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PROGRAM MANUAL
Certified Cooperative Communicator
Certification Program



Powering Your Career

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Why Become a CCC?

The early days of the rural electrification program are gone. Today, cooperative communicators must address many complex issues such as rapidly changing technology, cybersecurity, legislative/regulatory changes, evolving consumer expectations, and a marketplace where cooperatives must position themselves to be the trusted energy resource.

Audiences are larger, more diverse, better educated and deluged with information on a vast array of topics from many different sources. Today's electric cooperative must rely on communicators to tell its story persuasively, to cut through the ever-increasing information clutter, and to set itself apart from competitors. In order to do this, communicators must have honed professional skills, a solid working knowledge of the electric cooperative industry, and a commitment to the cooperative way of doing business.

NRECA's Certified Cooperative Communicator (CCC) Program provides communications and marketing professionals the opportunity to increase their knowledge, enhance their skills and earn a credential signifying professional competence.

On a more personal level, becoming a Certified Cooperative Communicator:

- demonstrates your commitment to being a cooperative communications professional;
- proves your willingness and enthusiasm about investing in your future at the co-op;
- improves your knowledge of the electric cooperative utility industry and business model, and exposes you to facets of the business that you may not be familiar with;
- ensures that your skills are kept current with the continuing education requirement;
- gives you the edge when a prospective employer is faced with hiring choices;
- keeps you valuable and marketable in the event of downsizing;
- helps you be more in line for the next promotional progression in your role;
- demonstrates that you are well qualified and that you take your career seriously; and
- builds confidence and provides you with personal satisfaction that you've reached a higher level of professionalism.

About the CCC Program

Background Information

The Certified Cooperative Communicator (CCC) Program was founded in 1985 by the Council of Rural Electric Communicators (CREC). It was known as the Certified Rural Electric Communicator Program through 1999.

The CCC Program is governed by an elected Board of Directors composed of communications and marketing professionals from the industry and administered by the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) in Arlington, Va. All board members must have attained the CCC designation and together set the policies and standards for the program. In addition to the elected members, there are organizational representatives from affiliated organizations who serve on the CCC Board of Directors.

NRECA receives assistance from outside experts in areas related to program development, testing and measurement for the CCC Program.

The goals of the CCC Program are:

- To improve the practice of communications in the electric cooperative field.
- To identify the knowledge and skills necessary to the practice of electric cooperative communications.
- To recognize those individuals who demonstrate a professional level of excellence in the practice of electric cooperative communications.
- To assist communicators in attaining the skills they need to function as communications and marketing professionals.

Eligibility and Fees

Eligibility

The CCC Program is open to communicators who meet the following requirements:

- You must be currently performing communications-related work in the electric cooperative industry.
- You must have one year's experience performing communications-related work in the electric cooperative industry.
- You must be an employee of an NRECA member. This includes:
 - Voting member system: distribution, G&T, and service members. If you work for a voting member under contract or as a freelancer, you can be sponsored by the voting member.
 - Nonvoting member: affiliate, associate and international members.

CCC Program Fees

Program Fee (includes the portfolio review)	\$300
Exam Fee	\$150
Re-grading Fee, if requested (portfolio or exam)	\$100
Annual Professional Fee	\$175

CCC Program Requirements

STEP 1: Submit a Candidate Application

Applications are accepted at any time. From the CCC website, click the “Apply Now” button. Once you submit some basic information, you will be taken to the online payment page. Your application is not complete until you have paid the program fee (which includes the portfolio review fee). If you are not eligible for the program, you will be refunded the full amount. If you are accepted into the program but drop out for any reason, no refunds are provided.

Once your eligibility is confirmed, you will receive an official welcome letter via email providing important dates: your official start date, portfolio due date, and program completion date. The clock starts ticking at this point; you have 24 months to complete the program. It is entirely self-directed; you are responsible for your own due dates. All the instruction you need contained in this manual.

You may request a Peer Advisor when you apply. Peer Advisors are CCCs who have volunteered to provide guidance and support to the candidates.

Prospective candidates are urged not to apply until they have familiarized themselves with the portfolio requirements and are ready to work on their submission. Candidates are encouraged to complete the CCC program during the first 12 months, using the second 12 months of eligibility as a safety net. If you do not become certified within 24 months, you must reapply, pay the program fee and restart the process.

STEP 2: Submit a Portfolio of Work

You must submit a Portfolio of Work within nine months of your start date and earn a passing score before you are eligible to register for the written examination. You can submit up to two portfolios during the 24-month eligibility period. If you fail the portfolio twice, you must reapply to the program.

STEP 3: Pass the Written Examination

After passing the portfolio, you are eligible to take the four-hour exam. You have 24 months from your start date to take and pass the exam to become certified. If you do not pass the exam, you may retake it once during your 24-month eligibility period.

Timing of the Exam

The exam is administered twice a year: in the spring at NRECA’s CONNECT Conference and in the fall during NRECA’s Co-op University. If you want to take the exam at CONNECT, you must submit your portfolio by March 1 to receive your score by April 1. If you want to take the exam at Co-op University, you must submit your portfolio by August 1 to receive your score by September 1.

STEP 4: Submit Continuing Education Credits Annually

After passing the exam, you will be required to complete the CCC License Agreement, outlining the program’s standards of conduct. To maintain your credential, you are required to complete 10 hours/1.0 continuing education unit (CEUs) each year, and pay the annual professional fee. Your CEU requirement begins the year after you become a CCC. Most CCCs fulfill the annual CEU requirement by attending the CONNECT Conference or a communications conference hosted by their statewide association or their G&T cooperative.

Quick Start Guide

All the information you need to get started is located in the Certified Cooperative Communicator section of cooperative.com:

1. Log in to cooperative.com.
2. Go to the “Conferences and Education” tab.
3. Click on “Certificate Programs”.
4. Click on “Certified Cooperative Communicator”.
5. Click the tab titled “Becoming a CCC”.

Getting Started

1. Download the CCC Program Manual and read it thoroughly.
2. Confirm that you are eligible to enter the program.
3. Familiarize yourself with the portfolio requirements.
4. Make sure you have two to four work samples to submit and the time to do it.
5. Submit the online Candidate Application form.
6. Download the Portfolio Overview and Work Sample forms.
7. Download the Body of Knowledge.
8. Download or purchase the study materials.

If you have any questions, please contact CCC program staff.

The Portfolio

The portfolio is your opportunity to demonstrate your skills as an electric cooperative communicator. You must submit your Portfolio within nine months of your start date or reapply to the program. Once you pass the portfolio, you are eligible to take the exam. The portfolio is graded on a Pass/Fail basis.

The work samples must have been completed within three years of your start date. However, if you have been doing communications work in the electric cooperative industry for less than two years, you may submit up to 50 percent of your samples from outside the industry.

The portfolio submission consists of:

1. Portfolio Overview Form
2. Work Sample Form for each work sample
3. Two to four work samples

Details on these items are provided on the following pages. Please read the information on portfolio preparation very carefully. Most portfolios that do not pass are due to incomplete information or not following directions. An outstanding work sample is only as good as the information you provide in the Portfolio Overview and Work Sample forms. Be sure to read “Maximizing Your Portfolio Score” at the end of this section.

Rules for Submitting Your Work Samples

Your work samples comprise your Portfolio of Work. The Work Sample Form is part of each sample and is extremely important. Please read the following instructions carefully. If you need more information about the work sample categories and how they may fit your particular job, please contact the CCC program staff for assistance.

1. The work samples must be your own—produced by either you or under your supervision (there are special work sample categories for supervisors and managers).
2. Each work sample you submit should have been completed during the past three years and should be work you have done within the electric cooperative industry. There is an exception to this rule: If you have been employed as an electric cooperative communicator for less than two years, or have been doing communications work as an electric cooperative communicator for less than two years, then up to 50 percent of the work samples submitted may be work you produced in a communications position—communications and/or marketing—outside the electric cooperative industry.
3. Each work sample must be accompanied by a Work Sample Form downloaded from the CCC site on cooperative.com.
4. You must submit at least two, but no more than four, work samples. This means four total work samples in your entire portfolio of work – not four work samples in each category. You may submit all of your work samples under one category.

