

Pre-employment Screening Guideline

Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment



Foreword

Vicki Telfer PSM
Former Commissioner for Public Employment

Dear colleagues,

Pre-employment screening is a crucial part of the Northern Territory Public Sector (NTPS) recruitment process. It ensures the suitability, integrity and identity of people engaged to work in the NTPS.

It is essential that selection panels commit to undertaking thorough pre-employment screening of applicants so that they make informed decisions about the eligibility and suitability of an applicant.

The purpose of pre-employment screening is to ensure that an applicant:

- is who they say they are
- has the qualifications, skills and/or experience they have claimed to have and which are required for the role
- has provided referees who are relevant, well placed and recent, and able to discuss the applicant's demonstrated work performance
- has nothing in their employment history that would make them unsuitable to work for the relevant workplace or the NTPS more broadly, such as previous serious misconduct, a relevant criminal conviction, or history that may bring the NTPS into disrepute
- is fit to perform the role they are engaged to undertake
- is legally entitled to work in Australia.

I thank you for your ongoing commitment to making the NTPS the employer of choice in the Northern Territory and for recognising that our employees are our greatest asset.

For more information on pre-employment screening please contact Public Sector Appeals and Grievance Reviews on 8999 4129 or via email at psagr@nt.gov.au

Vicki Telfer PSM

23 March 2022

Contents

1. Purpose	3
2. NTPS code of conduct and values	3
3. Aim	4
4. Scope	4
5. Employment screening of existing NTPS employees	4
6. Pre-employment screening of applicants	4
a. Applying online for jobs in the NTPS	6
b. Common mistakes made by selection panels	7
7. Recommended pre-employment screening checks	7
a. Comprehensive referee checks	7
b. Verification of relevant qualifications	7
c. Confidentiality	8
d. Conflict of interest	8
e. Criminal history clearance	8
f. Working with children clearance	9
g. Medical clearance	9
h. Ability to handle public monies and/or have access to financial resources	10
i. Compliance with the NTPS code of conduct and values	10
8. Training	10
9. Need more assistance with pre-employment screening?	10
10. NTPS resources	11
• Pre-employment check list for panel members	11
• Conflict of interest declaration for panel members	12

1. Purpose

Recruitment decision making does not need to be complex, however, a finding of *suitability* does need to be based on evidence.

The purpose of this guideline is to outline the requirements for pre-employment screening for applicants seeking employment in the NTPS, and for existing employees seeking transfers and promotions.

Employees of the NTPS hold positions of trust in the community. It is therefore important that potential and current employees are subject to appropriate pre-employment screening checks to confirm that they are fit and proper to hold these roles. Pre-employment screening is necessary to ensure the suitability, integrity, and identity of people engaged to work in the NTPS.

2. NTPS Code of Conduct and Values

Section 16 of the [Public Sector Employment and Management Act 1993](#) (the Act) provides the Commissioner for Public Employment with the power to make rules, not inconsistent with the Act, relating to the good management of the public sector. These are known as Employment Instructions.

[Employment Instruction 12 Code of Conduct](#) (the Code) applies to all public sector officers. The Code sets out the basic level of behaviour and conduct expected of public sector officers.

The NTPS also has a set of values to help public sector officers understand what it means to be a public servant today. They provide principles underpinning our work in delivering services to Territorians and promote collaboration and professionalism; and guide us to achieve our best performance at work.

The NTPS values are:

Commitment to Service	The NTPS is professional, hardworking, effective, innovative and efficient, working collaboratively to achieve the best results for the NT.
Ethical Practice	The NTPS upholds the highest standards of practice and acts with integrity in all that it does.
Respect	The NTPS respects all people, and in particular their rights as individuals.
Accountability	The NTPS is transparent and accountable in all its actions.
Impartiality	The NTPS is apolitical and provides the government with advice that is objective, timely, and based on the best available evidence.
Diversity	The NTPS values the diversity of its workforce as well as the NT population it serves.

3. Aim

All recruitment practices are vulnerable to corruption and misconduct risks, so care must be taken by the NTPS to ensure rigorous pre-employment checks are undertaken before making an offer of employment.

Robust pre-employment screening (such as requiring applicants to provide information about qualifications, work history, discipline and criminal histories, and conflicts of interest) can reduce the risk of fraudulent applications. It also assists in the prevention of employees moving between employers without previous misconduct being known or appropriately assessed.

