Employment Verification and Background Checks

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Introduction

The university’s employees are essential to advancing the institution as a place to learn and work. It is necessary to consider both the quality and suitability of potential employees in order to further the institution’s mission. The decision to hire an employee begins with an informed assessment. Experience shows that many serious problems—the worst of which involve violence or significant legal liability—can be avoided when determining whom to hire. This policy establishes the expected level of employment verification and background investigation, and also provides tools and resources to assist Iowa State University in appropriately employing its personnel (see Resources below). Those tools include employment verification through reference checks, confirmation of academic credentials and licenses, and investigation of criminal and credit histories.

Policy Statement

Scope

This policy shall apply to hires made through regular recruitment procedures, through an emergency hire, or through waiver or exception. When a search committee is used, the hiring department shall be responsible for ensuring this policy is followed. When a search firm is used, the hiring department shall require that the firm comply with the intent of this policy.

There are some positions on campus that are not covered by this policy for purposes of criminal background or credit history investigations or for reference checks. This policy sets the minimum standards for verifying that a prospective employee is qualified and suitable for employment with the university. Departments are encouraged to use any of the policy tools (see Resources below) for any non-covered positions, when appropriate and possible.

This policy supplements and does not replace any law, regulation, contractual obligation, or separate policy that requires employment verification and background investigations for new hires. For example, if a separate law, regulation, contract, or policy requires employment verification for specific positions or individuals (such as daycare providers), this policy shall not apply to those positions although the tools and resources are nonetheless available to the hiring department.
Definitions

"Any position" means any covered or non-covered position at the university, regardless of appointment type or term and including student and temporary positions.

"Covered positions" means all regular, full-time, and part-time positions, whether continuous or term, including the following employee groups:

- contract
- faculty
- Merit
- Professional & Scientific

Note that the following groups are not covered by this policy: temporary or casual employees, post-doctoral appointees, and students (both undergraduate and graduate) who work for the university incidental to their enrollment. However, because this policy sets only minimum standards, there may be situations in which a department needs to include these individuals along with other positions covered by this policy. Departments should consult with university human resources or the senior vice president and provost to discuss including these individuals.

"External candidate" means someone not currently employed by the university in the following categories: faculty (A or B base), Merit staff (E or H base), contract employees (K base), or Professional and Scientific employees (P base).

"Finalist(s)" means the applicant(s)/person(s) selected for interview.

"Selected candidate" means the person selected for hire, subject to satisfactory employment verification through this policy.

Disclosure of Criminal Convictions and Prior Discipline

All external applicants for a covered position shall complete a written disclosure statement (see Resources below). Disclosure of negative information is not an automatic bar to employment. All relevant factors and circumstances will be considered. However, falsification, misrepresentation, or omission of information on the disclosure statement is a legitimate reason to deny or terminate employment.

Reference Checks

The hiring department shall check references of the finalists or, at a minimum, the selected candidate for a covered position. Departments are also encouraged to check references for any position, including student and other temporary hires, when appropriate and possible. See Resources below for information on checking references.

Confirmation of Academic Credentials and Licenses

University human resources shall confirm the academic credentials of the finalists or, at a minimum, the selected candidate for any position for which a degree is required or preferred. At a minimum, this shall include Professional and Scientific employees, research appointees, faculty, and administrators. See Resources below for information on confirming academic credentials.

For any position at the university that requires or prefers a license or certification, University human resources shall confirm that such license or certification is current and in good standing. See Resources below for information on confirming licensure or certification. For motor vehicle licenses, university human resources will conduct the review in collaboration with risk management and transportation services.
Criminal History Investigation

The hiring department shall request from or arrange with university human resources for a criminal history investigation on the external finalists or, at a minimum, the external selected candidate for all covered positions. The purpose of this investigation is to determine the candidate's suitability for employment in light of past criminal convictions. University human resources will be the recipient and holder of such information and will share the results only with the hiring authority and other necessary personnel. Pursuant to the fair credit reporting act, the university will notify the candidate if negative information is revealed that may impact the hiring decision, and will provide a copy of the results to the candidate.

New hires should not begin to work until the criminal history investigation is complete. In the event there is an immediate need for services, all formal offers of employment and continued employment are contingent upon a successful criminal history investigation. In that situation, prior to making the formal offer of employment the department shall consult with university human resources or the senior vice president and provost, as applicable. For information on contingent employment offers and background check processing, see Resources below.

A criminal conviction is not an automatic bar to employment. The university will consider the recency, severity, frequency, and nature of a conviction, as well as its relation to the position in question. Other factors may include the candidate's role in the crime, the candidate's actions and activities since the crime, including rehabilitation or restitution, work history, truthfulness and completeness of the candidate's disclosure of convictions, and any other relevant information.

University human resources shall review any negative results in relation to the position in question and may also consult with necessary personnel as part of that review. The vice president for university human resources, or designee, shall make a recommendation to the hiring department and notify the senior vice president and provost or applicable vice president.

All job postings and announcements for covered positions shall state that the selected candidate will be subject to a criminal history investigation. See Resources below for information on conducting a criminal history investigation.

Credit History Investigation

Some positions may require a credit history to determine if the prospective employee is a suitable hire given the nature of those positions, including access to or accountability for university funds or other cash, financial assets or accounts. Employees hired into administrative positions (i.e., chairs, directors, deans and higher) will be subject to a credit history. Credit histories for non-administrative positions will be necessary when required by a contractual obligation, policy, law, or regulation. In any of those situations, the hiring department shall work with university human resources to conduct a credit history on the finalist(s) or, at a minimum, the selected candidate. By using university human resources to conduct the credit history, the university is better able to protect confidential information and ensure consistent consideration of the information received. Pursuant to the fair credit reporting act, the university will notify the candidate if negative information is revealed that may impact the hiring decision, and will provide a copy of the results to the candidate.

A negative credit history is not an automatic bar to employment but will be considered along with factors such as the nature and seriousness of the credit history and relation to the position in question. University human resources will be the recipient and holder of such information and will share the results only with the hiring authority and other necessary personnel.

All job postings and announcements for these positions shall state that the selected candidate will be subject to a credit history investigation. See Resources below for information on conducting credit history investigations.
Optional Steps

Hiring departments are not prohibited from using additional means of verifying a candidate’s qualifications and suitability for employment in addition to those identified in this policy. Some common practices may include speaking with former employers or colleagues of the applicant who were not listed as references but who are known to the department, or reviewing the candidate through electronic news or information resources. Although such practices are not prohibited, caution must be used in these situations to ensure the information is reliable and accurate. For instance, not all information on Internet sites is objective or verifiable, just as personal biases of former co-workers may not be professionally relevant. In addition, such optional steps shall be used in the same manner for all similarly-situated applicants for the position.

Confidentiality

Information received through this policy will be maintained in a confidential file. Disclosure statements and criminal and credit history investigations that are part of a search are confidential, and as such will be maintained in a separate, confidential file in university human resources. For all other information, including but not limited to reference checks and confirmation of academic credentials and licensure, the information shall be maintained in the department personnel file.

Non-Discrimination

Employment verification and background checks will be used only to determine the candidate’s qualifications and suitability for employment and will not be used to discriminate against any candidate on a basis protected by law or Iowa State University policy.

Resources

Links

- Employment Verification and Background Checks Process
- Resources for Job Seekers
- Tools for Employing Units
- Discrimination and Harassment Policy
- Discrimination and Harassment website
- University Human Resources [UHR]

Files

- Checking References [PDF]
- Contingent Employment Offers and Background Check Processing [PDF]