Portfolio Review and Scoring

Evaluation Process

Each portfolio submitted by a CCC candidate is evaluated by an independent communications professional who has earned the CCC designation and has been trained in the process of evaluating portfolios. Members of the CCC program board and the CCC program staff do not participate in the evaluation process. In addition, if a portfolio grader recognizes the name on a portfolio submission and believes he or she cannot be objective in their evaluation, the grader is instructed to recuse himself or herself from judging that entry. The portfolio review is pass/fail. While we do not share specific scores, we can provide grading feedback upon request for those who fail, if available.

Notification of Results

CCC program staff will notify you by email with the results within 30 days after your portfolio is received. (Please note that it may take longer if we experience a heavy volume of portfolio submissions.) If your portfolio does not pass, you may resubmit it along with a re-grading fee once during your nine-month portfolio eligibility period. If it does not pass a second time, you must reapply to the CCC program. All fees are listed under “Certification Requirements Details” at the beginning of this document.

Portfolio Return

Your portfolio is not automatically returned to you, nor is it archived by CCC program staff. If you would like your portfolio returned after it is graded, you must supply a pre-paid shipping label and instructions with your portfolio submission. Some portfolios are retained to use as samples for other potential candidates to view at the New Cooperative Communicator’s Orientation and at the CONNECT Conference (with permission).

The Portfolio Overview Form

The Portfolio Overview Form can be downloaded from cooperative.com. This form must be completed and included at the beginning of your portfolio with the following information:

1. Your system's overall communication program for both members and non-members.
2. A description of the employee(s) involved in communication work within your system.
3. A description of your co-op's use of outside communications consultants and/or communications products and services (i.e. Touchstone Energy, Straight Talk).
4. A description of the size and makeup of your co-op membership.

This form must appear at the beginning of your portfolio to be accepted for evaluation. The information you provide on this form provides the context for your submission to be reviewed. It's important to remember that an incomplete form can greatly impact the overall grading of your portfolio.

Work Sample Form

The Work Sample Form is very important. In essence, you are preparing a brief communications plan explaining your work sample including what you did, why you did it, and the result. The portfolio reviewer looks carefully at the work sample forms. Incomplete information can greatly impact the overall grading of your portfolio.

Each Work Sample Form requires the following information:

1. The exact goal, purpose and objective of this work.
2. Your role in producing the work -- whether you created the sample itself or acted as supervisor/manager.
3. The budget/financial considerations or limitations and timeline.
4. The audience of the work sample.
5. Unique characteristics or special limitations (other than budget) of the work sample.
6. The tangible results of the work sample. Use metrics whenever possible (i.e. you increased attendance X percent from prior years; you received X number of favorable comments—more than any previously; you increased website visits by X percent, etc.)

Each section is explained in more detail below.

Goals, Purpose and Objectives

The portfolio reviewer will observe how well your methods match your goals and objectives. A professional communicator selects tools suitable to the purpose. Write your goals and objectives concisely and specifically. Often, these will be linked to communications program goals stated on the Portfolio Overview Form. The program goals will be long-term and work samples will be individual efforts on the path toward these larger goals. Give the evaluators a picture of how your work fits into the larger scheme.

Your Role

When completing the Work Sample Forms, explain your role specifically. Avoid stating that you were “involved in” the publication. Did you write it, edit it or design it? Avoid stating you “helped plan” a brochure. Did you select the paper, colors and fold? Even further, where did you get the idea for your entry? Did you need to win approval from your CEO? Were you part of a team that needed to overcome differing opinions? Did you and your colleagues have a strategy in place that affected the communications piece? Be sure you explain your colleagues’ roles and identify other project contributors. Along with identifying them, elaborate on whether or not they provided direction, assisted with tasks and implementation, or offered guidance that helped the project evolve.

Department managers submitting work samples prepared largely by others should specify their role in the department. Explain what you mean when you describe your responsibilities as “coordinating,” “supervising” or “planning.” For example, rather than saying you “coordinated brochure development”, describe specifics around how you provided artists and designers instructions and discussed critical areas of organization and content with writers. If your role is less hands-on, specify your involvement. You might say you brainstormed with a writer and designer to reach a consensus. Essentially, evaluators want to know what you did that was hands-on and how you were involved making decisions. It is important to acknowledge the use of outside consultants or if you used Touchstone Energy products. The use of consultants or TSE products does not count against your project but should be clearly stated.

Budget and Timeline

Your entry should provide a comprehensive description of the budget and the timeline. The timeline should run from planning through production and implementation. When explaining your budget, give specifics so graders can get some perspective on your resources. How many copies of your newsletter do you get printed for \$1,200? If you are describing a major campaign involving printing, advertising, giveaways, etc., specify how much was allocated to each part. If the project did not include budgetary considerations, please explain. Specific tasks and a list of deadlines demonstrate attention to detail and indicate you considered what was necessary to achieve your goals.

Audience

Who was the target audience – members, employees, the media? How did you determine your audience? What were their needs? How did you shape your goals and objectives accordingly? The more you know about your audience, the more powerful your communications and marketing efforts will be. It will also help you craft the perfect message to encourage the audience to take a desired action.

Unique Characteristics

What was unique about your project? In most cases, not even the most basic communications piece is developed without decisions, questions or other issues. As a communicator, this is your opportunity to demonstrate why you chose to handle the project or draft the copy submitted and why this is important for your cooperative. For example, you may draft and produce twelve newsletters annually, but most

communicators can point to one or two exceptional issues because of the topics covered, the interest generated, the content honed to perfection, or the idea that evolved despite a shoestring budget.

One applicant offered that the main advantage of submitting news releases is “it’s free.” There are certainly more compelling reasons we seek news coverage than the cost. The portfolio reviewer is looking for good work with no apologies or excuses. Avoid blaming the printer and the budget. Emphasize creativity and uniqueness. Audience demographics, mailing requirements and matching ink to a color scheme for an event would be examples of unique characteristics.

Tangible Results

Lack of meaningful measurements showing the results of communications efforts is one of the major problems that portfolio reviewers encounter. Suitable measurement methods include reporting the number of responses to a direct mail piece, attendance at an event, and professionally executed readership or attitude surveys. When evaluating results, think both quantitatively and qualitatively. Did you get more news coverage? Did you draw more members to an annual meeting? Did you see a difference in survey results? Did you deliver a piece by the deadline and under budget? Did your website visits increase? These are all quantitative results from your evaluation. Be as specific as possible, including percentages and numbers. This indicates you gave careful consideration on how to determine whether your project was successful.

Not every category is suited to measurement. A single feature story or photo layout might not bring a statistically measurable response. Getting accolades from your board or CEO is good—that is qualitative. Use your judgment, and where possible, report meaningful results to substantiate the effectiveness of the sample. Your project may not have achieved the results you hoped for, but it may have generated additional ideas that were implemented, or caused you to make key changes in your plans. Discussion of these points indicates your expertise as a communicator. If you cannot explain why your entry was successful, you may want to consider another entry.

Include Samples of Your Work

Make sure you provide samples of how your work is used in the overall communications effort. For example, if you took photographs or developed artwork, show how they were used in presentations or newsletters or your website. Your work may be superior, but it is imperative that you include material showing how it was used by your co-op and that adequately describe all the items on the Work Sample Form.

