



Certified Fundraising Executive  
*The credential for fundraising professionals*

## CFRE

### Why in the world should you care?

#### 1. Will these 4 letters after your name make any difference to your career?

- Maybe yes and maybe no. Consider the following:
  - **Fact:** Studies show that individuals who hold the CFRE earn more money than those who do not hold the CFRE. (Surveys conducted by the Association of Fundraising Professionals and the Association of Lutheran Development Executives, USA)
  - **Myth:** A “mickey mouse” multiple choice exam that anyone can pass. Not so!
  - **Hope:** That the CFRE becomes *the* critical choice for professionals in the field of philanthropy, expected by employers, donors and volunteers.

#### 2. Some definitions

- **Certification** is a voluntary process, instituted to protect the public, which results in an individual being recognised for meeting standards set by a third party. For example: CPA, CFRE, physicians with a speciality.
- **Accreditation** is a voluntary process that results in organisations being recognised for meeting standards set by a third party. For example: hospitals and schools are accredited. The CFRE Professional Certification Board seeks accreditation by the National Commission for Certifying Agencies, the U.S. body that accredits certification programs.
- **Licensure** is a mandatory governmental requirement necessary for individuals to practice in a particular profession. For example: plumbers, real estate agents, general physicians license.
- **Academic degrees (and educational certificates)** document that an individual has fulfilled certain course requirements and achieved certain learning objectives.

#### 3. The general concept of certification

Certification assures the public that an individual demonstrates specific knowledge required of a practitioner at a certain level. Academic degrees and educational certificates do not certify demonstrated knowledge of professional practitioners. Typically, certification is more strenuous than licensure.

#### **4. Why bother to get certified? Here is what some people say.**

- Enhances credibility of the fundraising profession
- Voluntary certification may inhibit government regulation
- Statement to the public – and to your donors and volunteers
- Recognizes that there is a common body of knowledge
- Helps protect the public
- Keep in step with increasing worldwide interest in certification of all kinds
- Earn more money (according to 2 U.S. studies)
- 80% of Canadian job postings say “CFRE preferred” (say some of our Canadian colleagues)
- “Certification is not an award for passing an examination. Certification is a commitment to yourself, your chosen profession, your peers, the organisation you are employed by, and your community.” (Charles V. Watt, CFRE, Virginia, USA)
- “Do you need certification to be successful in this field? No, but you will enhance your professional credibility and sense of self-worth.” (George Engdahl, CFRE, California, USA)
- “Democratic society requires regulation for the protection of its citizens. Although governmental regulation is widespread, it is more expensive, more rigid, and less effective than self-regulation, because self-regulation directly involves those who have the best knowledge about the need for action and the most incentive to take the action.” (Book on credentialing by Jerald Jacobs)

#### **5. Is fundraising a profession? Many of us hope so and insist so!**

How do we demonstrate to the public that fundraising is a profession and we are professionals? By acting like other professions and professionals – and one of those actions is voluntary certification.

**Most professions possess the following attributes** (according to literature about professions and professionals)

- Recognised body of knowledge
- Code of ethics
- Research studying the profession
- Continuing education for professionals
- Certification for practitioners in the profession

#### **So what kind of certification is there in the fundraising profession?**

- One baseline credential: CFRE, the Certified Fundraising Executive, conferred by CFRE International, an independent body.
- Two advanced credentials:
  - ACFRE, the Advanced Certified Fundraising Executive, conferred by the Association of Fundraising Professionals, USA
  - FAHP, the Fellow of the Association for Healthcare Philanthropy, conferred by the Association for Healthcare Philanthropy, USA

## 6. Fundraisers: their careers and concerns

The 1997 book Fundraisers: Their Careers, Stories, Concerns and Accomplishments (Margaret A. Duronio and Eugene R. Tempel) studied U.S. fundraisers – and it is likely that the results are applicable to fundraisers around the world. The study surveyed 1,700 individuals and conducted 82 in-depth interviews.

To identify fundraisers' concern about the field, the study asked respondents to *specify how they thought the practice of fundraising could be improved*.

There were more than 2,600 responses to this question. The responses were sorted into topics and listed in order of decreasing frequency. The most frequently mentioned were noted more than 50 times each, representing 45% of the total responses to this question.

### How to improve the practice of fundraising: top 12 topics and number of times mentioned

1. Promote ethics, integrity, and honesty in fundraising (194)
2. Promote degree programs in fundraising (130)
3. Provide education in fundraising for CEOs, board members, and volunteers (125)
4. **Make certification mandatory (115)**
5. Improve quality of and access to professional development and training programs (109)
6. Promote continuing professional education (98)
7. Provide formal programs for internships and mentoring (80)
8. Promote better reporting and gift accounting (76)
9. Increase commitment to present organisation (69)
10. Identify and sanction unethical fundraisers (60)
11. Create more positive publicity for fundraisers (55)
12. Standardize professional qualifications (51)

CFRE International is the only baseline certification program for fundraisers. And, through its certification process, CFRE International also helps accomplish # 1, 6, 10, 11 and 12 in this list.

