




City of Olympia Administrative Guidelines

GUIDELINE #29 Reference Checking	
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Administrative Guideline #29 – Reference Checking

29 Reference Checking

29.1. PURPOSE: Ensure that employment reference and closely related information is collected, disseminated, retained, and released in a consistent and reliable way.

29.2. REFERENCE: N/A.

29.3. APPLICATION: This guideline applies to all employees of the City of Olympia. City of Olympia Department Directors are responsible for the application of this guideline in their departments.

29.4. POLICY: The City of Olympia will collect employment references and other background information as needed and/or allowable by law before offering employment to anyone. Persons with the authority to hire employees for the City of Olympia must make a reasonable, good faith effort to obtain employment reference information before offering employment to anyone.

The City of Olympia will provide employment references on current and former employees subject to the provisions contained in this guideline.

The City of Olympia will provide employment references for current and former employees in good faith, without malice or reckless disregard for the truth, and provide accurate job related information. A reasonable and good faith effort must be made to ensure that any information released is consistent with both experience and available documentation. Information will be furnished in accordance with the policies and procedures described below, and will in all cases be limited to the inquiry. References provided by the City of Olympia will not contain unrelated or extraneous adverse material, will not contain broad conclusions of wrongdoing that can't be supported or corroborated by materials contained in an employee file, will not be provided to persons not having a job related interest, and will not be made with malicious intent.

29.5. GUIDELINES:

29.5.1. PROSPECTIVE EMPLOYEES:

- a. Reference checks must be conducted on the finalist for positions at the City of Olympia before a job offer is made. This means that reference checks must be conducted for all types of hires (e.g., regular employees, temporary employees, emergency hires, and Instructors). Hiring decisions must take reference information into consideration *if it is available*.
- b. Refer to the candidate's application for contact information. If the information is unclear or inaccurate, contact the candidate and request that the information be brought up to date. At a minimum, a prospective employee's current or most recent employer must be contacted. It is highly recommended that references be obtained from the two employers immediately preceding the current or most recent employer. If a current or previous employer is unwilling or unable to respond to requests for references, or if a previous employer no longer exists, that information should be recorded.

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- c. Reference information is to be collected on a form. A sample form has been provided as part of this Guideline. (**Appendix 1**) You may customize the form to address needs you have for a position. In all cases, the same questions or areas of inquiry should be covered with each reference a candidate has provided. Contact Human Resources for assistance with developing custom questions or forms if needed.

29.5.2. CURRENT OR FORMER EMPLOYEES: Providing employment references for current or former City of Olympia employees.

- a. A signed release form may, if deemed necessary by a department Director, be obtained before any reference information is released about a current or former City of Olympia employee. (**A sample form is provided as Appendix 2**)
- b. Employment references may only be provided by the director, managers, or supervisors, of a current or former City of Olympia employee.
- c. It is highly recommended that employees with the authority to do so (generally directors, managers and supervisors) review the employee file before responding to employment history based reference requests.
- d. If a department Director has determined that a signed release form is necessary, contact the Human Resources Department for assistance in obtaining it. If time is of the essence, ask the prospective employer to provide one before you release any information. Forward the release form to Human Resources for placement in the employee file. If a City of Olympia information release authorization form or a similar signed release from a prospective employer is required but is not provided or available, the City of Olympia will only verify dates of employment, job title and rate of pay at separation. Contact the HR Department or the Payroll Division of Administrative Services to arrange for this verification service.
- e. Record the identity of the reference checker. Obtain name, position, company name, date, and time. Summarize the questions you were asked and responses you provided.
- f. Limit your responses to the questions asked. Don't volunteer unsolicited information and make sure that the overall accuracy and specific information in your response is accurate, complete and consistent with on the job experiences and, if possible, the contents of the individual's employee file and other records such as payroll documents and training files.
- g. If you don't have access to employee files and are asked a question that you reasonably believe can only be accurately responded to via access to an employee file, inform the requestor that you must review the employee file before responding and do so as soon as practically possible.
- h. Send all documentation to Human Resources for retention in the employee file.
- i. If you are asked to give a reference for a current or former employee where your response would be largely negative, seek guidance from Human Resources before responding.
- j. If contacted by a financial institution, potential lender and/or creditor, or owner of rental property desiring to rent premises to a current City of Olympia employee, the City of Olympia will verify job title, date of employment, and current rate of pay. No other information will be given to prospective creditors, lenders or landlords unless authorized by an employee signature and/or required by law.

