

Volunteer Reference Checks

The purpose of this quick guide is to provide information on reference checking volunteers.

Why do a volunteer reference check?

Having a set approach to reference checks means details can be verified. It complements other relevant screening checks and provides the opportunity to clarify any potential areas where information is needed to make an informed decision about a potential volunteer.

Reference checks as part of a standard volunteer recruitment procedure ensures that all volunteers are treated equitably. This is regardless of how they entered a program or how well they are known. They are also a chance for you to find out ways you can support the volunteer in your organisation.

Who can be a referee?

Some volunteer applicants may not have established networks or past employers to tap into as a referee, so be flexible and open to who can be a potential referee. A referee should be able to provide insight to an applicant's character. A referee could be a teacher, religious leader, support worker, sport coach, work colleague, volunteer coordinator, community leader, but not a family member.

Before the reference check

Make sure applicants understand that a reference check will be done and why. After the interview, let the applicant know that you will be contacting the referees listed and ask them to confirm that the referees have agreed to be contacted.

Format of reference checks

Each organisation will have their own procedures for undertaking reference checks and preferred method whether via phone, email, or an online questionnaire. Whichever format you use, ensure it is consistently used for all reference checks and is accessible for all the referees.

What to ask during a reference check?

A reference check template is a valuable tool to gather key information to help you decide if the volunteer role is the right fit for the applicant. Think about tasks of the role and skills needed to carry it out and adjust questions accordingly, rather than a 'one size fits all' approach.

Ask open questions rather than 'yes/no' responses to gain greater detail and provide a broader overview of an applicants' character, skills and role suitability. It can be useful to include an 'other comments' section for referees to add anything else they would like to share about the applicant.

Common questions:

- How long have you known the applicant and in what capacity?
- Why do you think the role is suitable for the applicant?
- What relevant skills and experiences does the applicant bring?
- How would you describe the applicant's ability to get along with others?
- Can you think of any reason why the applicant would not be a good fit for this role?
- How could we as an organisation support this applicant in the role?

Only ask questions that are relevant and necessary to the role. Be aware of the type of questions that shouldn't be asked, as part of [Australia's anti-discrimination laws](#).

Acknowledgement

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The seven State and Territory volunteering peak bodies acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea, and community. We pay our respect to Elders past and present.

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