### **Employers and certification**

The Duronio and Tempel study goes on to observe that “One aspect of in the success of voluntary certification depends upon on the value employing organisations place on the certification.”

**Note:** More and more employers are stipulating “CFRE preferred.” CFRE International regularly receives calls from search firms and employers asking whether or not a candidate is certified.

### **Government regulation or voluntary certification**

The U.S. study notes that “Legal scholars who are experts in the nonprofit sector believe fundraisers do not take self-regulation and the possibility of increased external regulation seriously enough. Hopkins (1996) wrote, ‘The fundraising community is generally engaging in classic denial in relation to government regulation of its practices’ (p. xii)”

What's happening around the world? Our Canadian colleagues tell us about regulations in the provinces. U.S. lawmakers regulate fundraising consultants, and a U.S. professional association is exploring the development of government licensure for fundraisers. The European Union is interested in certification programs. Around the world, government considers regulations for fundraisers. But how much input do fundraisers have? How familiar is government with the profession? Voluntary certification is a preferred alternative to government regulation. Why? Because certification is typically more strenuous, and developed by those in the profession. The fundraising profession needs to embrace self-regulation through voluntary certification.

## **What is the CFRE Professional Certification Program**

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- The only baseline credential in fundraising – and CFRE is international – including Australia, Canada, New Zealand, USA and soon the UK!
- Joint program with 14 international organisations participating, and offering their members reduced fees for certification and recertification. (Country of origin specified in parentheses)
  1. Association for Healthcare Philanthropy (USA)
  2. Association of Christian Development Professionals (USA)
  3. Association of Fundraising Consultants (UK)
  4. Association of Fundraising Professionals (USA)
  5. Association of Lutheran Development Executives (USA)
  6. Association of Philanthropic Counsel (USA)
  7. Canadian Association of Gift Planners / Association canadienne des professionnels en dons planifiés (Canada)
  8. Council for Resource Development (USA)
  9. Fundraising Institute Australia (Australia)
  10. Fundraising Institute New Zealand (New Zealand)
  11. International Catholic Stewardship Council (USA)
  12. North American YMCA Development Organization (USA)
  13. National Catholic Development Conference (USA)
  14. Philanthropic Service for Institutions (USA)
- The Certified Fundraising Executive (CFRE) credential demonstrates an individual's mastery of the core knowledge and skills required of fundraising executives after five years of experience. This practice-based designation requires demonstration of having met these standards through both an application and written exam.

### **Mission of CFRE International**

As stewards of the public trust, CFRE International certifies fundraising professionals who demonstrate the knowledge, skills and commitment to the highest standards of ethical and professional practice in serving the philanthropic sector.

CFRE International fulfills this mission by establishing and administering a voluntary certification process based on current and valid standards that measure competency in the practice of philanthropic fundraising.

In furtherance of its mission, CFRE International promotes voluntary certification, in dialogue with government and other bodies globally, as the preferred alternative to licensure and/or government regulation.

### **The process for you to obtain your CFRE!**

- Complete an application that documents your professional practice, performance, continuing education, and volunteerism.
- Pass a written, multiple-choice exam that tests the key knowledge areas of the 5-year practitioner. These key areas – validated by a random sample of practitioners in the field – are prospect identification, solicitation, donor relations, volunteerism, management, and stewardship.
- Recertify every 3 years.

### **But how do you know if a certification program is any good?**

The best certification processes are those that follow accepted standards in the certification business and use a professional testing agency. CFRE International does so.

CFRE International has designed its program and operations to adhere to the standards of the National Commission for Certifying Agencies, USA (NCCA) and the International Standards Organisation. In 2003, CFRE International will apply for accreditation by the NCCA.

### **The CFRE Test**

- **225 multiple choice questions covering six major areas of fundraising**
  - Six areas are: prospect identification, solicitation, donor relations, volunteerism, management, and stewardship.
  - These areas were chosen to appear on the exam following a job analysis (also called role delineation).
- **3 different exam forms**
  - Australian, Canadian, and U.S. – and within the next 2 years, there will be additional forms for the UK and New Zealand. (**CFRE International launched its new International Job Analysis in fall 2002. The first meeting of the Job Analysis Committee was held in Toronto, ON, CA.**)
  - Our current job analysis – the basis for the exam – tells us that the general content is the same for each country – only legal and regulatory questions are different – because the body of knowledge is the same across all countries so far.
- **Job analysis is a giant survey** that lists all of the tasks a fundraiser might do in the course of their job and respondents are asked to rate the frequency and import of those tasks. Standards in the certification business require that job analyses be updated every 5-7 years.
  - The job analysis survey is developed by a committee of the CFRE Board plus additional certified fundraising executives.
  - The last job analysis survey (1997) , the basis for our current exam, was distributed to 1,000 CFREs and 42% responded.

- As noted above, CFRE International launched its new job analysis in fall 2002. This job analysis will produce the new survey and will form the basis for exams once the analysis is completed.
  
