

**Human Resources Policy Bulletin
Lancaster County**

Number: (2025)-(1)
Date: May 2025

Reference:	Title:
	Background Investigation and Reference Check Policy

I. OVERVIEW

The goal of Lancaster County is to hire individuals who have integrity, produce quality work and are responsive to customers. Background investigations and reference checks are conducted to help achieve this goal, create a safe environment for all Lancaster County employees and members of the community and help uncover valuable insights that may not come up in interviews. Human Resources recommends checking at least two professional references once an applicant becomes a top candidate, before making an offer.

II. DEFINITIONS

- A. "County volunteers" are uncompensated persons who perform services directly related to the business of the County, to support the humanitarian, charitable, or public service activities of the County, or to gain experience in specific endeavors.
- B. "Vulnerable Population" refers to individuals who are more susceptible to harm or exploitation due to various factors such as age, disability, illness, socioeconomic status, or other conditions that may impair their ability to protect themselves or advocate for their own well-being.
- C. Candidate means any person who has applied for a position with Lancaster County ("County") and been referred from Human Resources to the hiring department.
- D. Top candidate means the remaining one to three candidates after all screening and interviewing have taken place.
- E. Internal candidate means any candidate who is presently employed with the County.
- F. Reference checks provide insights into a candidate's work ethic, personality, and cultural fit, reveal potential red flags, offer feedback on past job performance, and help avoid issues.
- G. Employment verification confirms a candidate's work history (dates, titles, and employers), identifies gaps or false claims, assesses job eligibility, and checks if a former employer would rehire them.

- III. Hiring Agency means County agency or department who is conducting background investigations and reference checks on candidates for vacant positions. **ELIGIBILITY**

This policy applies to candidates for positions within the County's classified service. For those hiring agencies that employ positions in the unclassified service, this policy may be used as a best practice guide for reference checks.

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IV. POLICY

- A. Background investigations will be conducted for all individuals being considered for positions in the career service, non-career service or as volunteers, unless waived by the Human Resources Director. Current employees who transfer or promote into a position in law enforcement or who are being considered for a position that provides service to vulnerable populations may be subject to additional background investigations. Please see Appendix A below for the departments which require a new background investigation.
- B. Background investigations cover a seven-year history, and the investigation scope depends upon the position for which the candidate is considered. The investigation may include, but is not limited to:
 - i. Academic credentials
 - ii. Criminal and civil court records
 - iii. Adult and Child Protective Services records
 - iv. Driving records
 - v. Employment history
 - vi. Professional license(s)
 - vii. Professional certification(s)
- C. References Employment or appointment by the County is contingent upon the completion of a background investigation, the results of which are satisfactory to the County. A person may be officially hired or appointed once Human Resources confirms they successfully completed the background investigation.
- D. Any omission or misrepresentation made by a candidate on the employment application, any information supplementing the application, or during the interview process shall be sufficient cause for the County to withhold or withdraw an employment offer or separate employment. Such withholding or withdrawal by the County shall not be subject to grievance or appeal by the candidate.

The County may require a background check for any employee who separates employment with the County and is rehired within six months. Reference checks and employment verifications may be conducted on both internal and external candidates.

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- E. Individuals who complete reference checks need to refrain from asking questions either directly or indirectly that lead a candidate to disclose information about legally protected characteristics including race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy), national origin, age, disability, or marital status.

V. BACKGROUND INVESTIGATION PROCEDURES

- A. Managers will notify Human Resources of their decision to offer a candidate a position and Human Resources will initiate a background investigation. Departments in law enforcement and corrections may initiate their own background investigations.
- B. All potential exempt, non-exempt, full-time, part-time, and temporary candidates will complete a release, authorizing the County to investigate, to the extent permitted by law. The release remains valid for hired candidates for the duration of the employment with the County.
- C. Managers may verbally offer a candidate a position contingent upon successful completion of a background investigation. A probationary employee's start date shall not be less than two weeks from the date of the verbal offer, unless otherwise approved by Human Resources.
- D. All written offers of employment will be contingent upon a background investigation and may be drafted by Human Resources.
- E. Human Resources will review the results of the background investigation and determine if the results are acceptable to the County.
- F. The investigation results will be sent to the hiring department indicating eligible or not eligible for hire. Employment shall not begin until the investigation results confirm eligibility for hire.
- G. Human Resources will ensure compliance with the Fair Credit Reporting Act.
- H. In cases where the decision is disputed, Human Resources will convene a meeting with the manager and the Legal Department to conduct a review of the decision.
- I. Human Resources will rescind contingent employment offers or partner with managers when necessary to separate employment.
- J. Background investigation results are confidential and retained by Human Resources.

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VI. REFERENCE CHECK PROCEDURES

- A. Hiring agency shall confirm if consent to contact provided references or conduct an employment verification has been provided on the top candidate's application under "May we contact this employer", or the "References" section.
 - i. If the top candidate has provided consent, notify the candidate you will be calling their references or conducting an employment verification.
 - ii. If the top candidate, internal or external, has not provided consent on their application or provided references, contact them to obtain written consent. Notify them you'll be contacting their references. If a top candidate is an internal candidate, the hiring manager may contact Human Resources to review the candidate's employee file.
- B. Hiring agency shall prepare questions for the reference check in advance. See Appendix B for potential questions.
- C. Hiring agency shall contact references, document questions asked and the response.
 - i. Provide 24-48 hours for reference check and employment verification contacts to get back to you.
 - ii. Provide the reference check documentation with all other interviewing materials to Human Resources.

It is recommended to consult with Human Resources before disqualification of a top candidate due to a dissatisfactory reference check.

IV. Employment Eligibility

- A. Information from an employee's background investigation may affect their employment status in their current position and eligibility for employment in any other position.
- B. Background investigation results will assess the candidate's suitability for hire into the position for which the candidate applied.
 - i. Factors considered in criminal history convictions may include; date of the conviction, conviction patterns, time since the last conviction, and the seriousness and nature of the violation in relation to the duties and responsibilities of the position.
- C. Driving records will be evaluated to ensure that the candidate meets the county's insurance requirements if operating a county-owned motor vehicle is required for the position.

VII. The County has the exclusive right to interpret this policy.

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APPENDIX A

Department	Requires Background Check On Current Employees
County Corrections/Jail	X
Mental Health Crisis Center	X
Public Defender	X
Lancaster County Sheriff's Office	X
Youth Services Center	X

APPENDIX B

Potential Reference Check / Employment Verification Questions

Relationship & Role Context

- Can you confirm the candidate's position and employment dates with your organization?
- What was your working relationship with [Candidate's Name]?

Performance & Strengths

- How would you describe [Candidate's Name]'s performance in their role?
- Can you provide an example of when they went above and beyond in their work?

Areas for Improvement

- Were there any areas where the candidate could improve or develop further?
- How did they respond to feedback or constructive criticism?

Work Style & Interpersonal Skills

- How would you describe their work style? (i.e. independent, collaborative)
- How did they manage relationships with colleagues and supervisors?
- How did they handle stressful situations or tight deadlines?

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- Was the candidate punctual and reliable?

Final Question

- Would you rehire [Candidate's Name] if given the opportunity?


Barb McIntyre
Human Resources Director

5/15/2025
Date


Rick Vest, Chair

5/20/2025
Date

Board of County Commissioners