Portfolio - Work Sample Categories

You must submit two to four samples of work you have produced or that were produced under your supervision. The samples must fall within the following portfolio categories:

- **Work Sample Category: Programs and Planning**
 1. Member, Employee, and/or Public Communications or Marketing Program
 2. Events Coordination

- **Work Sample Category: Marketing**
 3. Advertising
 4. Events Promotion
 5. Exhibits and Displays
 6. Direct Mail and Specialties

- **Work Sample Category: Writing and Editing**
 7. News Release/News Story
 8. Feature Story
 9. Speech Writing
 10. Editorial and Opinion Writing
 11. Website Content

- **Work Sample Category: Publications and Design**
 12. Newsletter
 13. Magazine
 14. Annual Report
 15. Special Publication
 16. Website Design
 17. Design Wild Card

- **Work Sample Category: Digital**
 18. Social Media
 19. Digital Communication
 20. Digital Storytelling
 21. Photography

You may submit more than one sample per category. For example, if you are a magazine editor, you could submit two to four different samples in the Writing and Editing category. Also, please note that some categories are recommended for, but not limited to, department managers and supervisors.

Detailed descriptions of the portfolio work sample categories are listed on the following pages. They include items your work sample should contain and the criteria on which it will be graded.

Portfolio – Work Sample Category: Programs and Planning

- 1. Member, Employee and/or Public Communications or Marketing Program:** Use this category if you have responsibility for a communications or marketing program directed toward member, employee and/or public audiences. Your work sample should meet the following criteria and include:

- A description of the candidate’s overall communication program for both members and non-members; employees involved in communication work within the organization; use of outside communications consultants, services or products; and the overall size and makeup of the candidate’s membership, as outlined on the Portfolio Overview Form.
- A description of goals, purpose and objectives of the work.
- A description of your role in producing the work, whether you created the sample itself or acted as a supervisor/manager.
- A description of budget/financial considerations and timeline.
- A description of the audience for the work sample and any unique characteristics or special limitations.
- Tangible results.
- The program reflects thoughtful research and planning.
- The program helps build awareness of the organization and its goals, as well as its products and services, while demonstrating innovation and creativity.
- Content and design of all elements are appropriate and reflect interest of the target audience.
- Media selected provided maximum impact for content of the message. The message and medium are appropriately used to reach the target audience.

NOTE: Please submit supporting materials if appropriate.

- 2. Events Coordination:** Use this category if you have responsibility for any coordinated event directed toward member, employee and/or public audiences. Examples include a grand opening, special celebrations, kids’ programs, meetings, conferences or annual meetings. Your work sample should meet the following criteria and include:

- A description of the candidate’s overall communication program for both members and non-members; employees involved in communication work within the organization; use of outside communications consultants, services or products; and the overall size and makeup of the candidate’s membership, as outlined on the Portfolio Overview Form.
- A description of goals, purpose and objectives of the work.
- A description of your role in producing the work, whether you created the sample itself or acted as a supervisor/manager.
- A description of budget/financial considerations and timeline.
- A description of the audience for the work sample and any unique characteristics or special limitations.
- Tangible results.
- The program reflects thoughtful research and planning.
- Implementation seems efficiently and consistently executed.
- Elements used for the event meet the highest professional standards.
- The event’s impact is clearly monitored, measured and evaluated, including number of attendees.

Portfolio – Work Sample Category: Marketing

3. Advertising: Use this category if you have responsibility for an advertising piece (including print, video, audio, billboard, etc.) used to promote an idea, service or product to a targeted audience through paid media. Examples include advertisements produced locally for placement on television or radio, print mediums or digital outlets – including one-time special publications. For broadcast submission, a locally tagged pre-produced ad does not qualify in this category (i.e. Touchstone Energy ads). Your work sample should meet the following criteria and include:

- A description of the candidate’s overall communication program for both members and non-members; employees involved in communication work within the organization; use of outside communications consultants, services or products; and the overall size and makeup of the candidate’s membership, as outlined on the Portfolio Overview Form.
- A description of goals, purpose and objectives of the work.
- A description of your role in producing the work, whether you created the sample itself or acted as a supervisor/manager.
- A description of budget/financial considerations and timeline.
- A description of the audience for the work sample and any unique characteristics or special limitations.
- Tangible results.
- Advertising shows imagination, innovation and uniqueness.
- The writing is creative, while meeting the highest professional standards.
- Visuals in the work sample are creative and appropriate to the message.
- Message and medium are appropriately used to provide maximum reach to the target audience. Overall content and design are appropriate and reflect the interest of the target audience.

NOTE: Please submit a video or audiotape of the actual advertisement(s), along with a script, tear sheet, copy of the publication market to show the advertisement, or screenshots of digital advertisement and the digital medium in which the ads ran. Print-style ads should be submitted in PDF format showing publication.

4. Events Promotion: Use this category if you have responsibility in the promotion of an event. Examples include annual or other membership meetings, fairs, etc. Coordination and/or supervision of an event should be submitted in category 2 (Events Coordination). Your work sample should meet the following criteria and include:

- A description of the candidate’s overall communication program for both members and non-members; employees involved in communication work within the organization; use of outside communications consultants, services or products; and the overall size and makeup of the candidate’s membership, as outlined on the Portfolio Overview form.
- A description of goals, purpose and objectives of the work.
- A description of your role in producing the work, whether you created the sample itself or acted as a supervisor/manager.
- A description of budget/financial considerations and timeline.
- A description of the audience for the work sample and any unique characteristics or special limitations.
- Tangible results.
- A description of the needs of the target audience, as well as an explanation of how

communication channel(s) were selected and utilized.

- Materials included in the work sample are appropriate, easy to understand, relevant and include all pertinent information.
- Materials show imagination, innovation and uniqueness.
- The event's impact is clearly monitored, measured and evaluated, including number of attendees and any plans for future events.

5. Exhibits and Displays: Use this category if you have responsibility in the development and implementation of exhibits and displays. Examples include kiosks, merchandising point-of-purchase displays, retail store designs, trade show exhibits, outdoor displays, and mobile exhibits. Your work sample should meet the following criteria and include:

- A description of the candidate's overall communication program for both members and non-members; employees involved in communication work within the organization; use of outside communications consultants, services or products; and the overall size and makeup of the candidate's membership, as outlined on the Portfolio Overview form.
- A description of goals, purpose and objectives of the work.
- A description of your role in producing the work, whether you created the sample itself or acted as a supervisor/manager.
- A description of budget/financial considerations and timeline.
- A description of the audience for the work sample and any unique characteristics or special limitations.
- Tangible results.
- Photos, illustrations and graphics are technically well executed and/or copy is well written and interesting.
- Project makes a communication statement and meets specified objectives. It complements the total communications effort. The purpose of the sample is evident.
- Careful planning is evident. The concept is suitable for the medium chosen. The project is also appropriate for target audience and provides positive impression of your organization.
- Work sample commands attention. The approach shows imagination and originality and the overall appearance is distinctive.

6. Direct Mail and Specialties: Use this category if you have responsibility in the development, production and/or distribution of direct mail pieces and specialties. Examples include a single mail piece or campaign to announce a cooperative event, service, product, program, or a special commemorative product. Your work sample should meet the following criteria and include:

- A description of the candidate's overall communication program for both members and non-members; employees involved in communication work within the organization; use of outside communications consultants, services or products; and the overall size and makeup of the candidate's membership, as outlined on the Portfolio Overview form.
- A description of goals, purpose and objectives of the work.
- A description of your role in producing the work, whether you created the sample itself or acted as a supervisor/manager.
- A description of budget/financial considerations and timeline.
- A description of the audience for the work sample and any unique characteristics or special limitations.

- Tangible results.
- Work sample commands attention. The approach shows imagination and originality and the overall appearance is distinctive.
- The organization's logo, signature or identifying symbol is apparent without distracting from the message.
- Careful planning is evident. The concept is suitable for medium chosen.
- The project is appropriate for the target audience and provides a positive impression of the organization.

NOTE: Please submit a sample of the piece or product. A photograph is appropriate if the item is expensive, in limited quantity, or difficult to ship.

