# Conducting Reference Checks Procedure

## PURPOSE

The City of Hamilton ("the City") recognizes the importance of reference checks as a means of substantiating information obtained from the Candidate’s application, resume and the interview; and collecting and clarifying any other position related information.

This Procedure outlines how the City conducts reference checks, which is an important step in the recruitment and selection process to make the best hire decision possible.

## SCOPE

This Procedure applies to both internal and external Candidates who have applied for a City position. References must be performed for all positions including temporary, permanent, contract, and casual.

Where applicable, if there are any discrepancies between this Procedure and the governing collective agreement for unionized employees, the collective agreement will prevail.

See the corresponding Procedure on “Giving References” if requested to give a reference on a previous or current employee.

## DEFINITIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Referee(s)</td>
<td>Current or previous supervisors / managers who have first-hand knowledge of the Candidate’s work and abilities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Candidate</td>
<td>Job applicant whether internal or external Candidate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hiring Manager</td>
<td>The manager who has requested that a position be filled and to whom the new employee will report when hired</td>
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## STEPS

1) References must be successfully completed and documented prior to any job offer extended (verbal or written). If the reference check results raise any significant concerns or issues, the hiring manager makes the final decision whether or not to proceed with a job offer in consultation with Human Resources.

2) References are only checked on the final Candidate, if there is one clear superior Candidate compared to the applicant pool; and only after all assessments have been completed. If necessary, references are performed on the short-list of Candidates (top two or three) following the final interview.

3) For external hires, a minimum of three Referees are contacted; and for internal hires; a minimum of two Referees are contacted as per
the following provisos:

- The best practice is to ask Candidates for referees who are current and former supervisors/managers. Depending on the type of job and whether the Candidate(s) have previous work experience, an exception may be made to consider teachers and volunteer organizations, if needed.
- In the situation where an external candidate cannot come up with three references or has difficulty providing references due to the nature of their previous work (i.e. self-employment), hiring managers should contact a Workforce Planning Specialist for guidance.

4) As per the *Ontario Human Rights Code*, no questions can be asked that give consideration to a Candidate’s race, ancestry, place of origin, color, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, sex, sexual orientation, age, record of offences, marital status, family status, disability, gender identity or gender expression.

5) In accordance with the *Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, all Candidates must sign off on an “Authorization for Release of Information Form” (see Appendix A) that provides their consent for the City to proceed to contact the referees as provided. Alternatively, Candidates can grant their permission through email.

6) All reference checks should be conducted via personal contact e.g. over the phone as opposed to receiving a letter of recommendation. Exceptions can be made for Referees who need accommodation.

7) As the City of Hamilton seeks to promote diversity within its applicant pool and the greater workforce, Candidates may use Referees from outside local and national geographic areas. In the event that a language barrier with the Referee exists, the Hiring Manager must contact a Workforce Planning Specialist in Human Resources for advice and direction.

8) All reference checks must be performed by the Hiring Manager or department designate, Human Resources, or a third party provider. See Appendix B for a list of standard reference questions. Unionized employees cannot conduct references on behalf of management for candidates within the same union.

9) All reference checks need to be accurately documented and treated as strictly confidential. This information needs to be included in the Candidate’s application file for the hiring manager’s review.
10) Letters of reference provided by candidates are not deemed to be acceptable unless specifically verified. Often more job specific information is required which is not addressed in a letter of reference.

11) Any unsolicited, inappropriate comments provided by the Referee should not be written up or given consideration as part of the reference.

12) If an internal Candidate refuses to include the names of his or her current or former supervisor(s), he or she should be asked the reason. Human Resources will normally inform the Candidate that any issues of concern raised by him or her will be taken into account. However, the normal practice is that an internal Candidate cannot be considered without a reference provided by the current supervisor or manager. Exceptions are considered on a case-by-case basis.

13) If an internal Candidate is currently working for or has previously worked under or has a close relationship with the Hiring Manager or a panel member, the manager must disclose this information and consult with a Workforce Planning Specialist in HR to develop the best plan to move forward while ensuring transparency and fairness in the reference checking process.

14) In the case where feedback from the Referee on the Candidate has been negative or indicates that the Candidate might not be the best choice for the position, the Hiring Manager is advised to contact a Workforce Planning Specialist for advice and guidance.

15) In the event that the Referee provided by the Candidate is unable to give a reference due to their company’s policy, the Hiring Manager should contact a Workforce Planning Specialist for advice and guidance.

**COMPLIANCE**

Any attempt to improperly influence a recruitment or selection decision will be reviewed by management and, if verified, may result in appropriate disciplinary action.

