

Toronto Conference

Settlement and Pastoral Relations Committee Joint Search Committees - Reference Checks

Reference Checks are an essential aspect of a search process. References should be checked not in order to create a short list, but in order to check on the leading candidate(s), usually after at least one interview. You may wish to contact the Toronto Conference Minister for Personnel Policy and Support to ask for a file/status check as part of your work of completing a short list; otherwise, be sure to make such a contact before proceeding to any conclusion of your search with the leading candidate(s).

The reference check is:

- an opportunity to gather information about the applicant(s) that you might not gain from the interview, resume or tests;
- an opportunity to check for consistency with information gathered by other means;
- an opportunity to find out how this person is perceived by those for/with whom she/he has worked in the past.

Questions for Telephone Reference Checks

There are standard questions that are useful to ask in a reference check. Suggestions are attached, adapted to positions for ministry personnel. In addition, once the interviews are complete, the Joint Search Committee should discuss what additional information needs to be gathered by means of the reference check: what areas are you unsure about; what did you not gather information on; what is critical to the success of the applicant in this position?

Ask about issues that are essential to successful job performance; these may include attitudes to ministry, flexibility, the ability to work independently and/or to work as part of a team, initiative, level of problem solving, communications skills, worship leadership, pastoral sensitivity, etc.

Reference checks provide more than just the answers to your questions. Whose names did the applicant give as referees? Did these choices show good judgment? What did the referee not say? (For example, if the referee emphasizes that a minister was well

organised, but does not say much else that is positive, you may want to proceed with caution.)

In addition: you may wish to ask for permission to contact additional referees who are not named by the applicant: someone who holds / held an official position (eg Chair of Board, Chair of M&P) in the current or a former congregation, or a person with whom the applicant has had some conflict. **Do not go beyond named referees without the candidate's permission.**

How To Format Your Questions

Indirect questions may solicit more useful information than direct questions.

Example: To understand how flexible a person is.

Direct Q: Is this person flexible in her/his work?

Indirect Q: When faced with a new situation or a change in routine, did this person prefer to do the task in the original way or want to try a new way?

Example: To understand the individual's skills in a group.

Direct A: Is this person a team player?

Indirect Q: What role does this person usually take in a group situation?

Remember to do a 'status check'. When your short list is down to one or two candidates, don't omit a 'status check' with the Conference Personnel Minister. Such checks are made 'CPM to CPM', which means that in Toronto Conference, you need to contact Lillian Perigoe at the Toronto Conference office (416-241-2677; 1-800-446-4729 – ex. 24). She will forward your query as quickly as possible to the CPM in the Conference in which the candidate's files are currently held, and then get back to you with relevant information.

The following sheets provide guidelines and permit record-keeping for telephone reference checks.

Telephone Reference Check

Applicant's name: _____

Position applied for: _____

Reference checked with: _____ **of** _____
Relationship to applicant: _____

Telephone: Business: (____) _____ Ex. _____
Residence: (____) _____

Date of Check: _____ **Checked by:** _____

Realizing that you may not be able to comment on all of the topics about which I have questions, I'd like to ask you about _____.)

1. How long and in what capacity have you known _____?

2. Please describe the scope of the ministry position that ____ held when you knew him/her.

Do you have any overall comments before I ask specific questions?

3. How would you describe the following skills and abilities of the candidate?

Pastoral sensitivity and pastoral care?

Presence and effectiveness in worship leadership and preaching?

Congregational leadership, development, education?

Ministry with special groups? (Youth, children, seniors, etc., as appropriate given the position description.)

Time management / Administrative ability?

Other – as appropriate to the position description.

Can you cite examples of the skills and abilities you have described?

4. Describe as you can this person's ministry 'style'.

5. How would you rate _____'s ability to utilize good judgement?

6. Can you comment on _____'s ability to deal with the following:
A controversial matter?

Interpersonal conflict?

7. Are there gaps or limitations in _____'s experience? How might they affect future performance?

8. How would you describe _____'s working relationships with:
Colleagues?

Support staff?

Volunteers and congregational leaders?

Other members of a congregation?

Presbytery colleagues?

9. How would you rate communication skills in the following areas:
Writing?

Speaking / preaching ?

Group presentations / meetings?

10. How would you rate the following:

Energy level?

Self care?

Spirituality?

11. Are there additional comments you would like to make?

Comments by Interviewer: