



CCE Essay Guidelines – 2027

In the essay step of the CCE process, you will write three essays: one main essay and two financial essays. This document explains the requirements for each essay, how they will be evaluated, and how to submit them. If you have any questions, please contact Ashley Purdy at apurdy@acce.org.

Key Dates

Step	Date	Time
Essay submission deadline	March 24, 2027	By 11:59 pm PST
Essay pass/fail notification	April 9, 2027	By 5:00 pm EST

Essay Integrity

Essay Integrity Policy

The expectations are that your essay is original, and you are the only author. Please note that essays will be checked with an AI checker to ensure that you are not using AI to write your essay. If a candidate is found to be in violation of this policy, they will not pass the essay step in the CCE application process and can re-attempt the following year.

ACCE AI Policy

You may use AI programs, e.g., ChatGPT, to help generate ideas and brainstorm. However, you may not submit any work generated by an AI program as your own. If you include material generated by an AI program, it should be [cited like any other reference material](#).

Identifying Information

Please do not use any identifying information in your essays. You can use replacement words or a repeated letter to stand in for things like city, state, chamber name, etc.

Examples:

- In my role as President & CEO of the ____ Chamber of Commerce in City A, State B, I...
- In my role as Membership Director of the XXXXX Chamber of Commerce in XXXXX, I...

Requirements for All Essays

- **Length:** 500–750 words for each essay
- **Formatting:** Times New Roman 12 pt font, 1" margins
- **Document:** Please save all three essays in separate documents. A Word document or a PDF is fine.
- **Submission:** Submit your essays in the 2027 CCE Candidates course. You will submit each essay separately, so please make sure you are submitting the correct essay for each section.

Working With a Mentor

If you are working with a mentor, please share these guidelines, including the evaluation criteria for the main essay and the financial essays, with your mentor before they review your work.

Some mentors earned their CCE before the financial essays were added to the process, and the evaluation criteria may have changed since they wrote their own essays. Your mentor should review your essays against the current criteria in this document.

Main Essay

Your main essay should focus on **one project that you led** within the **last three years**.

Topic requirements

- The main essay must discuss a recent, significant project of the candidate's chamber, **led by the candidate**. The project must have taken place within the last **three years**. The project must be completed before the start of the CCE application process. Projects that are in progress are not eligible for the CCE essay.
- The program or initiative discussed must demonstrate the candidate's professional skill, experience, and leadership ability, and his/her knowledge of one or more of the four core chamber leadership areas: management, planning and development, membership and communication, or operations.
- The selected program or initiative should have elevated the role of the chamber in its community, and should highlight the innovation, impact, and leadership of the candidate. There must be clear demonstration of project results, using qualitative and/or quantitative measures as appropriate.

- The essay topic will also be the subject of the candidate's **CCE oral presentation**.

What your main essay should make clear

Your essay should give readers a full picture of the project, including:

- The need the project addressed and why it mattered
- Who the project benefited
- How you led the project, from planning through results
- How the project supports your chamber's mission or strategic plan
- The impact on your community, supported by qualitative and/or quantitative results

Main essay evaluation criteria

Submissions will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

- Content/subject matter knowledge
- Identification of the problem/situation statement as theme of essay
- Effective explanation of the required concepts: planning process, development, and results
- Clear demonstration of project results, using qualitative and/or quantitative measures as appropriate
- Demonstration of leadership and management skills
- Clarity and precision of language and presentation
- Grammar and usage skills
- Demonstration of skills and competencies outlined in the [Chamber Body of Knowledge](#)

Please see the end of this document for examples of high-scoring main essays from previous years.

Financial Essays

- The financial essays consist of two different scenarios. The candidate should respond to **both** of the financial essay prompts.
- **Each** essay should be 500–750 words.

Financial essays evaluation criteria

Submissions will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

- Understanding of financial management principles
- Identification of appropriate actions and processes
- Demonstration of leadership and management skills
- Clarity and precision of language and presentation
- Grammar and usage skills

- Directly addressing the prompt
- Demonstration of skills and competencies outlined in the [Chamber Body of Knowledge](#)

Financial essay prompts (complete an essay for each prompt)

Prompt 1

Congratulations! Your organization has just been awarded a one-time grant to support community improvements. The grant is equivalent to 50% of your yearly operating budget. As CEO, describe how you would manage this grant from a financial oversight and accountability standpoint. If you are not currently the CEO, outline the approach as if you were. Detail the key considerations guiding your decision-making and elaborate on the processes you would implement to effectively monitor and manage the allocation of these funds. Please note that you don't need to detail how you would spend the funds but focus on how you would track the spending and maintain financial control.