4. Scope

This policy applies to all:

- existing employees (including ongoing, fixed period, casual, secondees and redeployees)
- potential employees (applicants) including those from overseas and on visas
- contract employees
- students on placements (including trainees, graduates and vocational students)
- contractors and outsourced providers engaged in a capacity that requires access to sensitive and personal information.

5. Employment screening of existing NTPS employees

It is not necessary for agencies to retrospectively screen NTPS employees. However, pre-employment screening is required each time an employee expresses interest in a transfer or promotion within the agency or the broader NTPS. A selection panel should not assume that an earlier selection panel satisfied all relevant pre-employment screening requirements.

Furthermore, where an existing role has been designated as one requiring a national police check or other form of screening (such as working with children or financial probity), existing employees will need to provide evidence of compliance before taking on the added responsibilities.

The employee should be given at least six weeks to obtain relevant clearances from the time they are advised in writing of any additional requirement.

6. Pre-employment screening of applicants

The NTPS takes the selection, transfer and promotion of applicants seriously, and requires that all panel members must, unless there are exceptional reasons, have completed the Merit Selection Training provided by the Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment (OCPE) within the previous three years. Selection panels must also familiarise themselves with the [NTPS Recruitment and Selection Policy](#) before undertaking the assessment of applicants for a vacancy.

The pre-employment screening of an applicant's suitability to perform the relevant duties within a relevant workplace must include:

- consideration of their skills and experience confirmed by referees who are well-placed, relevant and recent
- the relevance and accuracy of qualifications
- conflicts of interest
- any other factors relevant to the position.

When assessing an applicant's suitability to work in the public sector more broadly, the panel must inform itself of any previous breaches of discipline, criminal histories, conflicts of interest, inappropriate public comments, and another other relevant factors that may pose unreasonable risk to the NTPS.



The [merit principle](#) requires that selection to a vacancy within the NTPS must be based solely on the person's suitability:

- to perform the relevant duties
- for employment in the relevant workplace; and
- for employment in the Public Sector.

And, when assessing an applicant's suitability, regard must be given to their knowledge, skills, qualifications and experience, and potential for future development.

Applying online for jobs in the NTPS

The NTPS requires applicants to answer a number of pre-employment screening questions online when submitting their job application for consideration. Selection panels are required to consider the responses to these questions against an applicant's suitability to perform the advertised vacancy within the relevant agency and in the broader NTPS.

What is your citizenship/residency status?

Eligibility for ongoing employment requires Australian citizenship or permanent resident status; or an approved Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme visa; or New Zealand citizenship with a Special Category visa that allows the applicant to remain and work in Australia indefinitely.

For fixed period employment a person must have an appropriate visa to enable employment in Australia.

For further information see [Employing Visa Holders](#)

What is your current employment status?

Provides the selection panel with information relating to the applicant's current employment, whether it is with the NTPS or another employer.

What is your current NTG agency?

If an applicant advises that they currently work for the NTPS, applicants are asked to state in which agency they are currently employed.

During any period of employment with the NTPS have you been subject to disciplinary proceedings?

If an applicant answers yes to this question a panel chair should first seek further details from the applicant, such as when the matter occurred so that they can better understand the circumstances. The panel should also ask the applicant for a referee, from the relevant agency, to assist in determining whether the circumstances could affect the applicant's ability to perform the key duties and responsibilities of the advertised vacancy.

A 'yes' response to this question does not automatically rule out a potential applicant. Care should be taken to ensure that only relevant factors are taken into account when making decisions in the selection process.

Have you received a voluntary retrenchment from NTG in the last 12 months?

A former employee who has accepted a voluntary retrenchment is not eligible for employment in the NTPS for a period of one year from the date of retrenchment, except with the approval of the Commissioner for Public Employment.

Consideration under an agency's Special Measures plan whereby Aboriginal applicants are given priority consideration

Aboriginal applicants seeking consideration under a Special Measures plan are required to provide, with their resume, a signed statutory declaration which declares that they are Aboriginal. If they are selected they are also required to provide confirmation of Aboriginality.