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29.5.3. ADDITIONAL PRE-EMPLOYMENT TYPES OF BACKGROUND CHECKS: For certain positions, and in certain situations, additional pre-employment types of background checks beyond the scope of employment references may be required. Department Directors or their designees will furnish the Human Resources Director with a list of all positions in their departments for which information beyond the scope of employment references is used to make hiring and/or selection decisions. Directors will review the list on an annual basis, make appropriate additions and deletions, and furnish the updated list to the Human Resources Director. The Human Resources Director will work with Department Directors to accomplish this required action in an efficient and reasonable way.

- a. Candidates for positions where incumbents have unsupervised access to children and vulnerable adults must disclose criminal history to the City and undergo a criminal record background check for certain types of convictions in accordance with RCW 43.43.830 and 43.43.842.
- b. Candidates for positions requiring a Commercial Driver's License must take pre-employment controlled substance use detection tests and previous employers will be contacted for information about prior positive controlled substance or alcohol tests. **(See City of Olympia Administrative Guideline, Chapter 23, Drug and Alcohol Testing)**

Previous drug and/or alcohol results must be obtained for candidates applying for positions requiring a Commercial Driver's License. Prior employers, and those from whom the candidate sought regulated employment, must be checked (49 CFR Part 40). The applicable CFR permits employers to work the employee in a regulated position for 30 days before either obtaining the necessary information or documenting its good faith attempts to do so. **(See Appendix 3 for Release and Verification Form)**

- c. Previous drug and/or alcohol results must be obtained for candidates applying for positions requiring a Commercial Driver's License. Prior employers, and those from whom the candidate sought regulated employment, must be checked (49 CFR Part 40). The applicable CFR permits employers to work the employee in a regulated position for 30 days before either obtaining the necessary information or documenting its good faith attempts to do so. **(See Appendix 3 for Release and Verification Form)**
- d. Candidates for positions that have access to areas where FBI Criminal Justice Information System (CJIS) computers are located, those who have direct responsibility to configure and maintain computer systems and networks with connection to the FBI CJIS, and unescorted support positions, contractors, and custodial workers who work in areas where CJIS computer terminals are located are required to qualify for and be granted access to such areas. The granting of access is determined through review of national fingerprint-based record check and must be completed within 30 days upon initial employment or assignment. A new record check is required every 5 years to maintain access privileges.
- e. Candidates for both uniformed and non-uniformed positions in the Police and Fire departments may undergo, in accordance with policies and procedures established by Civil Service Rules, criminal record background checks, credit history checks, medical exams, polygraph examinations, psychological tests, pre-employment

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controlled substance use detection tests and physical ability tests.

- f. Candidates for positions where driving a City vehicle or a personal vehicle on City business is an essential function of the position are required to provide the City with a copy of their driving abstract. Applicants will have their driving records reviewed in accordance with applicable laws and regulations to ascertain that they are legally authorized to operate a motor vehicle within the scope of their employment.

The City of Olympia may independently verify the possession of degrees, licenses, certifications, or other similar educational or professional qualifications.

Department Directors or their designees, after consultation with the Human Resources Director, may require candidates to undergo and successfully complete criminal record background checks, credit history checks, medical exams, or other inquiries in situations not described in A through E above. Please consult with the Human Resources Department if you need assistance obtaining any pre-employment information you need to make a hiring decision or are working with a unique or unanticipated situation in this area.