Portfolio – Work Sample Category: Writing and Editing

7. News Release/News Story: Use this category if your work sample is classified as a news release or a news story. Examples include external, internal or industry announcements. This can also be an in-depth news story on an individual, organization, activity or campaign. Differs from a feature story in that its focus is on news, rather than narrative, and is often under a deadline or is time critical. Only individual news stories should be submitted, so if the story is part of a series, submit only one story per entry. Syndicated, borrowed or reprinted material is not eligible, nor are pieces written by freelancers, consultants or agencies. Your work sample should meet the following criteria and include:

- A description of the candidate's overall communication program for both members and non-members; employees involved in communication work within the organization; use of outside communications consultants, services or products; and the overall size and makeup of the candidate's membership, as outlined on the Portfolio Overview form.
- A description of goals, purpose and objectives of the work.
- A description of your role in producing the work, whether you created the sample itself or acted as a supervisor/manager.
- A description of budget/financial considerations and timeline.
- A description of the audience for the work sample and any unique characteristics or special limitations.
- Tangible results.
- The headline, as well as the lead, arouses the reader's interest or curiosity and is appropriate to the story. The copy holds the reader's attention throughout and is appropriate for the audience. The news release is timely and has news value.
- The news release answers who, what, when, where, why and how. The writing shows style and/or logical flow of ideas. The transitions are smooth and well-organized.
- The writing demonstrates good use of basic skills (i.e. grammar, punctuation, spelling and journalistic style).
- The news release reflects thorough research and reporting, including source attribution.

NOTE: Please submit a typed manuscript of the original news release and proof of publication within the past three years.

8. Feature Story: Use this category if your work sample is classified as a feature story. Examples include in-depth, interpretive coverage of a subject, or an entertaining, colorful single story of a subject that informs the reader. Differs from a news story in that its focus is on narrative, rather

than on news. Only individual feature stories should be submitted, so if the story is part of a series, submit only one story per entry. Syndicated, borrowed or reprinted material is not eligible, nor are pieces written by freelancers, consultants or agencies. Your work sample should meet the following criteria and include:

- A description of the candidate's overall communication program for both members and non-members; employees involved in communication work within the organization; use of outside communications consultants, services or products; and the overall size and makeup of the candidate's membership, as outlined on the Portfolio Overview form.
- A description of goals, purpose and objectives of the work.
- A description of your role in producing the work, whether you created the sample itself or acted as a supervisor/manager.
- A description of budget/financial considerations and timeline.
- A description of the audience for the work sample and any unique characteristics or special limitations.
- Tangible results.
- The headline, as well as the lead, arouses the reader's interest or curiosity and is appropriate to the story. The copy holds the reader's attention throughout and is appropriate for the audience. The writing demonstrates effective use of quotes.
- The writing shows style and/or logical flow of ideas. The transitions are smooth and well-organized.
- The writing demonstrates good use of basic skills (i.e. grammar, punctuation, spelling and journalistic style).
- The story is based on a good idea, and there is human interest appeal. The story reflects thorough research and reporting, including source attribution.

NOTE: Please submit a typed manuscript of the original feature story and proof of publication within the past three years.

9. Speech Writing: Use this category if your work sample is classified as an example of speech writing. Examples include speeches given at civic clubs, annual meetings or to an internal or public audience. Your work sample should meet the following criteria and include:

- A description of the candidate's overall communication program for both members and non-members; employees involved in communication work within the organization; use of outside communications consultants, services or products; and the overall size and makeup of the candidate's membership, as outlined on the Portfolio Overview form.
- A description of goals, purpose and objectives of the work.
- A description of your role in producing the work, whether you created the sample itself or acted as a supervisor/manager.
- A description of budget/financial considerations and timeline.
- A description of the audience for the work sample and any unique characteristics or special limitations.
- Tangible results.
- The speech's content demonstrates knowledge of the subject and an awareness of the target audience.
- Language used is grammatically correct and appropriate to the subject and audience.
- The speech's content is well organized and an appropriate length. The speech reflects thoughtful planning and research.

- The speech’s content holds the listeners’ attention throughout.
- NOTE: Please submit a typed manuscript of the final speech or script.

10. Editorial and Opinion Writing: Use this category if your work sample can be classified as editorial and/or opinion writing. Examples include a column or article expressing an opinion, written for your own publication, or a Letter to the Editor or guest editorial for another publication. Your work sample should meet the following criteria and include:

- A description of the candidate’s overall communication program for both members and non-members; employees involved in communication work within the organization; use of outside communications consultants, services or products; and the overall size and makeup of the candidate’s membership, as outlined on the Portfolio Overview form.
- A description of goals, purpose and objectives of the work.
- A description of your role in producing the work, whether you created the sample itself or acted as a supervisor/manager.
- A description of budget/financial considerations and timeline.
- A description of the audience for the work sample and any unique characteristics or special limitations.
- Tangible results.
- The headline, as well as the lead, arouses the reader’s interest or curiosity and is appropriate to the story. The writing is well organized and holds the reader’s attention throughout.
- The writing demonstrates good use of basic skills (i.e. grammar, punctuation, spelling and journalistic style).
- The writing shows style and/or logical flow of ideas. The transitions are smooth and well-organized.
- The work sample is appropriate for the audience. The writing’s content demonstrates knowledge of the subject.

NOTE: Please submit a typed manuscript of the original piece and proof of publication within the past three years.

11. Website Content: Use this category if you have responsibility in the development of website content, not focusing on design. Examples include website copy, articles or other written materials suitable for publication on the Internet. Your work sample should include:

- A description of the candidate’s overall communication program for both members and non-members; employees involved in communication work within the organization; use of outside communications consultants, services or products; and the overall size and makeup of the candidate’s membership, as outlined on the Portfolio Overview form.
- A description of goals, purpose and objectives of the work.
- A description of your role in producing the work, whether you created the sample itself or acted as a supervisor/manager.
- A description of budget/financial considerations and timeline.
- A description of the audience for the work sample and any unique characteristics or special limitations.
- Tangible results.
- Content is clearly written for the web, following shorter, more conversational patterns.
- The content is well organized and appears in a logical order. The writing demonstrates

- good use of basic skills (i.e. grammar, punctuation, spelling and journalistic style).
 - Content is relevant and meets clear communication objectives.
 - Content is suitable for the target audience and reflects their needs and tastes.
- NOTE: Please submit an accessible URL or thumb drive containing samples.

Portfolio – Work Sample Category: Publications and Design

12. Newsletter: Use this category if your work sample can be classified as a newsletter. Examples include an internal employee newsletter, or a member newsletter distributed directly to members or inserted into a statewide or other publication. It can also include an electronic newsletter published on your website or distributed via email. Your work sample should meet the following criteria and include:

- A description of the candidate’s overall communication program for both members and non-members; employees involved in communication work within the organization; use of outside communications consultants, services or products; and the overall size and makeup of the candidate’s membership, as outlined on the Portfolio Overview form.
- A description of goals, purpose and objectives of the work.
- A description of your role in producing the work, whether you created the sample itself or acted as a supervisor/manager.
- A description of budget/financial considerations and timeline.
- A description of the audience for the work sample and any unique characteristics or special limitations.
- Tangible results.
- An outline of frequency of publication, channel of distribution and circulation.
- The writing holds reader’s attention throughout. Headlines draw readers to the story and the content demonstrates knowledge of subject, research and reporting. The writing demonstrates good use of basic skills (i.e. grammar, punctuation, spelling and journalistic style).
- Layout, design and organization of the publication encourages readership. Photos are technically good and relate to copy. The illustrations and graphics are used effectively.
- The newsletter cover/front page commands attention and clearly identifies the organization and publication. It accurately and effectively introduces the issue. Each issue stands alone, yet is clearly one of a series with consistent high quality. The overall publication builds understanding of the organization and is appropriate to the audience.

NOTE: Please submit three consecutive issues of the newsletter produced within the past three years.

13. Magazine: Use this category if you have responsibility in the development, production and/or distribution of a magazine, focusing on layout and design. Examples include a local, statewide or national cooperative publication. Your work sample should meet the following criteria and include:

- A description of the candidate’s overall communication program for both members and non-members; employees involved in communication work within the organization; use of outside communications consultants, services or products; and the overall size and makeup of the candidate’s membership, as outlined on the Portfolio Overview form.

