



CE Council Guide to Firm Element Continuing Education Programs

Background

The integrity of the financial services industry relies, in part, on registered financial professionals and their in-depth knowledge and expertise to guide the investing public in reaching personal financial goals. To achieve this important objective, member firms in the securities industry (firms) and the individual(s) managing their firm's Continuing Education (CE) Firm Element programs must create and maintain effective and meaningful programs that expand a financial professional's knowledge of the securities and financial industry and keep them abreast of regulations governing their business activities.

According to rules and regulations of various self-regulatory organizations (SROs) of the securities industry (see CE rules table at end of document), firms are required to establish an annual Firm Element program for their covered registered persons that enhances their securities knowledge, skills and professionalism.

This guide is intended to generate ideas for producing a Firm Element program that not merely meets regulatory requirements but also provides training that is topical, spurs interest from the audience and fosters conversation amongst all stakeholders.

Firm Element programs must encompass the following components:

- needs analysis;
- written training plan;
- all covered registered persons; and
- books and records maintenance.

Additionally, Firm Element programs must cover the following standards:

- ethics and professional responsibility; and
- securities products, services and strategies offered by the firm, including the following elements:
 - general investment features and associated risk factors;
 - suitability and sales practice considerations; and
 - applicable regulatory requirements.

A firm should identify the person(s) responsible for overseeing the Firm Element program; developing, implementing and maintaining its core components; and ensuring it evolves with the business, industry trends and the progress of the covered persons. These responsibilities include:

- performing the needs analysis;
- developing and implementing the written training plan;
- establishing the time frame and schedule to deliver training;
- documenting course titles, content and participation;
- retaining training-related documents for books and records;
- managing the annual process of updating the needs analysis and implementing the written training plan;
- reviewing training objectives and modifying as needed (*e.g.*, quarterly or biannual review or ad hoc modifications due to unforeseen regulatory concerns); and
- establishing and maintaining the firm's policies and procedures to meet CE requirements.