29.5.4. OBTAINING AND USING CREDIT HISTORY INFORMATION:

- a. **Definitions (used in the credit reporting industry):**
 1. **Credit/Consumer Report** -a summary of a person's credit standing, capacity, or worthiness; character, general reputation, personal characteristics, or mode of living.
 2. **Investigative Consumer Report:** -a credit/consumer report or a portion of a credit/consumer report which contains information on a person's character, general reputation, personal characteristics, or mode of living based on personal interviews with that person's neighbors, associates, and friends.
- b. All credit history information must be collected and handled in accordance with the provisions contained in the Fair Credit Reporting Act.
- c. Employees with the authority to make hiring decisions for the City of Olympia may make limited use of these reports in making employment decisions only where a direct connection exists between the nature of the information obtained and suitability for employment by the City of Olympia. Great care will be taken in using this information and persons with hiring authority must be able to demonstrate a clear relationship between the information used and the candidate's qualifications for employment and ability to perform the duties, responsibilities, and essential functions of the position.
- d. Department Directors or their designees will furnish the Human Resources Director with a list of all positions in their departments for which any type of credit reports are used to make employment decisions. Directors will review the list on an annual basis, make appropriate additions and deletions, and furnish the updated list to the Human Resource Director. The Human Resources Director will work with Department Directors to accomplish this required action in an efficient and reasonable way.
- e. To protect employee and candidate privacy, the following procedures shall apply for all circumstances where credit reports are used to make employment

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decisions.

29.5.5. CREDIT/CONSUMER REPORTS: Prior to obtaining a credit/consumer report or causing one to be prepared on any person, the City must provide that person with a document that states that such a report may be obtained for employment purposes and obtain the person's written authorization to obtain the report.

Prior to taking any adverse employment action against a person that is based in whole or in part on a credit/consumer report, the City must provide the effected person with a copy of the report and a written description of that person's rights under the Fair Credit Reporting Act (FRCA).

Once adverse action has been taken against a subject of a credit/consumer report, the City must provide notice of the adverse action to the affected person, provide the name, address, and toll free telephone number of the consumer reporting agency that provided the City with the information; a statement that the reporting agency did not make the decision to take the adverse action and thus cannot provide information to the employee or applicant about the specific reasons for that decision; provide notice of the person's right to obtain a free copy of the report on which the adverse action was based within 60 days of notice of the action; and provide notice of the person's right to dispute the accuracy or completeness of the report with the consumer reporting agency.

29.5.6. INVESTIGATIVE CONSUMER REPORTS: Before obtaining an investigative consumer report or causing one to be prepared on a person a Department Director must contact and seek assistance from the Human Resources Department to insure appropriateness and compliance with the Fair Credit Reporting Act. The Human Resources Director will work with Department Directors to accomplish this required action in an efficient and reasonable way. For example, an initial authorization to perform this type of credit report may suffice for a number of subsequent hires for identical positions, provided there are no changes to the essential functions, duties, or responsibilities of a position.

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Sample City of Olympia Telephone Reference Check Form

1. This form may be used to collect employment reference information on prospective candidates for jobs at the City of Olympia.
2. Here are some examples of standard reference questions. You may use any or all of them, modify them, or add questions of your own devising if you desire. Remember to record all the questions you asked and the responses provided.
3. The questions have been arranged in a standard form for your convenience. The form appearance may be modified to suit specific needs and situations.

Complete this section before calling a reference source.	
CITY OF OLYMPIA _____ DEPARTMENT	
TELEPHONE REFERENCE CHECK	
Applicant's Name:	
Employer:	Telephone:
Immediate Supervisor's Name:	Telephone:
Person Contacted:	Telephone:
Applicant's Job Title:	Dates of Employment:
	From: To:
Current Salary:	Reason for Leaving:
<p>1. I am calling to verify some information given to us by _____ (candidate name); who is applying for a position with us as a _____ (position applied for). I have a signed release of information authorization and can provide it to you if required.</p>	
<p>1. He/she states that he/she was employed with your firm as a _____ from _____ to _____ and that his/her final salary was \$_____.</p> <p>Is this correct? YES NO (If no, enter the corrected information here.)</p>	

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Use this section to record the questions you asked and the responses received.