Common mistakes made by selection panels

Selection processes can be corrupted in the earliest stages of recruitment, such as during the development of job descriptions when a job is designed around an applicant rather than operational need. Selection panels can also be made vulnerable by the failure of panel members to declare or manage conflicts of interest in relation to applicants. Some common mistakes are:

- engaging in processes compromised by nepotism and poor management of conflicts of interest
- promoting or re-employing employees with problematic discipline or performance issues
- recruiting applicants with unexplained attendance issues
- recruiting applicants with a criminal history that should preclude them from employment in a public service, such as fraud or theft
- failure to ensure an applicant is suitable to have access to confidential information or public monies
- not verifying who referees are, or whether the information they provide is recent and relevant to the advertised vacancy
- accepting at face value and not satisfying themselves to the accuracy of claims of relevant qualifications and licences
- appointment of an applicant based on just one positive reference.

*BEWARE
OF COMMON
RECRUITMENT
MISTAKES*

7. Recommended pre-employment screening checks

Comprehensive referee checks

The NTPS relies heavily on referee information about an applicant's past demonstrated work experience. It is therefore imperative that selection panels speak with referees who are recent, well placed and relevant. Selection panels are encouraged to avoid phoning mobile numbers for referees they are not familiar with. As an alternative they should call the former workplace directly and ask to speak with the named referee.

Verification of relevant qualifications

To verify a tertiary qualification relevant to the role, selection panels may approach the relevant institution directly or conduct an online search using the various online search tools. Tertiary education (higher education) is defined as any formal education beyond high school.

Successful applicants must supply copies of all relevant tertiary qualifications listed in their resume. The selection panel must satisfy themselves as the accuracy of the qualifications prior to the selection panel's recommendation going to the delegate for approval and an offer of employment being made. The selection panel must upload copies of the relevant qualifications into eRecruit.

Confidentiality

Maintaining confidentiality in the workplace refers to the requirement to not disclose information that is private and not for public consumption. Confidentiality is simply the act of keeping that information private, and it is an essential quality for many NTPS employees. Determining an applicant's capability to maintain confidentiality is encouraged.

Conflict of interest

Conflict of interest can present a real risk in the NTPS, and it may be that an applicant is not aware that their personal, family or professional associations pose a risk to some work units. Depending on the agency, an offer of employment may be conditional on the consideration of if, and how, a conflict of interest can be managed.

A conflict of interest occurs when the private interests of a public sector employee interfere with official duties. Selection panel members must discuss actual, perceived and potential conflicts of interest before any shortlisting takes place.

Panel members must give careful consideration of any conflict of interest that may be apparent in assessing the applicants for the vacancy. Panels should also consider what measures should be put in place to reduce perceptions of bias.

When discussing the suitability of an applicant with a referee a selection panel should ask:

"Please describe your relationship to the applicant detailing any potential, perceived or actual conflict of interest that the selection panel should be aware of?"

When discussing a vacant position with an applicant a selection panel should ask an applicant:

"Based on your personal circumstances and what you know about the NTPS, this agency and this role, do you have any potential, perceived or actual conflict of interest that the selection panel should be aware of?"

The outcomes of these questions should be documented in the selection report.

Criminal history clearance

Increasingly, agencies in the NTPS require a criminal history clearance before an applicant commences in a role. Applicants and selection panels who wish to know more about applying for a criminal history check can click [here](#).

If a criminal history clearance is an essential requirement of the role, agencies should not commence an applicant in an ongoing role without receiving evidence of a recent criminal clearance.

If an applicant discloses a criminal record, consideration must be given to the relevancy of it in relation to the vacancy. The [Anti-Discrimination Act 1992 \(NT\)](#) defines *irrelevant criminal record* as a spent record within the meaning of the *Criminal Records (Spent Convictions) Act 1992* or record expunged under the *Expungement*

Selection processes can be vulnerable to compromise by nepotism, favouritism and conflicts of interest.

of *Historical Homosexual Offence Records Act 2018*; or a record relating to arrest, interrogation or criminal proceedings where:

no further action was taken in relation to the arrest, interrogation or charge of the person

no charge has been laid

the charge was dismissed

the prosecution was withdrawn

the person was discharged, whether or not on conviction

the person was found not guilty

the person's finding of guilt was quashed or set aside

the person was granted a pardon

the circumstances relating to the offence for which the person was found guilty are not directly relevant to the situation in which the discrimination arises.

Working with children clearance

Ensuring the safety of children and young people in the NTPS is vital.

A working with children clearance is an assessment of the risk of harm or exploitation that an applicant may pose to children. It involves a check of an applicant's:

- police history
- employment records
- character references
- reports about recent behaviour.

