WRITING REFERENCE LETTERS POLICY

[Organization Name] has established this policy to provide our staff members with guidelines to adhere to when developing reference letters or confirmation of employment letters for previous or departing employees. This policy aims to ensure that all reference letters are accurate, consistent and in accordance with [Organization Name] standards.

Note: this also applies to verbal requests for references.

SCOPE

This policy applies to all reference letters or confirmation of employment letters written for previous or departing employees, volunteers, or vendors of [Organization Name].

POLICY

While [Organization Name] (the “Employer”) is not obligated to provide reference letters, we may, at our discretion, agree to do so in order to confirm the employment history of a previous or departing employee.

Authorization

Only current staff members of [Organization Name] who have received express authorization to develop, write, or send reference letters may do so. [Insert Name/Title] is responsible for providing such authorization and all reference letters must be approved by [Insert Name/Title] prior to being sent to the departing or previous employee, volunteer, or vendor.

Please note, reference letters may only be developed and provided upon the request of the employee, volunteer, or vendor being referenced within them.

Content

When developing reference letters or confirmation of employment letters, authorized staff members must ensure that the content contained within the letter pertains only to factual information directly related to the employee/volunteer/vendor's history with [Organization Name]. This includes details such as start and end dates, compensation (if disclosed), job duties and responsibilities, qualifications, and core competencies.

Exaggeration or misrepresentation of facts is strictly prohibited. Language or content that could be interpreted as discriminatory, defamatory, or displaying any type of preferential treatment is strictly prohibited.

All subject matter and content in reference letters must be accurate, able to be substantiated, and delivered using a professional tone.

Format and Structure

All reference letters must follow a standard format and structure, including an introduction (e.g., the name of the individual being referenced), body (e.g., highlighting important dates, relevant skills, qualifications, and responsibilities), and conclusion.

Confidentiality

All reference letters must be developed and delivered with the utmost respect to the confidentiality of the individual being referenced. Authorized writers of reference letters must not disclose sensitive or private information without explicit consent.

When approached to provide a reference letter (or provide a verbal reference), the authorized person must assess whether they have sufficient knowledge to provide a meaningful and accurate recommendation. If not, they should kindly decline the request and only provide the start and end dates of the person’s history with [Organization Name] (if known).

Limitations

[Organization Name]’s commitment to confidentiality and prohibiting any form of discrimination extends to the content in all reference letters provided on behalf of the organization. As such, certain information will not be included.

[Organization Name] will not provide details about a previous or departing employee's personal life, private matters, disciplinary actions, accommodations provided, leaves of absences, or any non-public information not directly related to the individual's professional qualifications and performance.

This also extends to subjective observations on the person’s tenure with [Organization Name]; the person providing the reference may not provide emotional and/or unsubstantiated additions to the reference letter.

Review Process

Reference letters must be subject to review by [Name/Title] before being sent. This review is to ensure adherence with the established guidelines and to maintain [Organization Name]’s standardized format.

Recordkeeping

[Organization Name] requires the maintenance of records of all reference letters provided on behalf of [Organization Name]. This includes digital and hard copies for future reference.

If a request for a reference was made verbally or by phone, it must be documented in the same file, along with the information provided (if any).