1. Why did he/she leave your organization?

2. How well did he/she do their job?

3. What were his/her job duties?

4. How would you describe his/her performance compared with others doing the same job?

5. How well did he/she get along with managers/supervisors?

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6. How well did he/she work with managers/supervisors?

7. How well did he/she get along with co-workers?

8. How well did he/she work with co-workers?

9. How well did he/she get along with subordinates (if any)?

10. How well did he/she work with subordinates (if any)?

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11. How good were his/her written and verbal communications skills?

12. How would you describe his/her:

- a) attendance
- b) dependability
- c) punctuality
- d) degree of supervision needed
- e) overall attitude
- f) honesty
- g) trustworthiness
- h) potential for advancement
- i) customer service

13. Did this person participate in your company's random drug testing pool? (If "Yes," see Appendix 3, "City of Olympia Release and Verification Form.")

14. Has this person ever been disciplined for substance or alcohol abuse?

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15. Tell me about his/her strong points.

16. Did he or she ever receive any formal disciplinary action? If so, what were the circumstances?

17. Where do you feel he/she needs further development?

18. Would you re-hire this person? YES NO If no, why not?

19. Is there anything else you would like to add?

20. (Additional Question)

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Sample City of Olympia Release of Information Form.

1. *If required by a department Director*, current and former City of Olympia employees may use this form *or a similar document provided by a prospective employer* to authorize release of employment reference information.
2. Send the completed form to HR for retention. Keep a copy for your records if desired.

**CITY OF OLYMPIA
INFORMATION RELEASE FORM**

I, (print name) _____, hereby authorize the City of Olympia to provide information to prospective employers concerning my employment with the City of Olympia. It is understood that such information will be related to my skills, abilities, work performance, character, and behavior while employed by the City of Olympia. It is understood that information provided to prospective employers will be consistent with the contents of my City of Olympia employee file.

I understand that this authorization is at my request and direction and I agree to hold the City of Olympia harmless from any and all actions related to release of this information.

I understand that once signed and dated, this form will be placed in my employee file. I understand that in the absence of this form or a similar signed release from a prospective employer, the City of Olympia will only verify my job title and rate of pay at separation; and dates of employment.

Signature

Date

City of Olympia Release and Verification Form.

1. *As required by CFR 49, Part 40*, previous drug and/or alcohol test results must be obtained. This form will authorize the release of drug and alcohol test result information.
2. Send the completed form to HR for retention. Keep a copy for your records if desired.

**CITY OF OLYMPIA
RELEASE FORM**

Part 1

I, (print name) _____, hereby authorize (company name) _____ to release information on drug and alcohol testing program participation, any controlled substances test results, participation in a random program, evidence of refusals to be tested, or other violations of the DOT rules. I request that such records be released immediately.

Signature

Date (mm/dd/yyyy)

TO BE COMPLETED BY PREVIOUS EMPLOYER

Part 2

I, (print name) _____, am employed by (company name) _____ hereby certify the following information is accurate to the best of my knowledge regarding (employee's name) _____.

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Part 3

1. Did the employee participate in a drug testing program that complies in all respects with DOT regulations (49 CFR Parts 40 and 382)? Yes / No

If Yes, what dates did the employee participate? (mm/dd/yyyy) _____ to _____

2. Did the employee participate in a random controlled substance testing program? Yes / No

If Yes, what dates did the employee participate?(mm/dd/yyyy)_____ to _____

3. What date was the employee last tested for controlled substances? _____ (mm/dd/yyyy)

What was the result of that test? Positive / Negative

(please supply copy of test result)

4. What date was the employee last tested for alcohol? _____ (mm/dd/yyyy)

What was the result of that test? Positive / Negative

(please supply copy of test result)

5. Please list the test results and test dates for any drug tests taken within the past six months.

6. Do you have any knowledge or records of a violation by this employee of the DOT rules or the controlled substances abuse rule of another DOT agency within the previous six months?

Yes / No If Yes, please explain:

7. Name of qualified drug testing program:

Program Address:

Telephone Number of Program Administrator (include area code):

8. Signature of authorized Program Administrator:

Date: _____

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