Candidates (internal and external) who do not provide permission to contact references by signing off on the “Authorization for Release of Information Form” or through equivalent measures will be disqualified from the selection process.

Discrepancies from the information provided by the Candidate uncovered during the reference check process may lead to
disqualification as assessed on a case-by-case basis.

| RELATED DOCUMENTS | 1. Recruitment & Selection Policy  
|                   | 2. Authorization for Release of Information Form  
|                   | 3. Giving References Procedure |

| HISTORY | This procedure was developed by Human Resources in consultation with the Corporate Policy Review Group 2013-02-22 |

| APPROVAL | Approved by Human Resources Leadership Team 2013-04-09 |
Reference Consent Form

Please Print:

Candidate’s Full Name: ________________________________
Position: ________________________________
Department/Division: ________________________________

As part of the recruitment and selection process, you are required to complete this reference consent form that authorizes the City of Hamilton to contact the references you provide.

The City of Hamilton’s Anti Nepotism Policy prohibits any employee from being placed in a direct or indirect reporting relationship; or in a position of influence over an employed family member or a person with whom you may have a significant social relationship.

Are you aware of any person (family member, close or distant, or any significant friendship) with whom you hold a significant social relationship currently working as a City of Hamilton employee or elected official?

Yes ______ No ______

If “Yes” please indicate: Name: ________________________________
Department: ________________________________

If you have any questions regarding the City of Hamilton’s Anti Nepotism Policy please contact the appropriate Staffing / Workforce Planning Specialist in Human Resources.

As part of the reference process, we reserve the right to conduct internet searches as part of our process.

Signature Required on Page 2
Instructions

Please provide at least three (3) employment references in **chronologic order**. The employment references must be people that you have reported to. Personal references are not applicable. If the references are inconclusive, additional references may be requested.

**Internal Applicants:**
References provided must include your current manager/supervisor.

**External Applicants:**
At least one of the references provided should be someone you reported to in the past three years.

☐ References are attached on a separate page (*signature required below*)

1. **Position & Title of Contact Person:**
   **Name of Employer:**
   **Years reported to:** From: To:
   **Telephone Number:** Email:

2. **Position & Title of Contact Person:**
   **Name of Employer:**
   **Years reported to:** From: To:
   **Telephone Number:** Email:

3. **Position & Title of Contact Person:**
   **Name of Employer:**
   **Years reported to:** From: To:
   **Telephone Number:** Email:

I authorize the City of Hamilton, or its agent, pursuant to Section 29(1) of the *Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, to contact the aforementioned person(s) and/or organization(s) for the purpose of obtaining reference information, including information in my personnel file(s). By signing this waiver, I acknowledge full understanding of its content and meaning.

I agree that the statements made by me are true, complete and correct to the best of my knowledge. I understand that any falsification of statements, misrepresentations, deliberate omission or concealment of information may be considered just cause for disqualification or dismissal.

**Candidate Signature:** ___________________________ **Date:** ________________

Personal information on this form is collected under the legal authority of the Municipal Act, 2001, S. 270. The information is being collected to assess your suitability for a position with the City of Hamilton and for no other purpose. If you have any questions, please contact the Human Resources Division, 905-546-4462
APPENDIX B: SAMPLE REFERENCE CHECK QUESTIONNAIRE

Organization: __________________________________________________

Reference’s Name: ________________________________________________

Reference’s Title: ________________________________________________

Relationship to Candidate: _________________________________________

1) Do you feel comfortable providing a reference for this Candidate?

2) How long have you known the Candidate?

3) What was the Candidate’s position and primary duties?

4) What was the Candidate’s level of commitment to the position?

5) Please comment on their punctuality and attendance?

6) Reason for leaving previous position or why willing to leave current position?

7) Please comment on the Candidate’s strengths and areas for improvement?

8) Please comment on the Candidate’s interpersonal skills and working relationships?

9) Has the individual demonstrated that they are an effective team player?

10) Has this individual demonstrated flexibility in his or her approach to work?

11) What is the most effective way to manage this individual?
12) What motivates them?

13) Areas for development?

14) Eligibility for rehire (for external Candidates)?

15) If you were to send this individual on one training course what would it be?

16) Is there any other information you would like to add?

Reference Check completed by: ________________________________

Signature: ________________________________________________

Name: ____________________________________________________

Position Title: ______________________________________________

Date: ______________________________________________________

*Note: The questions on this sample are examples, and hiring managers may alter or add questions as required.