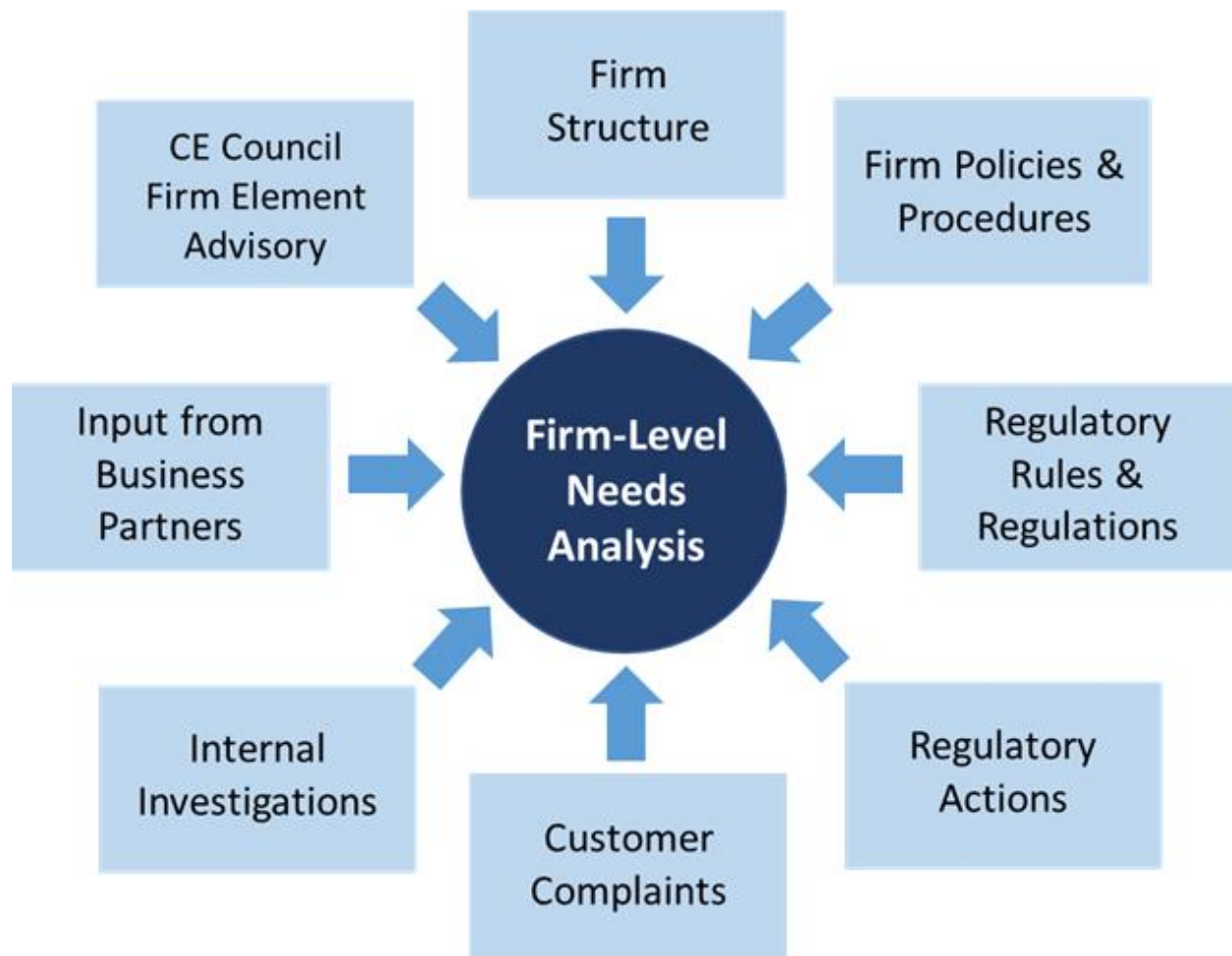


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Needs Analysis

The first step in developing a Firm Element program is to analyze a firm's training needs. The needs analysis identifies potential training opportunities for the firm's covered registered persons and serves as the starting point for developing a written training plan.

When conducting a needs analysis, firms should be as specific as possible. The needs analysis should address a firm's products, services and business model, bearing in mind the demographics of its customer base. The needs analysis should be well documented and include the various factors considered in identifying the training needs. Below are suggested considerations to help a firm perform the needs analysis.





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Firm Structure:

- Business model, job functions and the required knowledge, skills and responsibilities
- Changes to the firm's structure and supervision framework
- Knowledge and experience level of the firm's covered registered persons
- Customer base and level of sophistication
- Location(s) and jurisdiction(s) of the firm's covered registered persons

Firm Policies & Procedures:

- New and updated firm policies and procedures
- Products and services offered and any changes to features or processes
- New products and services offered
- Complexity and risks of products and services
- Changes in market conditions that may impact products and services offered by the firm
- New technology or operational processes
- Marketing strategies that may impact the firm's sales practices considering best interest and suitability obligations

Regulatory Laws, Rules & Regulations:

- Annual regulatory examination priority letters
- Regulatory sweep letters
- Applicable changes to securities industry laws, rules and regulations
- Clearing firm notifications and frequent surveillance exceptions
- The firm's quarterly FINRA CE Regulatory Element performance report

Regulatory Actions:

- Regulatory actions and examination findings against the firm and its covered registered persons
- Securities industry regulatory actions, notices and news releases

Customer Complaints:

- Incidents of customer complaints, litigation and arbitrations

Internal Investigations

- Internal investigations and terminations for cause of the firm's associated persons
- Review findings and remediations from internal audits, compliance testing, operational risk and control assessments, and operational losses or near misses (*e.g.*, incidents that could have led to monetary loss)



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Input from Business Partners:

- Heads of business departments
- Product sales
- Operations
- Internal audit
- Privacy office
- Cyber security office
- Supervision
- Risk management
- Legal
- Compliance

CE Council Firm Element Advisory

- Available online at: <http://www.cecouncil.com/firm-element/fea-online/>

Please keep in mind that the data sources identified above are not an exhaustive list, and the written training plan may not need to include all of the factors identified in this guidance document. Each firm will need to make the final determination as to what is included in the plan. To help prioritize the training needs identified in the needs analysis, firms may score or rank the identified training needs based on business and risk factors at the firm. Business and risk factors to consider may include business initiatives, percentage business volume, regulatory inquiries and violations, compliance issues, etc. A robust needs analysis that includes training prioritization helps support the development of a risk-based written training plan.



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Written Training Plan

The written training plan is the second component of an effective CE program. The written training plan is essentially the roadmap that identifies the who, what, when, where and how of a Firm Element CE program.

Who:

Firms should:

- identify the covered registered persons at the firm who are required to participate in the Firm Element program;
- group individuals by business or support area and/or by job function;
- assign training topics that are universal whereby they are applicable to the entire firm;
- develop and implement specific training to certain groups or individuals;
- consider that training objectives that are differentiated for each applicable group of covered registered persons (*e.g.*, registered representatives, supervisors) tend to make the impact of the training more meaningful and applicable to each group; and
- keep in mind whether the individual is client-facing and/or is a fiduciary.

