

International Foundation for Retirement Education (InFRE) 2013 Analysis of Practice Certified Retirement Counselors (CRC[®])

Executive Summary

The International Foundation for Retirement Education (InFRE) contracted with Professional Examination Service (ProExam) to conduct a practice analysis of Certified Retirement Counselors (CRCs[®]). The CRC certification examination is designed to ensure that CRCs possess all the knowledge and skills necessary to competently fulfill their responsibilities as retirement counseling professionals serving the public. The purposes of the practice analysis study were to:

- update the CRC content outline to reflect current professional practice
- ensure the validity and defensibility of the CRC examination
- derive empirical guidance to inform decision making regarding updated test specifications for the CRC examination
- provide empirical support for the accreditation of InFRE's credentialing program including the CRC examination
- provide guidance to InFRE for the development of future training and continuing education initiatives

Practice Analysis Steering Committee

ProExam worked with an eight-member Steering Committee (SC) comprised of retirement counselors who had been active in InFRE volunteers activities, and who represented the range of types of employers, areas of expertise, roles, experience levels, and geographic location. The SC served in a consulting and advisory capacity over the course of the study, providing conceptual guidance to ProExam and the Task Force, reviewing and making recommendations regarding proposed and completed activities. The Steering Committee met two times via web-based meetings during the course of the study.

Telephone Interviews with Thought Leaders

ProExam conducted a series of interviews with five thought leaders in the field of retirement counseling in advance of the first task force meeting. These interviews were focused on changes in the profession since the last practice analysis was conducted, how those changes might affect the tasks and knowledge included in the test content outline, and any trends or changes that might impact future directions in practice. Members of the telephone interview panel represented different perspectives, roles, employment sectors, and geographic locations.

Practice Analysis Task Force

The Practice Analysis Task Force (PATF) was comprised of nine subject-matter experts. They represented the range of types of employers, areas of expertise, roles, experience levels, and geographic location. The PATF met numerous times over the course of the study via web-based

meetings to update the CRC test content outline to ensure it was current, comprehensive, and reflective of retirement counselors working across the range of professional settings and roles.

Independent Review

To support and supplement the work of the PATF, an independent review procedure was implemented. A total of 10 SMEs were selected to represent a range of areas of expertise, industries, and geographic locations; in particular, they provided perspectives that may not have been represented by PATF members. Reviewers were asked to evaluate the delineation for comprehensiveness, clarity, consistency, currency, and sequence. The PATF reviewed their feedback in a series of web-based meetings and made further refinements to the CRC test content outline.

Web-Based Validation Survey

A web-based survey was pilot tested by 10 CRCs in advance of its wide-scale dissemination. Pilot testers provided feedback that was used to further refine the survey instrument. The final description of practice was used in a online survey disseminated to the entire population of CRC certificants. The survey consisted of four major sections:

- **Tasks:** Respondent rated 48 tasks on two scales, the *Frequency* with which they performed the task, and the *Importance* of the task to optimizing outcomes to clients and employees. They were also able to add additional tasks they performed which were not included in the survey.
- **Domains:** Respondents rated the *Percent of Time* spent in and *Importance* of the five major domains of practice.
- **Knowledge:** Respondents rated 65 knowledge statements on two scales: the *Importance* of the knowledge to optimizing outcomes to clients and employees; and *Acquisition*, the point at which the knowledge should be acquired. They were also able to add additional knowledge they possessed was not included in the survey.
- **Demographic and Professional Questions:** Respondents were asked about experience level, employment type and role, and other demographic and professional questions.

An invitation to participate in the survey was emailed to 1,670 CRC certificants; the email invitation contained a password-protected link to the survey. Of those invitations, 86 were undeliverable due to invalid email addresses, for a final survey size of 1,584. Three-hundred eighty CRCs completed the survey, for a response rate of 24.4%.

