



The Importance of Obtaining Reference Checks/Background Checks



This HR Connect is designed to provide you with best practices and some Archdiocesan resources on the topic of reference checks for employees and volunteers. Parishes, Schools and Archdiocesan agencies often invest a lot of time and money in hiring and training new employees. As a result, they should want to find out as much as possible about the applicant before committing to hiring. By not conducting good reference checks, employers may fail to uncover information that would have proved a new employee unsuitable for the job, and may expose themselves to claims of negligent hiring, or at the very least, make an expensive hiring mistake. The point is this: “It always pays to carefully check references of potential employees.”

Best Practices

- References can help you confirm factual information that candidates provide.
- References can sometimes reveal more in-depth information about a candidate, such as quality of performance, strengths and weaknesses or perhaps criminal convictions.
- References checks with former employers and the Office of Human Resources may identify individuals who are not desirable to hire.

Hiring a new employee or adding a new volunteer requires several steps. Some of those steps are required by law, Archdiocesan Policy, both, or not required by law or policy, but are highly recommended to reduce the risk of making a bad hiring decision and having to deal with the consequences. In addition to reference checks, State laws and/or Archdiocesan policies may require the individual to be fingerprinted or background checked with government agencies for certain positions.

The Archdiocesan Employment Application includes the following important wording:

“My permission is given for contact to be made with references and employers listed herein, except where specifically indicated to the contrary. I also understand that the law requires and/or allows the Archdiocese to perform a criminal background records check for certain positions and I will comply with all Archdiocesan policies and procedures pertaining thereto. Any offer of employment will be contingent upon satisfactory results of these reports, if any. I agree to provide the Archdiocese with any information reasonably necessary to implement these reports, including my date of birth and other relevant personal information, which shall be kept confidential and used solely for these purposes.”

We are required by law and/or by Archdiocesan policy to fingerprint employees if they hold certain positions. Refer to page 4 of the Fingerprinting Policy http://www.sfarchdiocese.org/F_5.PDF or HR Connect #28. Other individuals who have “regular contact with youth and children” are required by The USCCB’s Charter for the Protection of Children to have “criminal background checks” using some government agency resources. The Archdiocese of San Francisco has chosen ChoicePoint to perform these background checks on our behalf. These “ChoicePoint” background checks include National Criminal File

search, County Courthouse records search as well as Social Security Number confirmation, which will provide such information as the county restraining orders on individuals even though they may not have any convictions on file. A person with a record of spousal or child abuse may be an individual (employee or volunteer) that you do not want to place in a position that may create a risk for any youth or children in our programs or care.

To satisfy the obligation to prevent harm caused by employees, employers must:

- Do a reasonable investigation of applicants before hiring them;
- Give employees appropriate training and adequate supervision; and
- Discipline or terminate employees who cause problems.

Employers are required to take steps to prevent their employees from harming other people or their property. So, if employers fail to take reasonable precautions to prevent harm from occurring, they may be responsible for any damage that might otherwise have been prevented.

The Archdiocese of San Francisco has identified and will implement a well thought out, easily accessible training program to meet this training obligation to satisfy the Bishop's Charter for a safe environment for children sometime during Fall 2006.

When contacting references, limit your questions to job-related information. Do not ask for medical information, physical or personal information not related to the employees performance or conduct on the job. Listed below are some information and sample background-checking questions to ask the reference:



1. Applicant's dates of employment with reference's company
2. Applicant's job title
3. What was the reference's professional relationship with the applicant?
4. What were the applicant's duties and responsibilities?
5. What were the applicant's demonstrated areas of strength? Can you give a specific example?
6. Since none of us is perfect, what opportunities for improvement did you see in this candidate?
7. Please tell me about his/her interpersonal relationships with his/her superiors. Subordinates? Peers?
8. Please comment on his/her: Ability to handle ordinary stresses of the job; Quality of work; Quantity of work; Reliability.
9. Would you have any hesitancy in having this individual work with children, youths or vulnerable adults?
10. Why did the applicant leave employment with the reference's company?
_____ Voluntary _____ Involuntary Please comment:
11. Would the reference's company rehire the applicant?
_____ Yes _____ No If no, please explain:

Archdiocesan Resources:

For additional guidelines on checking references and information on the questions you should ask a former employer, please see the following on the website:

HR Connect Issue #16 (Dec 2003) "Checking References" <http://www.sfarchdiocese.org/HRConnect16.pdf>

Overview of Background check policy: <http://www.sfarchdiocese.org/hrBkgdEvalOverviewChart.pdf>

Employee and Volunteer Release Authorization forms:

<http://www.sfarchdiocese.org/hrBkgdCkEmployeesFm.pdf>

<http://www.sfarchdiocese.org/hrBkgdCkVolunteersFm.pdf>

Fingerprinting Policy: http://www.sfarchdiocese.org/F_5.PDF

Legally Approved Employment Application: [http://www.sfarchdiocese.org/hrEmpApplic\(New\).pdf](http://www.sfarchdiocese.org/hrEmpApplic(New).pdf)

If you feel that any of these areas need more attention in your parish, please call us at (415) 614-5540 and we will do our best to assist you.