What:

Firms should:

- identify the content and training courses to be completed by the firm's covered registered persons;
- consider whether they want to take a risk-based approach to prioritize the training courses by applying a scoring system to topics and events identified in the need analysis.
- vary the training topics and include areas outside the business focus or role of the covered registered person — topics broadly additive to their knowledge and skills of the financial industry and its peripheral influences; and
- prepare training materials internally or procure content from outside sources. When assessing the use of third-party providers and content, firms should consider certain factors such as:
 - industry reputation of the vendor;
 - whether the vendor or developer specializes in securities or financial industry topics;
 - whether the topic contributes to professional development;
 - whether the content is comprehensive, timely and topical;
 - whether the content offers value-added information;
 - whether the subject is broadly relevant to sales, trading, capital markets, economics, market data and business planning, etc.
- The [FINRA Compliance Vendor Directory](#) (CVD) provides firms a convenient, effective way to search for vendors that offer the following compliance-related services: Compliance Consulting, Cybersecurity, Data Management, Information Archive, Exam Prep & Firm CE, Insurance Brokers, Monitoring & Surveillance, PCAOB Registered Accountants and Registration services.



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When using outside vendors or externally developed training materials, make certain the firm retains the overall responsibility to ensure that the content, delivery and documentation is appropriate for the firm's needs. *Please note that SROs do not approve any vendors or training material.*

When:

Firms should:

- identify the time frame within which the firm's covered registered persons must complete the assigned training;
- set the timing for delivery of the training program.
- determine, depending on the size and scope of training topics, whether to condense the training schedule into one quarter or spread throughout the year;
- be sensitive to the workload of the individuals and avoid overwhelming schedules with training, if possible; and
- consider whether to budget extra time to allow for last minute make-up sessions or permit a brief grace period where extenuating circumstances prevent the individual from completing a course by the due date.

Where:

Firms should:

- identify the location(s) where the firm's training will take place.
- determine the appropriate training venue(s) based on their business model and footprint, *e.g.*, training can be conducted as part of a branch visit or at the main office as part of a national/regional meeting; and
- utilize firm technology to administer training in a virtual manner, both self-directed and live webinars.

How:

Firms should:

- identify the delivery method(s) the firm will use to administer the assigned training. Below are a few suggestions; however, firms may use any delivery method so long as the training content and participation can be documented and retained. Suggested methods include:
 - in-person training sessions;
 - regularly scheduled morning/afternoon business meetings;
 - online webinars;
 - online computer-based training courses;
 - compliance bulletins;
 - town halls; and
 - annual compliance meeting.



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Documentation of the Firm Element CE Program

The rules and regulations of the various SROs and exchanges of the securities industry require firms to maintain records documenting the content of their CE programs and the completion of the programs by covered registered persons.

Properly documenting Firm Element programs includes preparing and retaining detailed records reflecting how the Firm Element program was developed, implemented, administered and monitored, including:

- all components of the needs analysis, such as data sources, participants, methods and materials used, results and conclusions;
- the written training plan;
- training materials and outlines;
- records of covered registered persons' participation in training programs;
- feedback and evaluation;
- ensure that the firm's written policies and procedures include the process followed to meet CE requirements.

Best Practices

In addition to the detailed guidance provided above, firms should consider the following checklist of best practice considerations when developing their Firm Element programs:

- ✓ Encourage senior management to establish “Tone from the Top” messaging on the value of the Firm Element program and the firm’s low tolerance for non-compliance.
- ✓ Confirm that training programs and materials meet standards for content stipulated in the rules and regulations of the securities industry.
- ✓ Use training sessions to highlight the importance and reasons for continuous education and training of covered registered persons.
- ✓ Perform a quality assurance review of the Firm Element program, including course content and processes, against regulatory requirements.
- ✓ Educate covered registered persons and senior management about the importance and value of Firm Element, as well as the fact that it is mandatory.
- ✓ Expand the scope of the Firm Element program to include associated persons.
- ✓ Ask the firm's internal audit department, compliance department, or compliance officer to periodically review the firm's compliance with its Firm Element requirements, in addition to conducting ongoing reviews of the Firm Element processes and programs.
- ✓ Diversify breadth of training topics and avoid limiting courses based solely on role or function.
- ✓ Leverage training material offered in other financial industries (*e.g.*, insurance and financial planning) if courses are consistent with the topics identified in the needs analysis and may support the professional development of the individual.
- ✓ Firms may consider training relating to their anti-money laundering (AML) compliance program and annual compliance meeting toward satisfying an individual’s annual Firm Element requirement.
- ✓ Identify learning content to improve compliance with firm policies, securities laws, rules and regulations.
- ✓ Provide disincentives for late completion of Firm Element training.



