

Guide to Reference and Background Checks

The people you entrust to operate your organization should create an environment that fosters positivity and growth. However, sometimes finding and hiring the right people is easier said than done.

Employer **background and reference checks** are a crucial part of identifying the best candidates in your applicant pool and hiring them with confidence.

Why you should conduct reference and background checks

Workplace safety

Background checks can help you ensure that your workplace and your employees are safe from workplace violence, sexual harassment, and more. Additionally, they can help you avoid legal liability in the unfortunate event that something does happen at work.

Data verification

Background and reference checks can verify that someone is who they say they are and that the information on their resume is true. This can help you determine someone's honesty and reliability, and improve the quality of your hires.

Improved team quality

Background screening takes some of the unknown out of the hiring equation when evaluating applicants. It can help you determine the quality of a candidate *before* hiring them, preventing you from turnover down the road.

Additionally, hiring quality employees contributes to a positive employer brand and reputation. And since many job seekers won't apply to a company with a negative reputation, background checks can actually improve your ability to make the right hires.

Types of background checks

- Criminal background checks
- Drug screening
- Employment and education verifications
- Civil record checks
- Driver record checks
- Identity checks



Determine your screening needs

Just as not every small business is the same, not every background check fits every organization. You can determine what background checks are right for your business by **evaluating your industry and the type of roles you need filled.**

You may be tempted to find out all there is to know about your prospective candidate, but **it's better to establish a list of necessary checks consistent with your profession and business ethics.** Decide which checks mentioned above will aid your hiring decision. For example, if the job involves working with children, a criminal history check is mandatory.

Reference check tips

Tailor your questions to be specific and targeted at what you'd most like to know about an applicant. By asking something like: "Can you give me two examples of how so-and-so accomplished their main priorities?" you are asking the reference to be specific and speak directly about the applicant's job performance.

Supervisors know not only what it's like to work with this person (like coworkers do) but they also understand all aspects of their performance. They'll have insight into what it was like to coach them and can validate the strengths and weaknesses that you learned about during interviews. Ask for their advice on how you can be a great manager for this hire.

Stay compliant

Inform the candidate about your background screening policy and ask for the candidate's consent during the first meeting. Put all necessary information and provisions on your website. Check every potential employee – don't make any exceptions.

Last but not least, **avoid using any language like "background check" and "fingerprint check" in any job postings you put online. Many major job boards, like Indeed, will flag these terms to stay compliant with cities and states that have laws around criminal history based job discrimination.**