

Going Global: Look Before You Leap

As business and the economy become more global, increasing numbers of credentialing sponsors are considering offering their credential internationally. This inaugural edition of *Issues and Trends* highlights the experiences of two credential sponsors that currently operate in international markets: one develops five slightly modified versions of its examination for administration in English-speaking countries; the other translates its examination into 11 different languages for administration in 100 countries. We asked about the challenges of going global and what advice these sponsors would give to others considering similar initiatives.

Certified Fund Raising Executive International

Spun off four years ago from two professional associations, Certified Fund Raising Executive (CFRE) International offers the only internationally recognized baseline professional credential for philanthropic fundraising executives. The CFRE credential itself was created in 1981 and was first offered in Canada in 1998. It was introduced in Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom in 2004, and in 2006 the CFRE examination will move to a computer-based format for its North American candidates.

An International Practice Analysis as a Starting Point. In 2003, as part of a new practice analysis, CFRE International included Australia, New Zealand, and the UK in the study, in addition to the US and Canada, to assess the degree of overlap in professional practice. This was at the request of the professional associations in those countries, which were interested in the possibility of offering the CFRE credential locally. The practice analysis taskforce included representatives from all five countries, and achieved a very high response rate of 52 percent. Morgean Hirt, CFRE International's Executive Director, attributes this success in part to an extensive network of local contacts: "We had a good experience because the infrastructure was there through the professional associations. This made it easier to seek the input of stakeholders both for the practice analysis as well as for later examination development activities."

The practice analysis confirmed that there were no statistically significant differences in practice, although there were some surprising differences in language and terminology. For example, *volunteer* has a different usage in Australia as compared with the US. According to Hirt, "Some terminology issues needed to be worked out at the taskforce level, and these were not always easy conversations." The taskforce developed a glossary for the examination that continues in use today, and the organization adopted British spelling for all countries—including the US—in 2004.

Program Complexities. Based on the findings of the practice analysis, CFRE International decided to develop examinations that had 85 percent core content items, common across the five countries, and 15 percent country-specific items focused on tax and regulatory content. The organization trains item writers and conducts item-writing workshops in all five countries, and all item writers contribute core content items as well as country-specific items to the item bank. In addition, the organization conducts country-specific passing point meetings and sets separate passing scores for each country's examination.

Advice to Others. Asked what advice she would give to others considering similar initiatives, Hirt says, "Don't underestimate the amount of work and cost involved, even with a large overlap in professional practice it can be time-consuming and expensive work." She recommends, "Be clear about the organization's goals in expanding internationally—whether it's to advance a US credential or establish international standards," and says, "Look before you leap. It can be a fun ride but you have to proceed carefully."

Hirt highlights the value of conducting a practice analysis in providing "valid data to inform decision making." Hirt also notes that for a profession where there is substantial overlap in practice across countries, the job analysis also allows an organization to establish "global standards that are portable." Finally, she emphasizes the importance of a "solid network of local professionals—this creates a level of acceptance in a process that could otherwise be seen as threatening and territorial." However, she also cautions, "Be prepared for the fact that it may take a while to catch on, even with local endorsement—it takes time to build awareness and recognition."

The Information Systems Audit and Control Association

The Information Systems Audit and Control Association (ISACA) is a global leader in information technology governance, control, and assurance, and has been offering its Certified Information Systems Auditor (CISA) credential since 1981. In addition, ISACA launched a new Certified Information Security Manager (CISM) credential in 2002. ISACA administers its CISA examination in a paper-and-pencil format in 100 countries in 11 languages—Chinese (Mandarin Simplified and Mandarin Traditional), Dutch, English, French, German, Hebrew, Italian, Japanese, Korean, and Spanish—and is currently considering adding Arabic and Portuguese versions.

Same Examination: 11 Different Languages. The CISA examination does not include any country-specific content. According to Terry Trsar, ISACA's Chief Professional Development Officer, "Our mission has been to develop an examination that is applicable worldwide and that has the same value internationally." The examination is based on an international practice analysis conducted with input from participants in over 100 countries, and is translated or adapted from English into other languages.

Asked about the process ISACA uses, Trsar explains, "We use professional translators to translate the examination. The translation is then reviewed by content experts who are bilingual in the target language and English. Finally, we conduct a comprehensive item analysis across all 11 languages, and work with content experts to review item statistics to ensure that test questions perform according to standard in each language." ISACA draws its content experts from a pool of 47,000 active local chapter members worldwide. According to Trsar, "Our local chapters provide a great deal of the support required to run our program. Chapter members serve as translation reviewers for the examination as well as for test preparation and marketing materials. They also assist with program marketing, training, and item development. They are a key element to the success of our program."

According to Trsar, one of the greatest challenges in offering a credential internationally is translating the examination and support materials into other languages. He says that adding new languages is "not something to do without having a proper plan and local support." He advises others considering such a move, "Make sure there is a strong business case, particularly for the long term, since demand can and will fluctuate over time."

Administering in 100 Countries. Administering examinations in multiple countries and languages adds a layer of complexity to a credentialing program. There are challenges related to global time differences, especially for a paper-and-pencil test that is administered on the same day, the logistics of recruiting and coordinating native-language proctors, and the secure and timely shipment of test materials internationally. The CISA examination is currently administered at 230 test sites in 100 countries. Trsar notes that one of the issues ISACA currently faces is consistency in test site administration. According to Trsar, "The CISA examination is administered in a university or hotel environment, and as such there may be some variability in conditions, so we work very hard to ensure consistency in administration across test sites."

ISACA has capitalized on technology solutions and the Internet to bring efficiencies to its CISA program. More than 90 percent of candidates now register and pay online, and they receive admission tickets by e-mail as well as by postal mail. In the past, ISACA sometimes experienced postal delays in sending materials to candidates internationally, and steady increases in the numbers of registrants caused delays in manual processing. The Internet has provided a much more efficient and effective way for ISACA to communicate essential information to candidates.

Learning From Experience. Asked what advice he would give to other credentialing sponsors considering a move internationally, Trsar emphasizes the importance of, "choosing trusted partners to perform other services, whether its translation work or test administration. To avoid a breach in the integrity of your program, it's very important to work with reputable third parties."

Asked about the recent introduction of the CISM program Trsar says, "This was very easy for us because we had an already established and trusted infrastructure in place through our CISA program and local chapters."

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