

APPROVED
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Procedures for Providing Employment References and Letters of Recommendation

I. Introduction

Each day, employees of the Johns Hopkins University are contacted for information about current and former employees. The inquiries are usually from potential employers seeking information regarding work history. On occasion, there are requests from local, state and federal government agencies.

The staff of the divisional human resources office and the human resources managers are available to provide employment references. While faculty and staff are encouraged to refer all such requests to the divisional HR Office or the designated departmental HR representative, the manager can provide the employment reference or recommendation in certain situations. The university procedures for responding follow.

II. Phone or Written References

Employment references are defined as requests for information from a potential employer to verify factual information, and to obtain information on a person's performance. References are typically sought when a current or former employee is applying for employment with an internal JHU department or an external employer. Typically references should be kept neutral and refer only to the facts.

Verifications of employment and salary for financial purposes are different and should be directed to your divisional HR office.

A. External References- HR responds

Defined as references provided to an organization that is not affiliated with the Johns Hopkins University. External references should be kept neutral. All requests should be referred to the divisional HR Office or the designated departmental HR representative. The HR representative is allowed to respond to requests for work references by verifying the information received as follows:

1. Title of last position held

2. Employment dates
3. Department/location
4. Status: regular/full time/part time/temporary/limited/casual
5. Regular hours worked
6. Wage and salary information that has been provided to the other employer by the current or former employee
7. Only verify information that is provided, do not volunteer information.
8. Do not comment on any confidential matters or any matters relating to workers compensation, medical leaves, restrictions or accommodations.

B. Internal References

References that one JHU entity obtains from another JHU entity. Internal references allow for greater flexibility when responding to requests for information from a JHU colleague. Attention should still be paid to balancing the confidentiality and privacy concerns of an employee with the legitimate information needs of fellow departments. The HR or Departmental managers are allowed to respond to requests for internal work references as follows:

1. Title of last position held
2. Employment dates
3. Department/location
4. Status: regular/full time/part time/temporary/limited/casual
5. Regular hours worked
6. Wage and salary information
7. Performance and comments only as documented and communicated in the personnel file.
8. Do not volunteer more information than professionally appropriate.
9. Do not comment on any confidential matters or any matters relating to workers compensation, medical leaves, restrictions or accommodations.

C. Beyond the Neutral References

Should the employer wish to provide a reference, or letter of recommendation, beyond the neutral reference mentioned above, the manager should obtain a consent form from the employee. Please see the attached consent form.

III. In Person References

The following inquiries should be referred to the divisional human resource office or the designated departmental human resources representative for response. No manager, supervisor or employee should respond to requests for in person information or questions from federal, state or local authorities.

A. Government Agencies - HR responds

If the inquiry is from a government agency or federal, state or local authority, (FBI, Secret Service, Defense investigative Agency), the HR representative should check the credentials and the authorization to release information. Watch for an expiration date on the written authorization form; if expired, do not respond. The employer normally honors all such requests and provides the information sought in the form requested by the agency or office.

The name and badge number of any investigator making an in person request should be put in the individuals personnel file along with a copy of the completed written release.

Our cooperation is voluntary. However, if a government agency wished to do so, it can issue an administrative subpoena to have access to the personnel record.

B. Contacts from Attorneys/Subpoenas- General Counsel Responds

Attorneys requesting information should be referred to the Office of General Counsel. Notify the divisional human resources office or designated human resources manager and note contact in the file.

In the event that a subpoena related to University business is served or notice is given that a subpoena is going to be served, immediately notify the Office of

General Counsel and the divisional human resources office or designated departmental human resources representative.

C. Other Inquiries

Under no circumstance will a faculty or staff members' home address, home telephone number or forwarding address be provided or verified. In case of emergency request the caller's name and number and relay the message to the employee. If the message is not delivered, please notify the caller.

If there is any question concerning the legitimacy of the caller, or visitor, obtain the individual's name and number and consult with the divisional human resources office or designated departmental human resources representative.

If legal action is to take place, or if a police officer calls or shows up, contact your school security office for assistance.

IV. Guidelines for Letters of Recommendation

Letters of recommendation are often sought from managers by current or former employees who have reported to them. The letter of recommendation is typically a request to verify factual information and to comment on the person's performance and character while under the manager's employ. The letter of recommendation is intended to assist the current or former employee to obtain new employment based on the manager's recommendation.

The university recommended guidelines are as follows:

1. Managers do not have to provide a reference or letter of recommendation.
2. Managers can refer all inquiries to HR, if preferred.
3. Managers may provide an employment reference as an alternative to a written letter of recommendation.
4. If the manager provides a letter of recommendation the manager should obtain a general consent and release form from the employee. (attached)
5. Managers should share the letter of recommendation with the employee and obtain their approval of said letter in writing. This may be done through the general consent and release form.
6. It is best not to use JHU letterhead when providing a letter of recommendation, however if such letterhead is used the manager must be clear that they are speaking on their own behalf, and not on behalf of the university.

7. Be accurate, fair, and honest in the recommendation based on documentation and job relevance.
8. Do not volunteer more information than professionally appropriate.
9. Do not comment on any confidential matters or any matter relating to workers compensation, medical leaves, restrictions or accommodations.

**See attached general consent and release form*

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General Consent and Release Form

To be used to provide information beyond a neutral reference or to provide a letter of recommendation at the request of an employee.

I, _____, request and authorize _____ of The Johns Hopkins University to release information from my records in response to any request for the same from _____.

I understand that the information I am authorizing JHU to release includes factual employment information and also can involve records or assessments of my abilities, performance, attendance, productivity, attitude, conduct, and other work related characteristics or issues.

In exchange for JHU's timely cooperation with this request I hereby agree not to file or pursue any complaints, claims, or legal action of any kind against JHU for any of its employees, representatives or agents arising out of their activities or actions performed in connection with this disclosure of information.

Signed _____ Date _____