



City of Vernon, California
Human Resources Policies and Procedures

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SUBJECT: REFERENCE/BACKGROUND CHECKS

PURPOSE:

To establish guidelines for pre-employment reference checks of potential new hires and promotions, and for the release of personal or reference information to other employers regarding current or former employees while complying with all applicable disclosure and privacy laws.

Please refer to Human Resources Policy I-13, Criminal History/Live Scan Policy regarding the policy and procedures for conducting criminal background checks.

POLICY:

1. Verifying Information & Obtaining References - The City of Vernon is responsible for confirming information provided by applicants in their employment application. Information concerning an applicant's education and employment history will be verified by Human Resources before a formal employment offer is extended. This responsibility includes verification of an applicant's credentials and previous work experience.

The Human Resources Department shall verify all degrees, certifications, licenses and educational history listed in an employment application. Education can be verified by calling the campus Registrar or Student Records Office, although some campuses now refer you to a central registry service to obtain information. The student's name, social security number and dates of attendance or graduation are usually required in order to verify attendance and degrees earned. In most cases, this can be done over the telephone or online.

The Human Resources Department is responsible for ensuring that reference checks are conducted in accordance with applicable State and Federal laws. Reference information obtained in confidence by the City of Vernon from other employers is considered confidential and may be legally withheld from the applicant. However, any information obtained from public records as the result of a reference or background check must be released to the applicant within seven days unless the applicant waives their right to the information in accordance with Civil Code Section 1786.53.

The Human Resources Department is responsible for the oversight, compliance and consistency of reference checks. The hiring department shall conduct reference checks of candidates unless the hiring department wishes the Human Resources Department to do so. When the hiring department conducts reference checks, the department shall use and complete the attached Telephone Reference

Check Form. Upon completion of reference checks, the hiring department shall submit the Telephone Reference Check Form(s) to Human Resources for approval. Departments must consult with the Human Resources Department prior to asking questions not specifically identified on the attached Telephone Reference Check Form.

The purpose of reference checking is to gather additional facts and information about the leading candidate(s). Reference checks help verify information gathered in the interview (experience, skills and capabilities), and is a valuable tool in gauging the candidate's interpersonal communication skills (i.e. teamwork, ability to get along with others, communication style, etc.). A thorough reference check may also provide the hiring department with new facts and information (strengths, weaknesses and constructive criticism) to consider in making a final hiring decision.

Previous employers may be reluctant to share negative information about former employees but employers should verify, at a minimum, dates worked and positions held. Some employers will also state whether an employee is eligible for rehire.

Any written information obtained in the reference check will be retained by the Human Resources Department and destroyed in accordance with Government Code Sections 34090, et. seq. and the Records Retention Schedule of the Human Resources Department.

With the exception of the Police Department, authorization to use an outside investigator or agency to conduct any reference or background check must be obtained in advance from the Human Resources Director.

Applicants who submit an application for employment with the City of Vernon agree to the following:

- a. To answer all questions completely and accurately;
- b. To allow the City to contact all employers and educational institutions listed, including current employer, and if applicable the appropriate supervisor within the City of Vernon (for former employees);
- c. That all statements made within application are true and complete; and
- d. That making false statements may lead to disqualification or dismissal.

California Law prohibits employers from posing questions to applicants that express discrimination based upon an applicant's race, religion, color, national origin, ancestry, physical or mental disability, marital status, sex or sexual orientation. Federal law also prohibits discrimination in the hiring process.

The following are some examples of questions that cannot be asked regarding an applicant:

- a. When an applicant graduated from elementary or high school, or other questions concerning an applicant's age other than minimum age requirements;
- b. Where an applicant was born;
- c. Whether an applicant is a U.S. citizen;
- d. Questions regarding an applicant's race or ethnicity;
- e. Questions regarding an applicant's financial assets or debts, or whether an applicant owns or rents their residence;
- f. Questions concerning an applicant's height or weight;
- g. Questions concerning an applicant's family responsibilities such as the existence of dependents, childcare or child support, or about childbearing or fertility;

- h. Questions concerning an applicant's sexual orientation;
 - i. Questions concerning an applicant's religion or religious practices; and
 - j. Questions concerning an applicant's medical history or records.
2. Providing References to Outside Employers – The Human Resources Department is responsible for providing references to outside employers. Express written authorization must be provided by current or former City employees before requests for earnings-related data or detailed employment history can be released. Absent written authorization from the current or former employee, the Human Resources staff will only release basic factual information to other employers regarding current or former City employees.

