

# Employment References Policy - Policy Number 506

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## 1. Introduction

Exchange of information between employers maximises the opportunity for employees to be fitted into the positions for which they are best suited. Where possible, Pacific Community Housing wishes to provide and receive accurate information on the individuals with whom it deals. However, some routine precautions are necessary to safeguard the organisation against litigation.

## 2. Purpose

This policy seeks to ensure that the information needs of Pacific Community Housing, the individuals, and the other organisations concerned are met in a manner that places no party at risk of misunderstanding or conflict.

## 3. Definitions

'References' refers to material obtained or provided, in confidence or otherwise, to prospective employers to be used to assess a candidate's suitability for a post.

The purpose of references is to obtain information from a third party, providing a factual check on a candidate's employment history, qualifications, experience and/or an assessment of the candidate's suitability for the post in question.

Seeking employment references is a separate matter from requiring police record checks, and this policy does not apply to police record checks.

## 4. Policy

### Giving references

Pacific Community Housing will, in most cases, provide references for employees and ex-employees where this is their wish. However, there is no obligation on the organisation to do so.

### Requiring references

#### In the case of permanent full-time positions

As part of the recruitment and selection process Pacific Community Housing requests two referees from all applicants and prospective employees, those two referees being their current or immediately previous employer and a second employer.

If an applicant has not been employed previously, or is not able to offer their previous employer as a referee, they will be asked to provide an academic and a character referee.

References and other pre-employment checks must be deemed as satisfactory before a formal offer of employment can be made.

#### In the case of casual, short-term, or volunteer positions

As part of the recruitment and selection process Pacific Community Housing may, at the discretion of the selection committee, request two referees from applicants but is not obliged to do so, except in relation to positions involving significant financial responsibility or significant contact with vulnerable clients.

## 5. Responsibilities

It shall be the responsibility of the CEO to ensure that all members of staff/volunteers who may be involved in recruitment processes and/or provision of reference checks are aware of the policy and to monitor compliance with the policy.

It shall be the responsibility of each staff member/volunteer to follow these procedures.

## 6. Procedures

### Giving references

References will be provided only to appropriate parties. Before providing a reference, the staff member/volunteer should verify the identity of the person requesting the reference. If in doubt about the identity of the person requesting the reference, the staff member should ask for the request in writing. The staff member should not give out any information to parties who do not have a legitimate “need to know”.

Written references shall be clearly marked ‘Private and Confidential’ on an opaque cover page and shall be sent to an appropriate individual in the organisation seeking the reference.

In considering whether to give a reference, and in determining the content of any such reference, referees must not discriminate on any grounds covered in Pacific Community Housing’s Discrimination Policy.

When providing references, referees shall take reasonable care;

provide information which is as far as possible true, accurate and fair, and which does not give a misleading impression;

provide only honest opinions;

express opinions as opinions rather than statements of fact; and

limit the information given to the employee's job-related performance.

A staff member can act as a personal referee for any individual. However, such references must be made on the staff member’s own notepaper and must say that the reference is being made in a personal capacity. On no account should a personal reference be written on Pacific Community Housing’s letterhead or in any way suggest that Pacific Community Housing endorses the reference.

### Requiring references

Where possible, references should be obtained directly from the referee. Selection panels should not rely on references provided by candidates, or open references (addressed “to whom it may concern”), as there is no way of checking their authenticity and accuracy.

After the selection process, the successful candidate will be informed that they are the ‘preferred candidate’ and that Pacific Community Housing will be doing a number of pre-employment checks, all of which must be satisfactory before a formal employment offer will be made. New staff/volunteers shall not normally be permitted to commence employment until after their references have been checked.

When these references have been made, the selection committee shall confirm whether the references are satisfactory, and that they verify the information given by the candidate during the selection process.

If these references and any other appropriate pre-employment checks are satisfactory, the person will be formally offered the position.

The selection committee may, at its discretion, seek written references and/or telephone references. Where telephone references are sought, the person seeking the reference should:

Ensure they are speaking to the appropriate person in the organisation;

Make it clear to the referee that they are making notes, that a copy of the notes may be provided to the person if they request it, and that the referee’s name will also be disclosed;

Be sensitive that legal considerations may limit the amount of data/information a referee is prepared to give; and

Make clear notes of their conversation and place these on file at the earliest opportunity with the other material relating to the appointment.

Copies of written references and notes of telephone references must be kept on the employee’s personnel file.

### Related Documents

- Staff Recruitment Policy 508

## APPENDIX A

### REFERENCE GUIDELINES

Reference checks is a selection technique that addresses previous job performance.

It is designed to confirm information obtained from a candidate by discussing the candidate's performance with previous supervisors.

Ideally, a minimum of two referees should be contacted (preferably the candidate's two most recent employers).

Some tips for conducting a successful reference check are:

- Plan your call in advance, but be flexible. The conversation may not proceed exactly as planned. As with interviewing, reference checking gets easier with practice.
- Introduce yourself immediately, stating your position with your organisation and explain the purpose of your call. Ask if the referee is available for discussion, and if not, arrange to call again later.
- Be yourself. Relax and attempt to establish a rapport with the person to whom you're speaking.
- Mention that the candidate is one of several being considered for a position in your organisation, and confirm the accuracy of the employment information provided by the candidate (e.g. dates of employment, job duties and anything else that is relevant).
- Take notes as the referee speaks.
- Tell the referee about the position for which the candidate is being considered. This makes the exchange of relevant information easier.
- Let the referee talk freely. As with interviewing, open-ended questions and follow-up statements will work best. Listen for obvious pauses and be ready to probe for further information; if you reach a dead end with a particular topic, leave it and return later if necessary.
- Don't end the conversation until you have sufficient information. Use summary statements to clarify ambiguous answers. Finish your conversation by asking "Would you re-hire this applicant if you had the opportunity?"
- Confirm that the referee is comfortable that the information disclosed is covered by the Federal Privacy Legislation.
- Thank the referee for their help.