



## **Suggested Guidelines for Creating a Study Group**

While CFRE International does not sponsor or endorse any programmes which claim to assist candidates in preparing and reviewing for the Certified Fund Raising Executive (CFRE) exam, it recognises that many organisations seek to give this type of support to their membership.

CFRE International does not offer content-related study materials of its own for several reasons. First, the CFRE is a practice-based credential. This means it is testing the knowledge and skills that people have acquired and use on-the-job. This is different than academic exams with which most candidates are familiar. From school settings, candidates recall being able to study one textbook or one set of lecture notes to “get all the answers” for an exam.

With this kind of certification exam, the answers are all part of the generally accepted core body of knowledge. It is not all assembled neatly in one place. Of course, the material tested on the exam is supported by and found in professional literature. CFRE International reviews and approves professional texts which make up the Resource Reading List. These books are used by the CFRE Exam Committee to support the rationale for the correct answers on the exam.

Additionally, CFRE International strives to meet the accreditation standards set by the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA) of the National Organisation for Competency Assurance (NOCA). These standards prohibit the same organisation that does the certifying from offering content-related preparation materials.

### **General Guidelines for Conducting Study Groups:**

Because the exam is testing knowledge and skills that are generally acquired on-the-job, each candidate is going to have his or her own study needs. However, structured study groups are a great way to provide overall support – and peer support – for those planning to take the CFRE exam. Here are suggested guidelines for the formation of structured study groups:

- A. Any study programme should be developed to follow the Test Content Outline, as released by CFRE International. This is the blueprint for the content covered on the exam.
- B. Each participant should be strongly encouraged to review the Test Content Outline against their own set of experiences. Each participant will want to focus on different areas as a result of their own needs.
- C. Study sessions can be divided into sections that follow that same outline – holding one or more session for each topic area, depending on the length of the session and the size or complexity of the topic.



- D. After segmenting each session, the leader should look within the area's own fundraising community to identify those individuals with expertise in each session topic. Those individuals could then be invited to come discuss the topic with the group. Consider using CFRE, ACFRE and/or FAHP certified individuals – they have demonstrated commitment to the profession and certification. Presenters should be given the Test Content Outline for their topic area.
- E. Participants can be provided with recommended reading (homework) in advance of each week's session. Many participants may not have their own professional library started yet! This gives them an opportunity to build one. You can also check your local library for these books – or check to see if an AFP Affiliate Library is located in your community.

Most candidates cannot manage to read multiple books from the resource reading list. Choosing chapters from one or two publications, perhaps those publications most of the group already has on their bookshelf. Suggest participants come armed with questions they have about specific issues

- F. Resource materials or bibliographies provided to study group participants can come from publications outside of those on the Resource Reading List. However, only those on the Resource Reading List have been vetted by the CFRE Exam Committee as part of the generally accepted, core body of knowledge. The list has been kept limited to provide candidates with some focus.
- G. Each session can be structured as part lecture, part discussion, followed by questions candidates had from the “homework” readings. Many participants can learn as much from the question and answer period, as from the lecture part.
- H. After the completion of the sessions following the outline, there could be one or two additional “follow up” sessions where last remaining issues could be discussed.
- I. It is best to resist the temptation to have expert individuals discuss with the group their experience of taking the exam. The exam is constantly under revision and review. Test questions change frequently. One's recall of the exam experience is often clouded by the topics that were most unfamiliar. An uncertainty about planned giving suddenly becomes an exam that was “all planned giving questions.” Additionally, all those who sit for the exam are expressly prohibited from discussing exam content or questions.
- J. It is also best to resist the temptation to create “practice tests” for candidates. CFRE International does provide candidates with some sample test questions to help familiarise them with the format. They are not designed to be diagnostic and point a candidate toward areas of further study. Practice questions may give candidates a false sense of security.



- K. Study groups provide candidates the opportunity to focus their preparation for the exam in a structured setting (often difficult for busy professionals to do!) and to gain support and camaraderie from a fellow group of professionals in the same circumstances.

### **Regarding Programmes Packaged as Prep or Review Courses**

Any educational programmes in which candidates participate will be helpful in building their knowledge and fundraising foundation that will lead to great success on the exam. However, because the exam is “practice-based”, it is not possible for educational programmes to directly instruct candidates on the material that will be found on the exam.

Candidates are encouraged to develop their own personal study plan. As part of that plan, a candidate may wish to participate in a course that reviews and overview of fundraising concepts and principles. Candidates might also choose to participate in a course that covers areas with which the candidate is not particularly familiar. These types of review may be helpful to some candidates and enable them to focus on their studies. However, candidates should not expect any course to “test to the test.”

There are organisations which currently offer and promote courses as review or prep courses for the CFRE exam. It must be made clear that CFRE International does not sponsor, endorse, or receive any remuneration from any educational programmes which purport to help candidates prepare or review for the CFRE examination, even if courses are titled as such.

Such titles are given at the discretion of the organisation offering the course and do not hold or imply any recognition, approval, or participation by CFRE International or access to inside information from CFRE International. CFRE International cannot attest to the accuracy of materials presented in any educational courses or to how closely material covered in these courses mirrors content covered on the CFRE exam.

Printed materials used in these courses do not appear on CFRE International’s Resource Reading List and are not used as references for developing the exam. Review questions or sample questions from these courses do not come from former CFRE exams and were not developed by CFRE Item Writers. CFRE International does not release former exam forms.

Formal educational programmes that are titled or claim to review or prepare candidates for the exam will be accepted for Education points on the CFRE application, provided that the course primarily covers fundraising content found on the CFRE Text Content Outline. Formal educational courses that include test-taking strategies will be permitted; however, the portion of time spent on test-taking strategies will be deducted from the total overall course time.

Education category points for the CFRE application will not be awarded for participating in informal exam study sessions or groups, or for teaching any such sessions.