Highlights Related to Demographic and Professional Background

Respondents had an average of 13 years of experience as a retirement counselor. Seventy percent of respondents were certified as CRCs in 2009 or earlier, and 30% were certified from 2010 to 2013. Regardless of year of certification, the three most frequently represented professions were employee retirement counselor (18%), registered representative (16%), and investment advisor (13%). Respondents represented the range of organizations, with the greatest number working for public organizations (28%), followed by insurance companies (19%), brokerage firms or independent advisors (both at 12%), and banks (10%). Ninety percent serviced the public sector, 28% the corporate sector, 22% non-profit, and less than 10% unions

(multiple responses permitted). Finally, 83% of respondents worked with employer sponsored retirement plans and 34% worked with non-employer sponsored plans (multiple responses permitted).

All but two respondents worked in the US (those 2 were from Canada) and 47 states or territories were represented. Fifty-eight percent of respondents held a bachelors degree and another 19% held a masters degree. The majority were white (87%) and more than half (56%) were male.

Key Findings Relating to Tasks and Knowledge

On average, 58% of the tasks were rated as being performed at least monthly or more frequently, and of the remaining tasks, all were performed at least annually to quarterly. All tasks were rated highly on the *Importance* scale, with 41 receiving ratings between *Important* and *Very Important*, with the remaining 7 receiving ratings of *Important*. The tasks presented in the survey therefore accurately portray the activities necessary for practice as a CRC.

All knowledge was rated as important for CRCs, with 46 of 65 (71%) rated as *Important* to *Very Important* and the remaining 19 rated as *Somewhat important* to *Important*. Knowledge acquisition ratings indicated that a majority of the respondents believe 85% of the knowledge statements are necessary primarily *before* a retirement counselor could be certified as a CRC; that is, this knowledge is a relevant target for the CRC examination.

Respondents suggested additional tasks and knowledge that were not included on the survey, and after careful review by the PATF, no new tasks or knowledge were added. The PATF revised four knowledge statements to improve their clarity and deleted one due to low ratings.

Development of Profiles of Practice for the Profession and Test Specifications for CRC Examination

Profiles of Practice were developed by weighting each respondent's domain ratings by multiplying the *Percent of Time* spent in each domain by the *Importance* of the domain, to produce individual weighted values for each domain of practice. Individual's weighted results were then averaged to develop Profiles of Practice.

Test specification were developed to ensure that the examination focused on (a) the domains which make the greatest contribution to the profile of practice, and (b) the knowledge needed to perform tasks in those domains. Upon review of the quantitative and qualitative results, the PATF determined that all tasks and 64 of the 65 surveyed knowledge statements in the delineation were valid; that is, they reflected essential elements of professional practice. The *Importance* rating for each domain was uniform and high, while the *Percentage of time* estimates for each domain varied. The PATF reviewed the profiles of practice and recommended a slightly modified set of test specifications which took into account a number of discrete factors, namely (a) possible redundancies between test questions that might be focused on Domain 1 and the test questions that might be focused on Domains 2 and 3, and (b) the potential difficulty in translating Domain 1 tasks into valid test questions.

The PATF recommended that the hypothetical test specifications for Domain 1 be reduced and proportionally distributed across Domains 2 through 5, based on the number of tasks and

underlying knowledge supporting those tasks in the other four domains, taking into consideration instances wherein tasks similar in nature to Domain 1 tasks were located. The SC endorsed the PATF's recommendations and also re-ordered the domains so that what had been Domain 1 is now Domain 5, in recognition that retirement counselors need to possess all the knowledge underlying the tasks in the (now) first four domains in order to perform the tasks in the new Domain 5. They also slightly edited the name of the new Domain 5 to more accurately reflect its content. The final test specifications at the domain level follow.

Test Specifications for the CRC Certification Examination

	# tasks	% of exam
Domain 1: Identify Needs, Concerns and Goals in Terms of Quantitative and Qualitative Factors by Career Stage/Phase of Retirement	12	25%–29%
Domain 2: Design Retirement-readiness and Post-retirement Strategies within the Context of the Regulatory, Legal, Operational and Structural Environment	18	27%–31%
Domain 3: Facilitate the Implementation of the Retirement-readiness and Post-retirement Strategies	9	18%–22%
Domain 4: Evaluate, Adjust, and Document Retirement Strategies Across Career Stages/ Retirement Phases	6	14%–16%
Domain 5: Provide Education Materials and Programs	3	8%–10%