

## Step 6– Reference Checks

A reference check may be the most effective screening step during the hiring process. References will confirm the background and skills of the applicant and will provide an outside opinion on the suitability of the person for the position.

Don't assume that applicants will only give the names of people who will speak well of them. People often expect that references will not be contacted.

### Here are some tips for getting the most out of a reference check.

- Describe the position clearly to the person giving the reference. Ask about the applicant's skill and suitability for the tasks.
- Identify the level of trust that will be developed with children within the position (e.g. "Would you be comfortable with Joe working alone with your child?").
- Leave space in the call for open comment (e.g. "Could you comment on Joe and how you think he would fit this job?").
- Do more than one reference check. Get permission to contact previous or current employers.

### Dos and don'ts of reference checks

(Celeste J. Wroblewski, *The Seven Rs of Volunteer Development: A YMCA Resource Kit*)

- Do not proceed with reference checks until you have a signed release form.
- If possible, contact a non-profit agency the applicant has worked for.
- Make sure you have phone numbers for the references.
- If you've determined that the position requires reference checks, do them for everyone who applies for that position.
- Do not reject the applicant based solely on one bad reference, check others.
- Verify the identity of the person to whom you are speaking .
- If the person sounds guarded or hesitant, perhaps the candidate was a problem. Remember, however, that some problems arise because of the supervisor, so get several references.
- You may be able to ask trained volunteers or staff to help conduct the reference checks. A standardized reference check questionnaire ensures everyone is asked the same questions.

### Summary of key concepts

1. A reference check is the most effective screening step during the hiring process.
2. To get the most out of your reference check, prepare a list of questions or sample script beforehand.
3. Be aware of the do's and don'ts of reference checks before you proceed with one.

For additional information and other Volunteer Canada Screening Resources, or to order the complete Safe Steps workbook, please call 1-800-670-0401 or visit us at: [www.volunteer.ca](http://www.volunteer.ca)



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### Ontario Screening Initiative

A partnership of volunteer groups working together to make communities safer through the Ontario Volunteer Centre Network — Volunteer Canada Safe Steps Volunteer Screening Program. [www.volunteer.ca](http://www.volunteer.ca)

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