Prompt 2

You've recently uncovered that your bookkeeper has embezzled payroll taxes and disappeared with the funds. This individual was your sole financial resource within the organization. In your capacity as CEO, outline the specific steps you would take upon discovering this issue. If you are not currently the CEO, outline the approach as if you were. Identify the key stakeholders you would communicate with to address the situation and detail the checks and balances you would implement to prevent similar problems in the future.

Main Essay Examples

Example 1

Three years ago, our community's childcare landscape was dire. Childcare centers had hundreds of children on waitlists, workers were burnt out, and rooms were closed due to staffing shortages. This directly impacted employee absenteeism and workforce participation. Fortunately, I was able to utilize my strengths in coalition-building, fundraising, and program administration to deliver a solution - Child Care Works - positively impacting working parents, employers, and children.

My involvement in childcare access began when I joined a local childcare center board of directors in 2018. The same year, the XXXXXXX Foundation and Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) approached me to participate in community childcare conversations. Through that process, I engaged chamber members with a needs survey. The consensus was childcare was not a business priority.

Then COVID hit, and the need became evident. My service on our county's Joint Information Committee led to an invitation to serve on the Governor's Childcare Task Force. One task force initiative was a grant, offering a 50% match for business investment in childcare slot reservations. I met with center directors to determine financial feasibility, engaged with employers, and created an umbrella coalition through the Chamber Foundation. The result was 21 annually reserved slots and \$111,000 invested. However, I quickly realized slot reservations alone were not the solution. We needed to think bigger.

In late 2022, public health invited me to partner on a grant for a public-private solution. We were fortunate to receive \$100,000 from the XXXXXXX Foundation, along with supporting resources, to launch our effort.

The first step was forming a coalition. There were natural partners, including childcare centers and CCR&R. I brought on our public-school assistant superintendent and the XXXXXXX Employer Engagement Director. I knew these women would have innovative, actionable ideas.

Next, I hosted in-person meetings with centers and providers. The problem was clear – childcare staff were earning \$9.50/hour, and applicant quality was low. We knew increased wages were necessary.

XXXXX connected us with a community running a wage supplement program, and we felt it was replicable. However, it would require major investment. Our plan, Child Care Works, increased wages at centers by \$2/hour. At full capacity, it would cost \$600,000 annually. We committed to taking this on, and I volunteered the Chamber Foundation to serve as the umbrella organization.

By September 2023, I was preparing to introduce Child Care Works to chamber members when the state announced a Childcare Solutions Grant, matching all funds raised by the end of the month. What was intended as a soft-launch became an urgent effort. I invited 40 businesses to an informational breakfast; 25 attended, nearly all donated. I leveraged my relationships with city councilmembers and county supervisors for municipality contributions. In less than three weeks, I raised \$343,000. Due to lack of applicants, the state doubled their match, totaling \$700,000.

Realizing the need for administrative support, I contracted the city's Youth Task Force, whose staff were looking for additional work. This resulted in a win-win for both the project and Youth Task Force.

We launched the Child Care Works Wage Supplement Program in January 2024. All area centers are participating, impacting 1100+ children. I require bi-weekly reports to track outcomes, and after one year, we have seen a 20% staffing increase, 70 additional slots created, and waitlists reduced by 25%.

I knew our program was working last summer, when I ran into a former childcare worker and babysitter of my child. Without knowing my involvement, she shared that she had recently returned to working in childcare because of the increased pay and benefits. This woman was a shining example of our target market – qualified caregivers with a passion for the industry. It was a true moment of pride.

Beyond addressing wages, we need long-term solutions. This includes a workforce pipeline. I worked with our assistant superintendent to develop a credit program at the high school for childcare work. Another piece is advocacy. At the state level, I advocate for continued investment in solutions funds, health insurance pools, and industry support. Federally, I engage with members of Congress and recently participated in the U.S. Chamber's Childcare Hill Day.