- **Exam questions**
  - Are written by certified fundraising executives. We have separate item writers from Australia, Canada, and the USA – and will have item writers from the UK and New Zealand when we complete the new job analysis.
  - Each question must test something found in the job analysis.
  - Each question must be referenced to at least one published text (preferably more than one).
  - References are required so that we can assure candidates that the "correct" answer is not correct just because the CFRE Board says it is, but it is documented (and therefore legally defensible).
  - The test content outline is provided to all applicants in the CFRE Application Booklet.
  
- **Validating exam questions**
  - Once items are written, a second group of CFREs reviews the items for the correct answer, appropriate level and references.
  - Items are rewritten, combined, thrown out, etc....
  - Once validated, an item goes into the live item bank.
  - Our professional testing agency selects the 200 items on the actual exam from the item bank according to the test content outline.
  - Once the items are selected, the CFRE Board reviews the draft test booklet. Changes can be made if there are duplicate items, a wrong answer, a vague item, etc.
  - CFRE exam is not scored on a curve. Once the passing point is set, it does not change. It does not matter who you test with – your performance on the exam is not affected by anyone else's performance.
  
- **Setting the passing point for an exam**
  - Once the test booklet is finalized, the CFRE Board along with other CFREs reviews the test along with the professional testing agency to determine the passing point for the exam. There are two methods used to set the passing point for the CFRE exam. Each item is again reviewed during this process.
  - Finally, the exam is ready for release.

- **Monitoring performance of the exam each time it is taken**
  - When a new exam is released, CFRE International makes certain that it is fair. Once a critical mass of candidates have taken the exam, our testing agency conducts a statistical analysis of how candidates perform on each individual test item.
  - If there is something “wrong” with an item (such as, a significant number of exam takers are answering a different answer than the “right one”), we adjust the question.
  - Candidates are not penalized for faulty test construction.
  - Once adjustments are made, the exams are finally scored.
- **Constant review of the exam**
  - CFRE International constantly reviews, revises and updates the exam and the items included on it. However, the test content outline and the references remain the same, based on the most recent job analysis.
  - Each year the CFRE International reviews statistics from its professional testing agency. This analysis of how people answer the questions tells CFRE International whether the question is testing what it is supposed to and whether candidates know something about that topic. If the statistics tell us there is a problem – for example:
    - everyone is getting an item correct so the item does not discriminate between candidates who have mastered the knowledge and those who have not or,
    - no one is getting the item correct so the item may be obscure or incorrect or,
    - people who are choosing the wrong answer are doing really well on the exam as a whole
  - then CFRE International reviews the item(s) and adjusts it. to review the item
  - Every year the exam is revised and often a considerable portion (25 - 30%) is "changed", new questions are added for security reasons (too much exposure) and flawed items are revised.

## **Management and governance of CFRE International**

CFRE International is managed by a professional staff, led by Executive Director Morgean Hirt, ACA. Ms. Hirt is an expert in the certification business.

CFRE International is governed by an independent Board of Directors, constituted of certified fundraisers and at least one public member. Board members are recruited from the certificant population around the world.

The CFRE International Office is located in Alexandria, Virginia, USA.





## Certification vs. Certificate

People ask, “What’s the difference between certification and a certificate?” Take a look at the grid below. This can assist your communications with colleagues, organizational leadership, volunteers, donors and prospects.

As stewards of the public trust, CFRE International *certifies* fundraising professionals. Unlike many certificate programs being offered by colleges and universities, CFRE International is practice-based. It is not intended to teach individuals how to effectively raise funds. Rather, it is designed to measure an individual’s “knowledge-in-use” – the application of knowledge and skills by those with real-life experience in this role.

CFRE International promotes voluntary certification as the preferred alternative to licensure and/or government regulation.

<b>Certification</b>	<b>Certificate</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Results from an <i>assessment</i> process</li> <li>• For individuals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Results from an <i>educational</i> process</li> <li>• For individuals</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Typically requires some amount of professional experience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For both newcomers and experienced professionals alike</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Awarded by a third-party, standard-setting organisation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Awarded by educational programs or institutions</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indicates mastery/competency as measured against a defensible set of standards, usually by application or exam</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indicates completion of a course or series of courses with specific focus; is different than a degree granting program</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Standards set through a defensible, industry-wide process (job analysis/role delineation) that results in an outline of required knowledge and skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Course content set a variety of ways (faculty committee; dean; instructor; occasionally through defensible analysis of topic area)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Typically results in a designation to use after one’s name (CFRE, ACFRE, FAHP, CFP, APRA, CAE); may result in a document to hang on the wall or keep in a wallet</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Usually listed on a resume detailing education; may issue a document to hang on the wall.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has on-going requirements in order to maintain; holder must demonstrate he/she continues to meet requirements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is the end result; demonstrates knowledge of course content at the end of a set period in time</li> </ul>

People also confuse *certification* and *credentials* and *designation*.

- *Credentials* attest to someone’s knowledge or authority. Credentials can be a FBI agent badge; a letter of introduction from an ambassador to the President of the United States; a Ph.D. in physics and a list of published papers; or being called a Certified Fundraising Executive (CFRE)
- *Certification* is a process that results in credentials.
- A *designation* simply refers to the letters someone uses after their name (CFRE, Ph.D., M.D., CPA).