



Contact: 512.582.2197, [info@nvcnetwork.org](mailto:info@nvcnetwork.org); [www.nvcnetwork.org](http://www.nvcnetwork.org)

## Volunteer Reference Sample Questions

Before you bring new volunteers into your nonprofit, asking for at least two references can be a good idea. Talking with someone who has worked with the volunteer will hopefully yield a positive endorsement, and help you get to know the volunteer's strengths and weaknesses before assigning them to a particular task.

If you don't feel checking everyone's references is worth your time, at least check references for any volunteer position that involves dealing with money, children, or other at-risk populations, or one that involves regularly driving a vehicle.

Ask references questions like:

- **How do you know this person, and for how long?** A three-month friendship five years ago could be a sign that the person lacks other, more recent references.
- **If this was an employer/employee or volunteer relationship, how did the relationship end?** If the person seems to have flaked out on past obligations, ask for detail.
- **If this was an employer/employee or volunteer relationship, what were the person's responsibilities?** In particular, ask not only about the volunteer's ability to do the work you'll be asking for, but how he or she dealt with any responsibility for handling cash, interacting with children, maintaining confidential information, driving a car, or any other sensitive tasks that you'll need.
- **Do you know whether this person has had any financial difficulties, or history of drug or alcohol abuse?** Some references might protest that they can never know for sure, but any hesitation is a red flag.
- **Have you ever ridden in a car with this person driving?** Ask for more than a thumbs-up or down, but a description of the person's driving abilities and whether the reference had any concerns as a passenger.
- **Can you describe situations where this person was trustworthy and reliable — or not?** The reasons for this one are self-evident.
- **Have conflicts arisen between the two of you, and how were they resolved?** Basic communications can be a common source of stress in any environment.
- **Is there anything else I should know about?** Be alert to the reference's tone of voice, and any hesitation.

If something doesn't check out, you may need to either turn the person away altogether, or at least suggest a different project.

Volunteers have no legal right to hold a volunteer position. Organizations can determine who is a good fit, as long as their criteria are not discriminatory or otherwise illegal.