



Leadership. Integrity. Excellence. Service.

ACFRE Case Statement • March 2022

A holder of the Advanced Certified Fundraising Executive (ACFRE) credential embodies these values and more.

Recognized with the highest professional credential conferred by the Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP), ACFREs are true leaders in the social impact sector.

These exceptional individuals are shaping the future of our profession through their extensive involvement in AFP, commitment to fostering a growth mindset amongst the next generation, and wide access to the philanthropic sector.

There's no one way to be an ACFRE.

ACFREs work everywhere from small shops to billion-dollar institutions, and from the countryside to the big city. Each holder of the designation has taken a unique journey toward the credential. But they have one important thing in common: **fundraising is their calling.**

"I became an ACFRE because I can't resist a challenge. I love being one because I can now tell everyone about the journey and inspire others to challenge themselves, too."

—Leah Eustace, ACFRE

From Humble Beginnings

The seed of the ACFRE program was planted back in 1985 when what was then the National Society of Fundraising Executives (now AFP) began exploring whether its membership would be committed to an advanced credential beyond the CFRE. The response from membership was a resounding yes, and over the next seven years a group of exceptional philanthropic leaders created the program.

In 1993, the first ACFRE medals were presented to 14 individuals. Many of them are still active leaders in our profession and our association today.

There are now 115 ACFREs across North America. Despite their diversity of backgrounds, what they share is their adherence to the five values of the credential:

- ***Ethics and Trust***

An ACFRE must demonstrate only the highest and deepest commitment to ethical standards and practice. ACFREs are accountable to their colleagues, their donors, their communities and their organizations to demonstrate, to educate and to insist that ethical standards be maintained and enforced.

- ***Lifelong Learning***

Each ACFRE must demonstrate a depth and breadth of knowledge gained through practice, through study, and research to successfully complete the ACFRE certification process. This commitment to lifelong learning sets the ACFRE apart. This commitment establishes the ACFRE as leader, teacher and mentor.

- ***Professionalism***

The ACFRE demonstrates the highest standards of professionalism. Extensive preparation, successful leadership and management expertise, commitment to ethics, and service to the profession and the community enhance the fundamental commitment to donor-centeredness and stewardship, the bedrock values of the ACFRE.

- ***Experience***

Achieving the ACFRE is a demonstration of the quality, depth and breadth of experience gained from a lifetime. This lifetime of experience brings added value to the organization, the community, our colleagues and the profession. Through teaching, mentoring and service all benefit from the ACFRE.

- ***Leadership***

Earning the ACFRE credential is a new beginning. Sharing knowledge, sharing experience and sharing expertise through mentoring, collaboration, and service is the obligation of each ACFRE. The ACFRE is dedicated to advancing the culture of philanthropy.

- ***Diversity, Equity and Access***

ACFREs are expected to promote work and volunteer environments that are inclusive, diverse, equitable and accessible. In addition, the ACFRE Credentialing Board commits to ensuring that the credential is promoted to those audiences that will ensure that our applicants represent the communities we serve.

Setting a positive example

Cathy Cessna's fundraising career began as so many accidentally do: in high school. As the senior class president, she negotiated with a fast food chain to sell \$1 coupons and split the proceeds. **Sales were so successful the manager had to end the program.**

Later, Cathy would go on to serve on three non-profit boards and work 80+ volunteer hours per week as a stay-at-home mom. It was then she began to see the fundraising career she was destined for.

Cathy's first "professional" fundraising job was as the Assistant Director of Development at her children's school. Since then, she has gone on to raise tens of millions of dollars and teach non-profit organizational courses as an Adjunct Professor.

“I want to be the best at everything I do,” Cathy says. “I want to set an example for my children and grandchildren.”

Cathy was inspired by her son Max, who earned a double degree in honour of his late brother Andrew. She, too, wanted to create something positive in the wake of the loss—so she committed to the rigorous work of becoming an ACFRE.

After four months of preparation, plus the time it took to have her exam graded, Cathy was successful. Today, she jokes that her favourite career advice is “never retire”. She says she never plans to!

As an ACFRE, Cathy is dedicated to educating the public about the value of fundraising and the specific skills the profession demands.

“Do you consider yourself to be a professional? Are you committed to professionalism? Can you prove it? How do you know? The difference, in my mind, centers around the simple commonality that the ‘pros’ never stop learning and growing. They use experiences, conversations, interactions as opportunities to listen and grow as opposed to a chance to show what they know. They have a thirst for learning.”

—Vern Snyder, ACFRE

What makes the ACFRE credential unique?

ACFREs are deeply committed to their professional associations. Just look at the volunteer leadership of AFP: while ACFREs represent only 0.5% of AFP’s membership, you will disproportionately find their names listed as Board Members and Committee Volunteers! Currently they represent 8% of the Global AFP Board, 14% of the U.S. Foundation Board, 11% of the AFP Canada Board, 11% of Champion’s Circle members, 22% of the Leadership Society, 15% of the Omega Circle.

ACFREs think about the big picture. The future of philanthropy, and the future of our profession, are a frequent topic of conversation. ACFREs aren’t content to simply nudge the needle: they change its track entirely.

ACFREs are leaders in our profession. Eight have received the AFP Global Outstanding Fundraising Professional Award (that’s more than 20% of all those awarded); most have held or hold leadership positions within AFP; and many are regular contributors when it comes to speaking and publishing.

ACFREs are less interested in self-gain and more focused on enhancing social good, living emphatically, and boosting up those around them.

Service comes before self.

ACFREs are life-long learners, sharers, leaders, principle-oriented, and authentic. While fundraisers come from all sorts of educational and professional circumstances, they’ve made this their *career*—not a temporary gig.



The CFRE credential affirms competence, knowledge of tactics, and adherence to AFP's Code of Ethical Standards. **The ACFRE credential goes beyond that to recognize exceptional achievement in leadership, management and ethics.**

"I have an unwavering commitment to high ethical standards, professionalism, and the possibility to save lives."

—Wayne K. Lynch, ACFRE

Is the ACFRE right for you?

Of more than 33,000 AFP members, just 112 currently hold the ACFRE designation.

Are you up for the challenge?

"The ACFRE offers you the opportunity to measure your knowledge, passion and commitment to the fundraising profession through challenging yourself to reach the highest credential in the industry. Once obtained, you will discover respect and credibility from others as a leader, providing personal validation and encouraging your continued personal growth and involvement to improve the nonprofit sector."

—Paul Strawhecker, MPA, ACFRE

ACFREs are committed to a lifetime of fundraising learning and leadership. They demonstrate this through a combination of professional and volunteer experience along with education. ACFREs must have a minimum of 10 years full-time professional experience for those with current certification, or 20 years for those without.

Hard work pays off: The designation serves as indisputable proof of your commitment to the fundraising sector, elevating you above potential competition in the eyes of potential employers.

Ready to invest in yourself?

Visit acfre.org to learn more about the journey to becoming an ACFRE.

"I have had the opportunity to associate with, and work with, the top professionals in philanthropic service as a result of becoming an ACFRE. It has also given significant meaning to my life."

—Carl Mansfield, M.Ed., ACFRE



Association of Fundraising Professionals

4200 Wilson Blvd., Suite 480 • Arlington, VA 22203

Toll Free: 800/666-3863 • afpglobal.org