Firms can conduct physical county- and state-level checks – where an applicant has lived, worked or gone to school. Minton recommends running a social security number trace to find all applicant addresses of record – not just the ones listed on the job application. Companies also can hire a third-party consumer reporting agency. Employers reference source Northwest charges a flat fee of $49 for a complete background check.

But companies should be aware that using a third-party consumer reporting agency subjects the company to FCRA rules, said Richard Matson, shareholder at the Vancouver law office of Bullivant Houser Bailey PC. Completing a background check in-house does not subject the company to the FCRA, he said.

Limiting exposure

Ensuring a background check is complete is only half the picture, Minton said.

There are both federal and Washington state FCRA rules, Matson said, and they have specific regulations regarding disclosure, consent and other details.

For example, applicants must sign a release that notifies them a background check will be performed and exactly what will be checked. This release must contain a summary of their rights – including the right to see what turns up in the check, he said. “Companies openly express to discrimination claims if the type of background check is not closely related to the job class,” Matson said.

And, he pointed out, there is a lot of room for interpretation about what “closely related” means. But while it satisfies legal requirements, notifying applicants about background checks is also a first level of screening.

If, after learning you’re going to do a background check, an applicant is no longer interested, “That tells you quite a bit,” said Doug Williams, president of Doug Williams & Assoc.

Finally, companies should handle background check records carefully – do not, for example, route them through the office for everyone to read, Matson said.

If a negligent hiring suit does surface, a company must show it has formal, written policies that indicate background checks are performed, what the company will and will not accept and how those criteria are related to the type of business.

Background Check Checklist

- Notify all applicants that you will perform a background check
- Tailor the scope of the background check to the specifics of the job sought
- Identify gaps in the applicant’s job or education history
- Check all references
- Verify all employment and education claims
- Document everything – who you contacted, their responses, etc.
- Develop company policies covering background check issues
- Follow your background check policies consistently, even if you’re in a hurry to fill a position

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Shirley Schwartz, 39

Scholarship Program Manager
Clark College Foundation, Vancouver
Nominated by: Ana Serjoie, Clark College Foundation

Shirley Schwartz is known as a “gateway to student success” at Clark College. She has worked for the Clark College Foundation since 1999, starting as a scholarship administrator assistant and rising to become scholarship program manager in 2008. Schwartz has helped grow the college’s scholarship program and given capacity, partnering with donors and area schools. She coordinates Clark’s annual scholarship reception and revived the foundation’s newsletter, which reaches more than 25,000 readers. Schwartz has a Bachelor of Arts degree in Christian education from the former West Coast Christian College and is pursuing a Master of Arts degree at Multnomah University.

Jaret Sutherland, 31

General Manager
Electric, Vancouver
Nominated by: Kyma Kruep, Electrix

Jaret Sutherland is a community-minded electrician. He has worked for more than 10 years in construction and has worked with Electric since its inception in 2001, playing "a major role in (its) explosive growth," nominators said. He has managed projects for clients including Exxon, Pennzool and Newell-Packard, and his safety program made Electrix the first contractor to win the Intel Safety Excellence award twice. Sutherland is active in the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers and the National Electrical Contractors Association and holds numerous state and local licenses. He volunteers his electrical skills at Pioneer Elementary School, has coached soccer for seven years and volunteers for Vancouver’s Sassy Fete. He and his wife, Christi, have two children, Madeline and Sander.

Amaya Urzua, 32

Vice President and Commercial Loan Officer
Bank of Clark County, Vancouver
Nominated by: Michael V. Worthy, Bank of Clark County

Amaya Urzua is a single mother who won’t be held back. She has worked in banking for 12 years, and her superiors said her leadership exemplifies “the best character traits we look for.” Urzua is on the Ethics Committee for Lake Oswego-based ASTRA Women’s Business Society and is a Junior Achievement Classroom Instructor in Vancouver and Portland. She was a member of Portland Mayor-Elect Sam Adams’ Affordable Workplace Task Force, an assistant coach for Rose City Soccer Club, a member of the United Way of the Columbia-Willamette’s Young Leaders Society and a volunteer for YWCA Portland’s Yulanda House. She holds a bachelor’s degree in international studies and economics from Portland State University.