In accordance with California Civil Code 1798-1798.78, the City of Vernon reference policy permits providing references to other employers including written verification of employment, dates of employment, job classification and salary range of an employee's classification. The Director of Human Resources may authorize individual supervisors or managers to respond to requests for detailed employment information when a signed release is on file with the Human Resources Department.

Whenever there is any doubt concerning the legitimacy of a request for information, the inquiry will not be honored by the City.

PROCEDURE:

| Responsibility | Action |
|---|--|
| Prospective Employee | 1. Provides written consent to Human Resources to provide information pertaining to employment and/or payroll and/or Commercial Driver's License (if applicable) information. |
| Human Resources | 2. Verifies all degrees, certifications, licenses and educational history listed in an employment application. 3. Confirms hiring department's compliance with reference check procedures. |
| Hiring Department (Human Resources, if requested) | 4. Conducts reference check(s) provided in application after final interviews and lead candidate is identified. 5. Utilizes the Telephone Reference Check Form for all reference checks. Consults with Human Resources prior to asking any questions not |

specifically identified on the Telephone Reference Check Form.

Hiring Department

Outside Agency (if applicable)

Human Resources/Police Dept.

6. Submits completed Telephone Reference Check form(s) to the Human Resources Department.

7. Submits personnel action form to Human Resources Department along with completed Telephone Reference Check Form(s).

8. Responds to requests from City staff regarding reference and/or payroll information on employee.

9. Coordinates with outside Background Investigation Company on background checks as requested.

10. Provides DOT required forms to all new applicants.

11. Provides applicant information to outside agency, if applicable.

12. Provides reference checks to outside employers upon receipt of expressed written authorization from former employee.

CITY OF VERNON

TELEPHONE REFERENCE CHECK

The purpose of reference checking is to gather additional facts and information about your leading candidate(s). The reference check helps verify information on the application form (education, experience, training) and information gathered in the interview (experience, skills, and capabilities), and is a valuable tool in gauging the candidate's interpersonal communication skills (teamwork, ability to get along with others, communication style, etc.). A thorough reference check may also provide you with new facts and information (strengths, weaknesses, and constructive criticism) to consider in making your final hiring decision.

Initiate your reference call with a brief introduction and the purpose of your contact, indicating that your candidate has listed them as a reference and you are following up to gather facts and information. Be sensitive to their time and make sure they are able to give you approximately 10 to 15 minutes to conduct a thorough reference check. A "rushed" reference check will be ineffective in eliciting quality information.

To assist you in the reference check process we have developed a list of suggested questions. These will be helpful to you in collecting necessary information to make an "informed" hiring decision. You may ask additional specific or substitute questions related to the particulars of the position you are filling. These questions serve as a guideline for you and have been very effective in gathering pertinent information about candidates. Not all questions need to be asked/answered.

Name of Candidate: _____

Reference Contact: _____ Telephone: (____) _____

Organization: _____

1. Employed from _____ to _____

2. Salary: Beginning - _____ Ending - _____

3. Were you involved in the selection process when _____ was hired in your organization? If so, what influenced you to hire him/her? _____

4. How would you rate their customer service skills? _____

5. How did he/she get along with:

• Co-workers? _____

• Supervisors/Managers? _____

6. If I were to call his/her co-workers, what do you think they would tell me about his/her teamwork and interpersonal skills? _____

7. Was he/she dependable? _____
8. What was his/her attendance record like?
• Was he/she absent often? _____
• Was he/she tardy often? _____
9. How well did he/she follow instructions? _____
10. How would you rate him/her on their ability to do their job?
_____ Unacceptable _____ Needs Improvement _____ Acceptable
_____ Good _____ Superior _____ Outstanding
11. If you could offer him/her one bit of constructive criticism, what would it be? _____

12. Why did he/she leave your organization? _____
13. What one thing about his/her employment with you do you recall the most? (name major accomplishment, event, work product, etc.) _____

14. What was his/her reputation within your organization? _____
15. What else can you share with me about _____ that might help us in evaluating his/her candidacy for this position? _____

This is to certify that I have conducted a reference check on the leading candidate for purposes of employment and have asked the specific questions contained in this checklist.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Reviewed and approved by Human Resources Department:

Signature: _____ Date: _____