The check is conducted by the Northern Territory Screening Authority, appointed by the Minister for Children. A working with children clearance is valid for two years and is issued by SAFE NT. Employees who come into contact with children and young people as part of their daily work should have a working with children card (also called an Ochre Card). Applicants can apply for, or renew their working with children clearance [here](#).

Medical clearance

Some roles within the NTPS may require a medical clearance before an offer of employment is finalised. A medical clearance states that an applicant is work ready or fit to return to work. It confirms they have the capacity to perform their duties without exposing themselves or anyone else to an unnecessary level of risk.

A medical clearance is not required for all NTPS roles, however, if the role requires that a person be physically fit and capable it is good idea. Care should be taken not to require a medical clearance where it is not strictly needed.

Ability to handle public monies and/or have access to financial resources

Public funding, in its simplest terms, is funding that comes from the public treasury. It is the taxpayers' money, and the funding of health, education, the environment, community development, and other public service programs are some of the ways it is spent for the common good.

Compliance with the NTPS Code of Conduct and Values

In order to maintain public confidence in the integrity of the NTPS, a public sector officer must exhibit, and be seen to exhibit, the highest ethical standards in carrying out their duties, and must pursue, and be seen to pursue, the best interests of the people of the Northern Territory. The NTPS Values underpin the Code of Conduct and provide standards of expected behaviour and conduct for all public sector officers, promote collaboration and professionalism, and guide public sector officers to achieve their best performance at work.

A selection panel must satisfy itself that an applicant is capable of understanding and complying with the NTPS Code of Conduct and its Values.

8. Training

OCPE is responsible for Merit Selection Training across the NTPS. Learn more about pre-employment screening by attending Merit Selection Training. Merit Selection training can be located on the [MyLearning](#) portal

9. Need more assistance with pre-employment screening?

There are a range of different pre-employment screening checks that can be used to verify information about shortlisted applicants. For high risk roles, agencies may wish to consider engaging external service providers to undertake the following screenings:

1. Employment history checks
2. National and international criminal history checks
3. Entitlement to work (visa) checks
4. Licence checks
5. Qualification checks
6. Financial interest checks
7. Working with children checks
8. Security and other clearances
9. Professional membership with an association
10. Health assessments

10. NTPS Resources

- Pre-employment Check List for selection panels
- Conflict of Interest Declaration Form for selection panels

Pre-employment Check List for selection panels

Pre-employment screening	Required	Required	Date sighted
	Yes	No	
Identity (passport, driver's licence, birth certificate)			
Right to work (visa, passport, etc.)			
Criminal history clearance			
Working with children clearance			
Fitness for work (health assessment)			
Driver's licence (only if listed as essential selection criteria)			
Relevant tertiary qualification (compulsory for all selected applicants if listed in their resume)			
Verification of referees (they are who they say they are)			
Social media screening (scanning an applicant's Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, SnapChat, or other social media to ensure applicant is suitable to work in the relevant workplace and the NTPS more broadly)			
Drug and alcohol screening			

Conflict of Interest Declaration Form for selection panels

A conflict of interest occurs when the private interests of a public sector employee interfere, or appear to interfere, with official duties. Selection panel members must discuss actual, perceived and potential conflict of interest before any shortlisting takes place.

Selection panels should complete this form to declare and manage any actual, perceived or potential conflict of interest for a selection process, or to confirm that no conflict of interest exists. If completed, this form must be attached to the selection report and provided to the delegate for their consideration.

Vacancy details					
Agency				Work unit	
Job title				Designation	e.g. AO3, SAO1, ECO2
Job type	e.g. full time/part time/flexible			Duration	
Position number		RTF		Location	

Each panel member will detail any actual, perceived or potential conflicts of interest they may have with any of the applicants. If no conflict of interest is identified please state NIL.

Chair

Panel Member

Panel Member

If a conflict of interest is identified, detail how the identified conflict of interest will be managed by the selection panel. Please advise if a panel member has been replaced due to an identified conflict of interest.

We, the panel, understand what constitutes a conflict of interest in a recruitment and selection process.

Panel information			
Panel chair			
Name		Job title	
Signature		Date	
Panel member			
Name		Job title	
Signature		Date	
Independent Panel member			
Name		Job title	
Signature		Date	