Child Care Works has provided measurable benefits to businesses, childcare centers, and families. It has elevated our organization's profile, increased membership engagement, and proven the value of the chamber. Because of my strategic leadership, our community's childcare landscape has turned from dire to promising, and I hope other communities will be able to replicate the program and find similar success.

Example 2

In January 2024, the XXXXXXXX Chamber and the Greater XXXXXXXX Economic Development Council (EDC) began discussions on how we might partner to increase the competitiveness of our region and maximize overall outcomes by leveraging relationships and resources. Our region has experienced rapid success over the last decade, ranking among the fastest-growing areas in their respective states. In fact, the region is growing at three times the national average. However, with this growth comes significant challenges, including workforce shortages, a lack of a cohesive regional brand, a need for business expansion and relocation, and a decline in business-minded leadership at local and state levels.

We needed a new play of action, and I was the catalyst for shifting the mindset that the chamber and the EDC must work more collaboratively. In my 25 years of leading chambers, I realized the power of partnership and that together with other organizations, chambers can have even greater impact and results. The next step after shifting mindsets was to move toward a comprehensive strategy and execution plan. I then worked to motivate my Executive Committee, Board of Directors, and the President of the EDC to formalize a partnership that would address these challenges head-on. The Chamber and the EDC had mission alignment, strong reputational value, and organizational capacity, but lacked a unified plan and sufficient resources to achieve our shared goals. This led to the creation of XXXXXXXX, a regional growth plan focused on economic growth, workforce solutions, business development, and public policy.

As the President/CEO of the Chamber, I have led, and will continue to lead, this initiative over its four-year span, both internal operations and external execution. I relied on the expertise and experience I have gained through ACCE, Metro Cities, US Chamber and leading 5 other chambers in other markets to create a framework. Here is that framework for which I was integrally involved in leading:

Internal Operations:

- Established a memorandum of understanding and governance structure for shared oversight.
- Created an Advisory Board of investors, bringing together leadership from both organizations.
- Engaged a fund development firm to shape and vet the strategic plan and launched the fundraising campaign.
- Unified our communications teams under the XXXXXXXX brand, strengthening our regional narrative.
- Aligned staff roles to prevent duplication and maximize efficiency.

External Execution:

- Researched best practices from high-performing regions with similar initiatives.

- Engaged key stakeholders, business leaders, elected officials, and education partners, to identify core challenges and co-develop solutions.
- Developed a strategic plan centered on three key pillars:
- Talent & Workforce Development – Strengthening the labor force and improving talent retention.
- Business Growth & Expansion – Supporting business relocation and industry-specific expansion.
- Public Policy & Civic Engagement – Advocating for pro-growth policies and increasing civic engagement.
- Vetted the plan through focus groups, one-on-one discussions, and surveys of over 100 business and community leaders to refine objectives and gain broad-based support.
- Established clear, measurable KPIs to track progress over four years:
- Increase the regional labor force by 12,000 workers (a 30% increase over historical rates).
- Create 3,500+ high-paying jobs and drive \$1 billion in additional business sales.
- Facilitate 130 company expansions or relocations, a 33% increase over past trends.
- Ensure at least 28 of 38 local legislators align with business-driven policy priorities.
- Launched a formal fundraising campaign in July 2024, successfully securing \$4 million per year, 80% of our goal, from public and private investors. I conducted over 200 face-to-face visits alongside the fund development firm.
- Implemented a reporting and engagement framework to track progress, maintain accountability, and keep stakeholders informed and involved.

As CEO of the Chamber, my role has been the driving force in shaping XXXXXXXX 's strategic direction, stakeholder collaboration, and execution. I have worked to enhance the Chamber's visibility, responsibility, and influence, positioning it as a stronger leader in regional growth. Through this initiative, I have cultivated new relationships with key business, education, and policy leaders, reinforcing a collaborative approach that pushes our community further than ever before.

XXXXXXX is more than a plan, it is a bold movement toward regional prosperity. I firmly believe in the power of collaboration and hope that this initiative serves as a model for other communities. True progress demands more than visionary words, it requires action, innovation, and courageous leadership. With a shared commitment to growth, our region is poised to lead nationally in economic and workforce development. The future of our region is XXXXXXXX .