

PRE-EMPLOYMENT REFERENCES POLICY NOTICE

1. **PURPOSE:** The purpose of this notice is to announce the inclusion of pre-employment reference check requirements in the hiring process. In the hiring process, Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) human resources (HR) professionals and hiring officials must demonstrate an ongoing commitment to recruiting a diverse and talented workforce through equitable hiring practices that are free of biases and/or any form of discrimination to promote excellence in service to our diverse community of Veterans and their beneficiaries. Compliance with this policy will be recorded in the VA onboarding system of record, USA Staffing.
2. **POLICY:**
 - a. **Applicability.** This notice is applicable to all competitive and excepted service positions appointed under title 5 in grades GS-1 through 15, or equivalent and hybrid title 38 and full title 38 excepted service positions appointed under 38 U.S.C. Chapter 74.
 - b. Reference checks are an assessment method used in the hiring process to verify the information provided by a candidate (e.g., on resume and during interview); gain additional knowledge regarding a candidate's abilities; and assist a hiring manager with making a final selection for a position. Hiring officials must incorporate pre-employment reference checks into the selection process by conducting them prior to HR staff extending the tentative offer.
 - c. Hiring officials must obtain permission from candidates prior to contacting their references.
 - (1) If candidates' resumes/applications indicate permission is granted, no further action is necessary and hiring officials may proceed with conducting reference checks.
 - (2) If candidates' resumes/applications indicate permission is not granted or do not specify whether a potential reference may be contacted, hiring officials must contact candidates to obtain their permission prior to conducting reference checks. This permission can be obtained in writing (i.e., memo or email) or orally (e.g., during the interview). If obtained orally, the hiring official must document the permission and include it in the recruitment case file.
 - d. At minimum, the pre-employment reference checks must include contacting two current or former supervisors for all placement actions unless one of the exceptions listed in 2.e below applies. If candidates do not grant permission to conduct reference checks with current or former supervisors, hiring officials may consider it as a factor during the selection process. If two supervisory references are not available or if hiring officials desire additional perspectives, they may ask the candidate for alternate/additional references. References should come from individuals who were in a position to directly observe the candidate's work

products, performance, aptitude, conduct, etc. and be of a professional nature (i.e., coworkers, professors, etc.).

e. Exceptions.

- (1) Candidate is member of hiring official's work unit - If candidates are members of the hiring officials' current work unit, reference checks are not required. Note: A work unit is a group of employees organizationally aligned under a hiring official (i.e., line official or supervisor).
- (2) Candidate is unable to provide two supervisory references - If it is not possible for hiring officials to obtain at least two supervisory references, per 2.d above, they may substitute one co-worker or another employment-based source who was in a position to directly observe the candidate and can provide information about the candidate's professional work products, performance, aptitude, conduct, etc.
- (3) Candidate only has academic history or limited employment history - Hiring officials may substitute academic sources, such as professors, teachers or instructors, as employment sources for candidates who have only academic history and/or limited or no employment history.
- (4) Candidate has no academic or employment references - Hiring officials should conduct reference checks using personal references (i.e., friends, relatives, etc.) as a last resort, and only if the candidate has no employment or academic references available. The personal references should be able to attest a candidate's work skills (e.g., general and technical) and their work habits including the behaviors needed for the position.

f. Hiring officials do not have to use a specific form or format when conducting reference checks, as long as the check provides an additional assessment of the final candidates' past work product, performance, aptitude, conduct, competencies, general or technical skills and behaviors. When conducting the pre-employment reference check, hiring officials must consider the following:

- (1) Describe the position and duties that the candidate will perform to the reference.
- (2) Ask the same questions of all references for all candidates under consideration.
- (3) Verify information from the candidate's resume and interview, as appropriate.
- (4) Clarify any conflicting information received from references with the candidate.

- g. After reference checks are completed:
- (1) Hiring officials must submit written documentation confirming pre-employment reference checks were completed to HR office staff along with the name(s) of the selected candidate(s).
 - (2) Hiring officials must submit all completed reference check documentation to HR office staff, including documentation for candidates to include selected and non-selected candidates.
 - (3) HR office staff will ensure the reference check documents for selected and non-selected candidates are uploaded into USA Staffing and retained as part of the recruitment case file.
 - (4) As applicable, if the current supervisor is not contacted for a reference check prior to the tentative offer, the hiring official is encouraged to conduct this reference check prior to extending a final offer of employment and submit it to the HR office staff for inclusion in the recruitment case file.
3. **RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer (05), Recruitment and Placement Policy Service (059).
4. **RELATED HANDBOOK:** VA Handbook 5005, Staffing.
5. **RESCISSION:** This notice will be rescinded when revised VA Handbook 5005 is published to include pre-employment references, within one year.

CERTIFIED BY:

**BY DIRECTION OF THE SECRETARY
OF VETERANS AFFAIRS:**

/s/
Guy T. Kiyokawa
Assistant Secretary for
Enterprise Integration

/s/
Gina M. Grosso
Assistant Secretary for
Human Resources and Administration/
Operations, Security and Preparedness

DISTRIBUTION: Electronic only