Reflecting on 15 Years of Progress

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As one of the ICCIFP’s founders, I am frequently asked how we established our certification program.

In the mid-1990s, past CFMA chairman Gordon Marshall brought to the attention of CFMA’s then Executive Committee that certification was fast becoming an important part of all professions. At that time, I was among a group of CFMA leaders who also recognized that construction financial management was indeed a profession.

Construction financial managers (CFMs) financially manage companies in a high-risk, low-margin industry with unique cash management and accounting challenges; if certification was becoming the mark of a professional, then our profession certainly deserved that recognition. After all, as you may have heard me say, “the difference between an occupation and a profession is certification.”

As CFMA leaders, we also strongly believed that any type of construction financial certification should be sponsored by no other industry association than CFMA. Over the years, support grew gradually and after appropriate analysis and due diligence, CFMA’s 2002-03 Executive Committee approved moving ahead with a certification program sponsored by the Association.

The following year, I was elected CFMA’s 2003-04 Chairman. At the time, CFMA’s Officers felt we should launch a certification program within one year, despite consultants telling us it would take two. We were very concerned that other construction organizations were looking at launching certification programs for construction financial management, and we could imagine no greater missed opportunity than for an association other than CFMA to sponsor such an important endeavor. Many volunteers pitched in, and the first exam took place one year later at CFMA’s 2004 Annual Conference & Exhibition. Eighty-eight people passed, and the first certificates were issued.

The road wasn’t always easy. For various reasons, we were advised early on that the certification program should be housed in a separate entity. In fact, in May 2004, the ICCIFP existed only on paper. So much effort was put into creating the first CCIFP exam that there was no time for developing the Institute. In response, more dedicated volunteers stepped up and over time, built the ICCIFP we know today.

We have come a long way since that first CCIFP exam nearly 15 years ago. We have issued over 1,500 CCIFP certificates. The ICCIFP is ANSI-accredited. The Institute has become financially self-sufficient. And this past year, we hired an Executive Director, Veronica Whitehead, whose association knowledge and extensive certification experience is taking the ICCIFP to the next level.

As my time as ICCIFP Chairman ends, I have found it very rewarding to lead the Institute at this advanced stage. Those of us who started the program had high expectations, which have been far exceeded. The CCIFP has become the gold standard for professional and competent construction financial management and will continue to benefit CFMA and the profession well into the future.