- A description of goals, purpose and objectives of the work.
- A description of your role in producing the work, whether you created the sample itself or acted as a supervisor/manager.
- A description of budget/financial considerations and timeline.
- A description of the audience for the work sample and any unique characteristics or special limitations.
- Tangible results.
- An outline of frequency of publication, channel of distribution and circulation.
- Each issue stands alone, yet is clearly one of a series. Consistent high quality throughout all issues. Publication has its own “personality.”
- The cover or front page gets attention and clearly identifies the organization and publication. It should accurately and effectively introduce the issue.
- Layout, design and organization of publication encourages readership. Photos are technically good and relate to copy. Illustrations and graphics are used effectively. The publication uses typography, paper stock, ink and color effectively.

NOTE: Please submit three consecutive issues of the magazine produced within the past three years.

14. Annual Report: Use this category if your work sample can be classified as an annual report.

Examples include publications targeted to the cooperative’s membership, effectively communicating the organization’s mission, personality and required financial information. Either print or electronic versions of your cooperative’s annual report can be submitted. Your work sample should meet the following criteria and include:

- A description of the candidate’s overall communication program for both members and non-members; employees involved in communication work within the organization; use of outside communications consultants, services or products; and the overall size and makeup of the candidate’s membership, as outlined on the Portfolio Overview form.
- A description of goals, purpose and objectives of the work.
- A description of your role in producing the work, whether you created the sample itself or acted as a supervisor/manager.
- A description of budget/financial considerations and timeline.
- A description of the audience for the work sample and any unique characteristics or special limitations.
- Tangible results.
- The cover gets attention and clearly identifies the organization and purpose of the work sample. Creativity is shown in developing the theme or identity of the publication. Design is distinctive yet unobtrusive and enhances communication. Color is used effectively and with purpose.
- Content shows evidence of clear planning, writing and editing. Sections are designed to coordinate as a whole and are presented in logical sequence. All subject areas are clearly identified and easily located. Financial data and other required information is presented clearly and effectively.
- Photos and graphics are of good technical quality and complement the copy, support the narrative, and are easily interpreted. Charts and graphs provide useful information.
- The writing demonstrates good use of basic skills (i.e. grammar, punctuation, spelling and journalistic style).

NOTE: Please submit a final copy of the annual report distributed to the membership.

15. Special Publication: Use this category if your work sample can be classified as a special or infrequent publication. Examples include brochures, bill inserts, handbooks and special editions of a magazine. Your work sample should meet the following criteria and include:

- A description of the candidate's overall communication program for both members and non-members; employees involved in communication work within the organization; use of outside communications consultants, services or products; and the overall size and makeup of the candidate's membership, as outlined on the Portfolio Overview form.
- A description of goals, purpose and objectives of the work.
- A description of your role in producing the work, whether you created the sample itself or acted as a supervisor/manager.
- A description of budget/financial considerations and timeline.
- A description of the audience for the work sample and any unique characteristics or special limitations.
- Tangible results.
- The purpose of the publication is clear and appropriate to the target audience, including frequency of publication, circulation and channel of distribution.
- The writing has impact, is clear, readable, interesting and informative. Headlines and subheads are used appropriately. Strict editorial standards are consistently evident.
- The design is distinctive and draws the reader's attention. Photos, illustrations and other graphics are effective, creative and can be easily read and understood. Effective use of color and paper stock.
- Content shows evidence of clear planning, writing and editing. Sections are designed to coordinate as a whole and are presented in logical sequence. All subject areas are clearly identified and easily located.

NOTE: Please submit a sample of the publication (A PDF or photo is appropriate if the item is expensive, in limited quantity or difficult to ship).

16. Website Design: Use this category if your work sample can be classified as website design. Examples include internal and external websites as well as specialty websites. Websites designed by freelancers, consultants or agencies are not eligible for submission. Your work sample should meet the following criteria and include:

- A description of the candidate's overall communication program for both members and non-members; employees involved in communication work within the organization; use of outside communications consultants, services or products; and the overall size and makeup of the candidate's membership, as outlined on the Portfolio Overview form.
- A description of goals, purpose and objectives of the work.
- A description of your role in producing the work, whether you created the sample itself or acted as a supervisor/manager.
- A description of budget/financial considerations and timeline.
- A description of the audience for the work sample and any unique characteristics or special limitations.
- Tangible results.
- Site structure shows careful planning. Users are provided maximum transportation choices from all locations. Links are explained and provided, as applicable. The site is easy to navigate and all functions work.
- The site shows evidence of frequent updating.

- The site’s overall artistic quality is pleasing to the eye and shows creativity. Design elements are suitable for the chosen medium and reflect the needs and tastes of target audience.
- Photography and graphics complement the text and add impact.

NOTE: Please submit an accessible URL to the finished website or screenshots of sites with restricted access.

17. Design Wild Card: Use this category if your work sample is any communications or marketing effort, focusing on layout and design, which does not fit another category, such as specialty items, posters, tent cards, coffee cups, etc. Your work sample should meet the following criteria and include:

- A description of the candidate’s overall communication program for both members and non-members; employees involved in communication work within the organization; use of outside communications consultants, services or products; and the overall size and makeup of the candidate’s membership, as outlined on the Portfolio Overview form.
- A description of goals, purpose and objectives of the work.
- A description of your role in producing the work, whether you created the sample itself or acted as a supervisor/manager.
- A description of budget/financial considerations and timeline.
- A description of the audience for the work sample and any unique characteristics or special limitations.
- Tangible results.
- Sample commands attention. The design shows imagination and originality. The overall appearance is distinctive.
- Careful planning is evident. The design theme works well through the whole piece. The sample is a cohesive unit.
- The design is suitable for the chosen medium and reflects the needs and tastes of the target audience. The overall arrangement of design elements enhances communication. Elements are complementary and work effectively together.
- Photos, illustrations and graphics are technically well executed and/or copy is well written and interesting.

NOTE: Please submit a sample of the item (A PDF or photo will be appropriate if the item is expensive, in limited quantity or difficult to ship).

Portfolio – Work Sample Category: Digital

18. Social Media: Use this category if your work sample can be classified as social media. Examples include Facebook, Pinterest, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter or any combination of social media platforms that were successful for your cooperative. Your work sample should meet the following criteria and include:

- A description of the candidate’s overall communication program for both members and non-members; employees involved in communication work within the organization; use of outside communications consultants, services or products; and the overall size and makeup of the candidate’s membership, as outlined on the Portfolio Overview form.
- A description of goals, purpose and objectives of the work.

- A description of your role in producing the work, whether you created the sample itself or acted as a supervisor/manager.
- A description of budget/financial considerations and timeline.
- A description of the audience for the work sample and any unique characteristics or special limitations.
- Tangible results.
- A description of the target audience's needs, the social media platform selected for the work sample and why.
- The work sample has a clear communication goal. The message is communicated well in the selected medium or social media platform.
- Narration, music and audio elements, if used, are of high professional quality.
- The work sample commands attention. The design shows imagination and originality and the overall appearance is distinctive. Layout, design and organization encourage readership/viewership.

NOTE: Please submit accessible URL to social media entry or work sample screenshots.

19. Digital Communications: Use this category if your work sample can be classified as digital communications. Examples include podcasts, webinars, videos running less than two minutes, multimedia presentations, and other digital materials. Your work sample should meet the following criteria and include:

- A description of the candidate's overall communication program for both members and non-members; employees involved in communication work within the organization; use of outside communications consultants, services or products; and the overall size and makeup of the candidate's membership, as outlined on the Portfolio Overview form.
- A description of goals, purpose and objectives of the work.
- A description of your role in producing the work, whether you created the sample itself or acted as a supervisor/manager.
- A description of budget/financial considerations and timeline.
- A description of the audience for the work sample and any unique characteristics or special limitations.
- Tangible results.
- A description of the needs of the target audience, circulation, frequency and chosen medium/platform. Careful planning is evident.
- The work sample has a clear communication goal. The message is communicated well in the selected medium. Content is well organized.
- Narration, music and audio elements, if used, are of high professional quality.
- The design and information are complementary, and the text is well written. These elements are suitable for the chosen medium and reflect the needs and tastes of the target audience. Overall design and organization encourages readership/viewership.

