

Reference Providers (faculty, college administrative staff, and employers)

1. Prior to providing a reference, obtain consent from the person about whom the reference will be given. If you are unaware that the job applicant has named you as a reference, ask the prospective employer for verification that the individual has given consent for the reference. Such verification could include a copy of the student's signed application listing you as a reference, your name listed as a reference on the student's resume, or verbal confirmation by the student to you.
2. Discuss the type of reference that you will provide with the person who asks you to be a reference. If you cannot provide a good reference, be honest with the individual. Don't promise a "glowing reference" and then provide merely a "glimmer."
3. Follow your organization's policy regarding providing a reference. If references are handled in a centralized fashion, advise the prospective employer that even though you may be named as a reference, your organization's policy prohibits you from providing the reference. Direct the employer to the appropriate person in the organization.
4. If "to whom it may concern" reference letters are requested, document that this is the type of reference requested and that the student or job applicant takes responsibility for disseminating the letters to the proper persons.
5. Respond to the specific inquiry about the student or job applicant. Direct the response to the particular person who requested the information.
6. Relate references to the specific position for which the person applied and to the work that the applicant will perform.
7. Informal lunch discussions or "off the record" telephone conversations with prospective employers regarding a person's performance should be avoided. There is no such thing as "off the record."
8. Information given should be factual, based upon personal knowledge/ observation of the person through direct contact with the person or obtained from the person's personnel record or student record.
9. Avoid giving personal opinions or feelings. If you make subjective statements or give opinions because they are requested, clearly identify them as opinions and not as fact. If you give an opinion explain the incident or circumstances on which you base the opinion.
10. Don't guess or speculate-if someone asks you questions regarding personal characteristics about which you have no knowledge, state that you have no knowledge.
11. State in a reference letter, "This information is confidential, should be treated as such, and is provided at the request of (name of student or applicant), who has asked me to serve as a reference." Statements such as these give justification for the communication and leave no doubt that the information was not given to hurt a person's reputation.

12. Do not include information that might indicate an individual's race, color, religion, national origin, age, disability, citizenship status, sex (unless by the individual's name it is obvious), or marital status. Do not base an opinion of performance on stereotypes about an individuals, for instance "for a woman, she excels in math."
13. Document all information you release.

National Association of Colleges and Employers.
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