



Certification vs. Certificate

People are always asking us, “What’s the difference between certification and a certificate?” To assist you in communicating with your members and volunteers and to help avoid confusion in the marketplace, we have provided you the comparison below.

As stewards of the public trust, the Board of Directors of CFRE International *certifies* fundraising professionals. Unlike many certificate programs being offered by colleges and universities, the CFRE program 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.

Certification	Certificate
• Results from an <u>assessment</u> process	• Results from an <u>educational</u> process
• For individuals	• For individuals
• Typically requires some amount of professional experience	• For both newcomers and experienced professionals alike
• Awarded by a third-party, standard-setting organization	• Awarded by educational programs or institutions
• Indicates mastery/competency as measured against a defensible set of standards, usually by application or exam	• Indicates completion of a course or series of courses with specific focus; is different than a degree granting program
• Standards set through a defensible, industry-wide process (job analysis/role delineation) that results in an outline of required knowledge and skills	• Course content set a variety of ways (faculty committee; dean; instructor; occasionally through defensible analysis of topic area)
• 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	• Usually listed on a resume detailing education; may issue a document to hang on the wall.
• Has on-going requirements in order to maintain; holder must demonstrate he/she continues to meet requirements	• Is the end result; demonstrates knowledge of course content at the end of a set period in time

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 Fund Raising 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).