NOTE: Please submit an accessible URL or thumb drive containing sample.

20. Digital Storytelling: Use this category if your work sample can be classified as digital storytelling. Examples include tightly edited, well-paced programs running longer than two minutes. Differs from digital communications in that it conveys a more detailed narrative. Your work sample should meet the following criteria and include:

- A description of the candidate's overall communication program for both members and non-members; employees involved in communication work within the organization; use

of outside communications consultants, services or products; and the overall size and makeup of the candidate's membership, as outlined on the Portfolio Overview form.

- A description of goals, purpose and objectives of the work.
- A description of your role in producing the work, whether you created the sample itself or acted as a supervisor/manager.
- A description of budget/financial considerations and timeline.
- A description of the audience for the work sample and any unique characteristics or special limitations.
- Tangible results.
- The purpose of the production is clear and meets objectives. The overall approach shows imagination, originality and innovation. The production has impact. The work sample has an interesting opening and holds interest throughout.
- Narration, music and audio elements, if used, are of high professional quality.
- The program is well organized, tightly edited and well-paced. The presentation does not drag, and all elements complement one another.
- The script is clear, well-written and structured for media use.

NOTE: Please submit an accessible URL or thumb drive containing sample.

21. Photography: Use this category if your work sample can be classified as photography. Examples include color, black and white, digital or film photos used in regular-issue publications, special publications, digital communications, exhibits and displays, etc. Your work sample should meet the following criteria and include:

- A description of the candidate's overall communication program for both members and non-members; employees involved in communication work within the organization; use of outside communications consultants, services or products; and the overall size and makeup of the candidate's membership, as outlined on the Portfolio Overview form.
- A description of goals, purpose and objectives of the work.
- A description of your role in producing the work, whether you created the sample itself or acted as a supervisor/manager.
- A description of budget/financial considerations and timeline.
- A description of the audience for the work sample and any unique characteristics or special limitations.
- Tangible results.
- The photo is well-composed and cropped appropriately. The photo shows technical quality, including lighting, contrast and focus.
- A description of the purpose and utilization of the photo.
- The photo commands attention. The photo shows imagination and creativity.
- The photo tells a story with limited copy and/or contributes to the message being conveyed.

NOTE: Either five (5) non-related single photos (photos with different subject matter taken at different times or places); OR a photo essay consisting of no fewer than five (5) related photos (related subject matter taken at the same event) may be submitted. Please submit copy of original photos (minimum of 4" x 6" and a maximum of 8.5" x 11") placed inside a page protector, along with proof of publication within the past three years.

Portfolio - Frequently Asked Questions

How is the portfolio evaluated?

Each portfolio is reviewed and scored by an independent communications professional who has earned the CCC designation and who is familiar with the objectives of the CCC program. A candidate's score is based on both the quality of the work submitted and the description of the work on the Work Sample Form, which should clearly explain why it is a communications asset for your cooperative.

How long does the portfolio evaluation process take?

Once your portfolio is received at NRECA, expect to hear your results within 30 days. Occasionally, it takes longer if we have a large volume of portfolios to be graded. CCC program staff will send you an email with your results and next steps.

How is the portfolio evaluated?

Every work sample is evaluated on the criteria listed with each sample category. The information provided in the Portfolio Overview and Work Sample Forms is used to determine if the criteria were met.

What is the historical pass/fail rate for the CCC portfolio?

Most CCC candidates pass the portfolio review on their first try. Those who fail will be given grading feedback and an opportunity to submit a revised portfolio for review, which incurs an additional fee. (Fees are listed in the "Eligibility and Fees" section of this document.) Often, candidates score poorly because they failed to follow directions. For example, they did not adequately complete the Overview or Work Sample Forms, or submitted work under the wrong category.

Will I be able to see my portfolio score?

No, the portfolio review is pass/fail. We can provide evaluation feedback upon request for those who fail.

I am having a hard time selecting which work to submit. Any suggestions?

We encourage you to reach out to your CCC peer advisor, nearby CCCs or statewide communicators to help review your work and provide guidance. If asked, CCCs may also be willing to show you the portfolio they submitted. You can view samples of passing portfolios at the CCC booth at CONNECT or if you attend NRECA's New Cooperative Communicator's Orientation.

How can I find out who is a CCC in my region or state?

A directory of CCCs can be found on the CCC site of cooperative.com.

How should my portfolio be packaged and submitted?

We prefer to receive hard copy portfolios in a binder format. For printed pieces, please provide hard copies of the original work (brochures, annual reports, bill stuffers, newsletters, etc.) if possible. For digital entries such as website submissions, you can send the URL for website submissions. You can also submit electronic data on thumb drives.

Will you return my portfolio to me?

We do not return portfolios or keep them after you have become a CCC. If you would like us to return your portfolio, you need to include a completed self-addressed, pre-paid shipping label with your portfolio submission.

How many work samples are required?

You must submit at least two, but no more than four, total samples of work. More is not always better. If you submit 4 samples and one is poor, it will bring down the overall evaluation result. Look for quality work rather than quantity.

Can I submit all work samples in the same category?

Yes. You may submit more than one sample per category. For example, if all your time is spent as a magazine editor; you could then submit two to four different samples in one category.

I have only been doing communications work in the electric cooperative industry for a little over a year. Can I submit samples from my previous job(s)?

If you have been doing communications work at an electric cooperative for less than two years, then up to 50 percent of the work samples you submit may be work you produced in a communications position—communications and/or marketing—outside the electric cooperative industry.

Any other helpful hints?

Be sure to thoroughly and thoughtfully answer all questions on the Portfolio Overview and Work Sample Forms and provide detail as to why your entry is compelling. Use metrics when possible (e.g., you increased attendance X percent from prior years; you received X number of favorable comments—more than any feature article/blog post previously; you increased website visits by X percent, etc.).

Maximizing Your Portfolio Score

The Portfolio Overview Form

When completing the Portfolio Overview Form, be as accurate and thorough as possible. The reviewer will read what kinds of responsibilities you have, and the samples should reflect your position. Provide a clear picture of your cooperative and a summary of how you communicate with members across all communication channels—print, electronic, face-to-face, etc. Give the size of your system and unusual characteristics influencing your communications program. This information sets the stage for how your portfolio will be evaluated.

A small cooperative with one communicator will not have the same resources as a large cooperative with a full marketing/communications department, and the portfolio reviewer takes this into account. The information you provide on this form should provide evaluators with a glimpse of how your organization is structured and operates to achieve its communications goals and objectives.

Follow Directions

As simple as this advice is, evaluators frequently find problems resulting from failure to follow directions. The most common cases are incomplete information, lack of supporting data, and partial samples. Do not wait until the last minute to read the guidelines on what is required of you. Plan your portfolio, write a rough draft of your overview and forms, and go back and read the portfolio section of the manual again.

Get Started Now

On a day-to-day basis, we tend to jump from job to job without self-assessment. Perusing old issues of newsletters or other communications pieces can be beneficial. Looking at them with a fresh eye without the pressure of a deadline can be eye-opening. Graphic problems pop off the page and ways to improve the copy become clear. Start looking at your work now for self-assessment. This is one of the great benefits of the CCC process and candidates are wise to do this before actually deciding to apply. Another advantage of starting now is you will have time to discover and correct problems in future projects. Also, advance preparation allows you to measure the effectiveness of your work. You will be asked for tangible results. Sometimes these numbers are tucked away in someone's files or perhaps you can develop a valid measurement tool for future projects. Most importantly, preparation allows you time to read the directions carefully and to be more complete and thoughtful in your responses.

