Individuals who make hiring decisions should check references as part of the selection process. Information from references through telephone calls or letters of recommendation is likely to prove very useful in evaluating a candidate's skills, training, experience, and ability to perform job duties. Multiple references allow supervisors to look for consistency among comments.

On page 2, you will find a sample list of questions to use as a resource when conducting your reference check.

Remember to give candidates advance notice that you will be checking their references, which may include contacting people they did not identify as a reference. Hiring administrators, supervisors or HR staff should contact current or former supervisors even if the finalist did not provide supervisory references. Use the following guidelines to conduct all telephone reference checks, whether the candidate is an internal employee or an external candidate:

* Introduce yourself and explain why you are calling.
* Ask whether it is a convenient time to talk.
* Briefly describe the position the candidate applied for.
* Confirm the relationship between the person giving the reference and the candidate.
* Verify basic duties such as job title, duties, salary, and dates of employment.
* Be consistent! Ask the same questions about all final candidates and weigh the information equally; what disqualifies one candidate should disqualify any candidate.
* Request personal and work references.
* Don’t request information about race, color, religion, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, disability, or age.
* Don’t ask questions that can be answered with “yes” or “no.” Be sure that all questions are open-ended and relate directly to job performance.
* Don’t ask a reference any questions that you’re not permitted to ask the candidate.

**Sample Reference Check Questions**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Date |  |
| Candidate's  Name |  |
| Reference  Check provided by |  |
| Organization |  |
| Title |  |
| Phone Number |  |
| Employment Dates |  |

1. What was the nature and length of your relationship with the candidate?

2. How long have you known, worked with or supervised this individual?

3. What were the candidate’s beginning and ending employment dates?

4. What position(s) did the candidate hold? What was the salary history?

5. What were the candidate’s most recent job duties?

6. How would you describe the candidate’s institutional and personnel leadership skills?

7. Please describe the candidate’s ability to make good political judgements and work with senior leadership?

8. Why did the candidate leave the position? (if relevant)

9. Describe how the candidate reacted in stressful situations. Be specific.

10. How does the candidate handle difficult people and work to resolve conflict?

11. Has the candidate mainly served the role of implementer or initiator of projects and proposals?

12. What balance does the candidate achieve between working independently and checking in with stakeholders and supervisors?

13. Does the candidate always interact with others in a tactful manner? Explain.

14. What are the candidate’s key accomplishments or impacts on the organization?

15. What can you tell me about the quality and quantity of the candidate’s work?

16. How would you describe this person’s ability to meet deadlines?

17. What kind of supervision did this person require?

18. How well did this person get along with management and peers?

19. In what ways is this person a team player?

20. How would you describe this candidate’s attitude toward work?

21. How would you describe the candidate’s overall performance?

22. How was this person’s attendance? Was he or she punctual?

23. Why did this individual leave your organization?

24. Would you reemploy this person if you had the opportunity?

25. Is there any more job-related information you would like to add?

**Optional questions to ask professionals, managers, or executives:**

26. How would you describe this candidate’s leadership, managerial, or supervisory skills?

27. Describe the quality of this candidate’s written and verbal communication skills.

28. How do you rate this candidate’s ability to plan short-term? Long-term?

29. Provide examples in which this person had to make sound and timely decisions. What were the results?

30. Did this person plan and administer a budget? If so, what was the size, and how did this person manage it?

31. How would you describe this candidate’s technical skills?

32. How well did this person manage crisis, pressure, or stress?

33. How many people did this person directly supervise, for how long, and what were their levels (professional, administrative, blue collar, technical)?

34. What area of development could the candidate focus on?

35. If you were to offer advice on how best to guide this person, what would it be?

36. Would you hire or want to work with this person again? \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No (If no, then why?)