organization Name Supervisor/Contact Address Email Phone Number**

_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____