Selection of Samples

It is important to follow instructions concerning the number of work samples. You must submit two to four samples of work you have produced or was produced under your supervision. The samples must fall within one of the listed portfolio categories. You may, however, submit more than one sample per category. Please note that in some cases you will be asked to submit more than one sample per category. For example, if your submission is a newsletter, you are asked to submit three consecutive issues of it as one entry.

It is not necessary to select one sample from every kind of work you do. It is wise to be selective and submit only your best work. There is sometimes a "sameness" in cooperative publications as a result of material available from NRECA and statewide organizations. In these cases, state which articles you did not originate. Better yet, choose issues of newsletters with very little of this copy included. An issue with 25 percent outside material should not be your best work.

When compiling your portfolio, talk to your peer advisor, colleagues and other cooperative communicators for insight on what types of pieces to include and what makes a good entry. Networking can improve not only your portfolio entries, but also result in ideas for improving a variety of communications techniques.

The Portfolio Itself

There are many different methods of binding portfolios. You are not evaluated on how your submission is bound. A graphic masterpiece that contains poor submissions will not pass. Most submissions come in 3-ring binders. These are fine if the pouches, sleeves or plastic covers allow evaluators to pull out any multi-page material presented. If you are submitting several large newspaper ads or full-page photo essays, a larger binding format may be more suitable.

Any disks or thumb drives should be accompanied by instructions concerning what is to be viewed and should clearly indicate the length. Provide URLs for webpages. While it may be tempting to submit all samples in PDF format, it is best if you submit the work in the medium it was presented to the audience.

Body of Knowledge Study Guide

It is strongly recommended that CCC candidates preparing to take the written exam use the CCC Body of Knowledge Study Guide and study materials. Often referred to as the “BOK,” the Body of Knowledge is an outstanding resource tool and a document you will likely find yourself referencing time and time again, even after you have attained your CCC.

The written exam is based on the BOK Study Guide and accompanying study materials. These study materials are drawn from a variety of sources covering communications and marketing skills, the electric utility industry, and the cooperative business model. The study materials make excellent additions to any communicator’s reference library. While not everything in the Body of Knowledge will be covered on the exam, working through the entire BOK will strengthen your role as a communicator.

For some, preparing to take a four-hour test may seem intimidating, especially if it has been some time since you have had to sit for an exam. The key is preparation. You should understand the CCC exam requires more than a few late-night study sessions. It is important to allocate time to study, especially when juggling job responsibilities, personal commitments and leisure activities. Many people have established a study time line covering a four- to six-month timeframe. What *is* important is to develop a plan that works best for you. The introductory section of the Body of Knowledge Study Guide provides some excellent tips to prepare for the CCC exam.

We also strongly encourage working with a CCC peer advisor. They have been through the process and can help you get organized and prepare. You can request a peer advisor when you apply to the program, or at any time by contacting CCC program staff. Be sure you take advantage of the expertise at your own cooperative in accounting, engineering and operations departments. They can break down specific concepts for you.

There are no trick questions on the exam; the answers are all included in your study materials. The key to success is make sure to give yourself plenty of study time.

The Written Examination

Composition of the Written Exam

Focus of Exam

The exam is designed to test your knowledge and skills in:

- The electric utility industry, with particular emphasis on electric cooperatives and how they differ from other utilities;
- Member, employee and public communications; and
- Communications and marketing skills.

There are three sections in the exam, corresponding with the Body of Knowledge. All sections are weighted equally. You are expected to have a working knowledge of each of these topics, no matter your specific area of expertise. The exam is prepared and updated by a panel of Certified Cooperative Communicators, under the guidance of outside certification experts. You will be given four hours to complete the exam.

Types of Questions

The examination itself is composed of several types of questions:

- Essay questions in which concepts, theories or organizational characteristics are explored;
- Multiple choice questions;
- Short-answer questions where you write out an answer;
- Scenario-based questions describing a hypothetical situation; and
- Short writing assignments, such as writing a news release or radio spot.

Exam Review and Scoring

General Information

Independent, licensed certification experts (psychometricians) review and score the exams. A panel of Certified Cooperative Communicators review the exam and answer key with guidance from the psychometrician. Although they do help with the development and maintenance of the exam, CCC board members and CCC program staff do not score exams.

Scoring

- The exams are based on a total of 300 points, 100 for each section. A candidate must score 190 points to pass.
- The responses are scored based on the grader's (psychometrician) evaluation. No notations are made on the exams.
- The CCC board puts great value in the knowledge and expertise of the psychometricians, trusting their grading methodologies and accepting their final evaluations.

Notification

You will receive notification of your exam result within six weeks from your exam date. Candidates who do not pass are provided with their overall scores in each of the three sections, in the hope they can identify areas for improvement and prepare to retake the exam.

It is customary for certification programs, like CCC, to not provide detailed scoring information. Doing so can jeopardize the security and integrity of the exam. A limited pool of exam questions is rotated, thus creating a need to keep the exam confidential.

Exam Appeals

A candidate failing the exam by 10 points or less will be notified by the CCC program administrator that they are eligible to request an appeal. If eligible, the candidate may submit a letter requesting an appeal to the CCC program administrator within two weeks of exam failure notification. The exam will be re-scored by an alternate psychometrician for an additional re-grading fee. (All fees are listed in the “Eligibility and Fees” section of this document.)

The two scores are averaged to determine the final exam score. Pass/fail results of the appeals process will be provided no later than four weeks from the date that the candidate’s appeal request is received by the CCC program administrator.

CCC Exam - Frequently Asked Questions

What is the best way to prepare for the exam?

We encourage candidates to read through the entire Body of Knowledge document (available for download on cooperative.com), complete the worksheets and sample test questions. We also recommend obtaining the suggested materials listed in the Body of Knowledge and on cooperative.com. Talk to CCCs who have earned the credential for additional study tips and request a CCC peer advisor to help guide you through the process.

What is the CCC Body of Knowledge (BOK) Study Guide?

The Body of Knowledge Study Guide was developed to serve as a roadmap for candidates studying to take the CCC exam. Routinely reviewed and updated by a CCC board committee for accuracy and relevancy, this document contains worksheets, sample exam questions, a list of suggested reading materials, and more. Any cooperative communicator has access to download the BOK on cooperative.com.

Do I need to purchase all the books on the recommended reading list?

To fully prepare for the CCC exam, we encourage you to borrow or purchase as many of the titles as you can. Many communicators are able to borrow the reading materials from a fellow CCC in their state or region, while others prefer to buy their own books so they can keep them for future reference. While it is not possible to test candidates on all the recommended reading material, many CCCs will tell you the resources have been very helpful to them throughout their careers.

There is a lot of material to study. Where should I focus?

It is helpful to break down the three sections of the exam (Electricity and Cooperatives; Member, Employee and Public Communications/Marketing; and Delivery of Communications and Marketing) and figure out where you need to focus. For example, if you are a professional communicator who is new to the electric cooperative industry, spend more of your time focusing on Section 1. If you have been working with cooperatives for a while but you are new to the role of communications, focus on preparing for Sections 2 and 3. Clear and concise writing is also important when answering exam questions. Give yourself a few months to properly study and prepare for the exam.

Is there a preparation class or program to help me study for the exam?

Other than the BOK and other printed materials, there is no classroom instruction to help you prepare for the exam. The CCC credential is similar to a self-directed graduate-level independent study course. You are responsible for preparing for the exam and studying at your own pace. You may request a CCC peer advisor to guide you through the preparation process, but they cannot answer specific questions about what is on the exam. Approximately six weeks prior to the CCC exam, CCC program staff will email weekly study tips to candidates.

Are there test questions or a practice exam I can use?

Yes – please refer to the sample CCC examination questions within the CCC Body of Knowledge study guide. You will also find worksheets that will be useful as you learn more about your cooperative and the industry. The written exam is based on the BOK study guide and recommended reading materials. Test questions are meant to be straightforward; there are no “trick” questions on the exam.

What is the historical pass/fail rate of the CCC exam?

Over the past 30 years, the pass rate has averaged around 70 percent. Many excellent cooperative communicators have failed the exam on their first try and went on to pass the exam on their second round.

What is a passing score?

A candidate must score 190/300, or at least 63 percent, to pass the exam. If a candidate is within 10 points of passing, they will be notified they are eligible for an appeal and will receive further instructions on how to proceed.

Who scores the exam?

A licensed certification expert (psychometrician) uses an approved answer key to score each exam question. This professional has been trained on the CCC exam and our program objectives. Candidates' answers are not scored by NRECA staff or CCC board members.

Who develops the exam?

The CCC exam is drafted and prepared by a panel of Certified Cooperative Communicators. The Candidate Assessment and Program Standards committee of the CCC Board regularly reviews the exam for accuracy and relevancy. They also work with a licensed psychometrician to ensure the questions are properly formulated and graded.

How long will the exam take?

Candidates are given four hours to complete the CCC exam, and many people will use all of this time. Bathroom breaks are allowed.

What else can you tell me about the exam?

The exam is divided into three sections worth 100 points each: Electricity and Cooperatives; Member, Employee and Public Communications/Marketing; and Delivery of Communications and Marketing. Each section includes several different types of questions (multiple choice, definitions, essay, short answer questions, short writing assignments, etc.) and questions are worth different point values. A good strategy is to look through all the questions on the exam as you begin, making sure to answer the higher point value questions first in case you run out of time.

Can I bring my own computer to type my answers?

Yes. Laptops/tablets will not be provided. You may choose to bring your own laptop/tablet with keyboard and word processing software (Microsoft Word, etc.), or you may handwrite your answers. If you bring a laptop or tablet, it must have a USB port so you may save your exam answers on a removable thumb drive, which may not be feasible on some tablet devices like iPads. Thumb drives and power strips will be provided by NRECA at the beginning of the exam.

What are my options if I do not pass the exam?

A candidate failing the exam by 10 points or less will be notified by the program administrator that they are eligible to request an appeal. If eligible, the candidate may submit a letter requesting an appeal to the program administrator within two weeks of exam failure notification. The exam will be re-scored by an alternate psychometrician for an additional re-grading fee. (All fees are listed in the "Eligibility and Fees" section of this document.) If you failed the exam the first time and are not eligible for an appeal, you have the option to retake the exam once during your 24-month eligibility. The CCC exam is administered two times a year—at the CONNECT Conference in the spring and at Co-op University in the fall. Candidates are not able to take the exam remotely.

CCC Peer Advisor Program

Peer advisors are available to help guide you through the certification process. When you complete the CCC application form, please specify if you would like to be assigned a CCC peer advisor, and one will be assigned to you. If you initially decline the assistance of a peer advisor but change your mind later, please contact CCC program staff. If you would like to be paired with an advisor from your state/region or have a specific request, please let CCC program staff know.

CCC Peer Advisor – Frequently Asked Questions

What exactly is a CCC peer advisor?

Current and active Certified Cooperative Communicators can volunteer to assist CCC candidates by serving as CCC peer advisors. Candidates can opt-in to be paired with a CCC peer advisor who will make themselves available to answer questions and offer support and guidance while the candidate is working to achieve the CCC credential. To maintain integrity of the program, CCC board members are not able to serve as peer advisors while they sit on the board or for two years after their tenure.

How do I find a CCC peer advisor?

When you fill out the CCC application form, specify if you would like to be assigned a CCC peer advisor. If your application is accepted, CCC program staff will contact you and pair you with a volunteer. If you initially decline the assistance of a peer advisor but change your mind later, contact CCC program staff.

How can my peer advisor help me with the portfolio of work?

Your CCC peer advisor can share their experience; give you an idea of what to submit, and how to complete the forms. They can also critique your work and help you select which pieces to include in your portfolio and help you edit your Work Sample Forms.

What can my peer advisor tell me about the CCC exam?

All CCC candidates, including CCC peer advisors, signed a confidentiality agreement preventing them from sharing specific details about the exam. This confidentiality agreement is in place to protect the integrity of the CCC Program. Your CCC peer advisor can help you with preparation tips as they draw from their own experience studying and preparing for the exam.

What if things are not working out with my assigned CCC peer advisor?

The CCC peer advisor program is voluntary; we cannot guarantee or predict their level of involvement. If for any reason, you are not satisfied with your peer advisor, please contact CCC program staff and we will match you with someone else.

Can I receive assistance from another CCC instead of being assigned to a peer advisor?

Yes. If you know a Certified Cooperative Communicator who is willing to guide you through the certification process, you are free to work with them. Those who volunteer to be peer advisors are aware of the time commitment and have received instruction on how to best provide guidance.

Maintaining Your CCC Status

To keep your designation as an active Certified Cooperative Communicator (CCC), you must accumulate at least 1.0 continuing education units (CEUs) each year, and pay the annual professional fee. (See “Eligibility and Fees” section of this document.)

Continuing education requirements are important because they help maintain the value of the credential. Professional development also helps CCCs keep their skills honed and up to date in this rapidly changing industry. The CCC Board of Directors implemented a program of certification maintenance that became effective in 2001.

1. **Continuing Education Requirement** – Those who earned the CCC status in 2001 and after are required to earn 10 hours/1.0 continuing education units (CEUs) on a yearly basis.
 - CEUs can be earned in a variety of ways, including education and training activities through NRECA, attendance at professional conferences and seminars (outside of NRECA), and college level courses. Most CCCs fulfill their annual CEU requirement by attending CONNECT or a statewide communications conference.
 - You do not need to routinely submit proof of your continuing education unless requested by the CCC program staff, but please keep your own records. NRECA will randomly select a number of CCCs to audit for proof of their continuing education for the previous year. If you are selected for the audit, you will be required to provide one of the following:
 - Copy of the certificate you received for attending
 - Receipt showing registration/attendance confirmation
 - Copy of the sign-in sheet with your name clearly visible
 - Verifying email from the instructor
2. **Annual Professional Fee** – All CCCs must pay an annual professional fee. NRECA sends an invoice each January, which must be paid by March 31 to retain CCC status.
3. **CCC Standards of Conduct** – If you earn your CCC designation, you must pledge to adhere to the CCC Standards of Conduct found on the following page.

Failure to Maintain your CCC Status and Re-Instatement

Failure to pay the annual professional fee or fulfill the CEU requirement will result in the loss of your CCC benefits. You will be removed from the mailing lists and no longer be allowed to use the CCC designation after your name.

Program staff, with guidance from the CCC Program Board, will consider re-instatement requests on an individual basis. Generally, if you do not pay the annual professional fee for one or more years, you must pay a reactivation fee plus the current year’s fee. In addition, you must agree to a review of your education and training activities for the previous 12 months.

CCC Standards of Conduct

If you pass the portfolio and the written exam, you become a Certified Cooperative Communicator. As the final step, you will be asked to carefully read and sign CCC Standards of Conduct. These standards have been adopted to promote the highest standards of excellence in professional communicators. They represent a commitment to professional excellence and an assurance of integrity by each CCC in all dealings with the public, governmental authorities, and members of the electric cooperative industry. The Standards of Conduct state the following:

As a Certified Cooperative Communicator, I agree to:

1. Respect and maintain a relationship of loyalty to my cooperative employer.
2. Reflect the Seven Cooperative Principles in all related duties in the scope of my employment.
3. Adhere to the highest standards of accuracy and truth in communicating within my cooperative, the electric cooperative industry, and the public.
4. Protect any confidential information entrusted to me by my employer.
5. Comply with state and federal laws, including copyright, trademark and fair use.
6. Serve the public interest by acting as a responsible advocate for the members I represent.
7. Improve my individual competence and advance my knowledge of the electric cooperative industry through continuing education.
8. Preserve the integrity of the Certified Cooperative Communicator program by maintaining the confidentiality of the exam.