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CE Rules for SROs and Exchanges

Exchanges	CE Rule
BOX Exchange	<u>Rule 2040 Restrictions, IM2040-4 & IM2040-5</u>
Cboe Exchange	<u>Rule 3.33 Continuing Education for Registered Persons</u>
Cboe C2 Exchange	<u>Rule 3.30-03 Qualification and Registration</u>
Cboe EDGA Exchange	<u>Rule 2.5 Restrictions, Policy 02 Continuing Education Requirements</u>
Cboe EDGX Exchange	<u>Rule 2.5 Restrictions, Policy 02 Continuing Education Requirements</u>
Cboe BYX Exchange	<u>Rule 2.5 Restrictions, Policy 02 Continuing Education Requirements</u>
Cboe BZX Exchange	<u>Rule 2.5 Restrictions, Policy 02 Continuing Education Requirements</u>
FINRA	<u>Rule 1240 Continuing Education Requirements</u>
Long-Term Stock Exchange	<u>Rule 2.160(p) Continuing Education Requirements</u>
MEMX LLC	<u>Rule 2.5 Restrictions, Policy 02 Continuing Education Requirements</u>
MIAX Options	<u>Rule 1903 Continuing Education Requirements</u>
MIAX Emerald	<u>Rule 1903 Continuing Education Requirements</u>
MIAX Pearl	<u>Rule 3103 Continuing Education Requirements</u>
MSRB	<u>Rule G3(i) Continuing Education Requirements</u>
NYSE	<u>Rule 345A Continuing Education for Registered Persons</u>
NYSE American	<u>Section 4. Employees and Admission of Members and Member Organizations, Rule 341A Continuing Education for Registered Persons</u>
NYSE Arca	<u>Rule 2.24 Registration—Employees of ETP Holders</u>
NYSE National	<u>Rule 2.2. Obligations of ETP Holders and the Exchange</u>
NYSE Chicago	<u>Article 6 Registration, Supervision and Training, Rules 11 Continuing Education for Registered Persons</u>



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Exchanges	CE Rule
NASDAQ Stock Market	<u>General 4, Section 1.1210 Registration Requirement,.07 All Registered Persons Must Satisfy the Regulatory Element of Continuing Education</u>
NASDAQ PHX LLC (Formerly Nasdaq OMX PHLX)	<u>General 4, Section 1.1210 Registration Requirement,.07 All Registered Persons Must Satisfy the Regulatory Element of Continuing Education</u>
NASDAQ BX, Inc. (Formerly Nasdaq OMX BX)	<u>General 4, Section 1.1210 Registration Requirement,.07 All Registered Persons Must Satisfy the Regulatory Element of Continuing Education</u>
NASDAQ GEMX LLC (Formerly ISE Gemini)	<u>General 4, Section 1.1210 Registration Requirement,.07 All Registered Persons Must Satisfy the Regulatory Element of Continuing Education</u>
NASDAQ ISE	<u>General 4, Section 1.1210 Registration Requirement,.07 All Registered Persons Must Satisfy the Regulatory Element of Continuing Education</u>
NASDAQ MRX	<u>General 4, Section 1.1210 Registration Requirement,.07 All Registered Persons Must Satisfy the Regulatory Element of Continuing Education</u>
The Investors Exchange (IEX)	<u>Rule 2.160(p) Continuing Education Requirements</u>



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Firm Element Training – Needs Analysis Template

This template is provided to assist firms in fulfilling their responsibilities to establish a Firm Element training program to keep covered registered persons up to date on job- and product-related subjects as required by SRO CE rules. Nothing in this template creates any new requirements for Continuing Education Firm Element. **Furthermore, following this template does not guarantee compliance with Firm Element requirements or provide a safe harbor from regulatory responsibility.**

The language in this template is provided only as a helpful starting point to walk you through planning, developing and implementing your firm's Firm Element program. Each firm must consider its size, structure, scope of business and regulatory concerns to ensure that its training program is in accordance with its annual needs analysis and written training plan. If any of the language does not adequately address your firm's Firm Element program in any respect, you will need to prepare your own language. **You are responsible for ensuring that your training program meets the requirements set forth by the SRO(s) rules that your firm is subject to.**

[Click to download a Word version](#) of the Needs Analysis Template.



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Firm Element Training — Needs Analysis Template

The self-regulatory organizations (SROs) of the securities industry have established rules addressing continuing education (CE) that apply to member firms and their covered registered persons as defined by each of the SROs. Please reference the appropriate SRO rule applicable to your firm.

IDENTIFY COVERED REGISTERED PERSONS

Business Units *(may include but are not limited to revenue-generating unit, client-facing unit, etc.)*

Support Units *(may include but are not limited to Operations, Compliance, Finance, Technology, etc.)*

FIRM-WIDE TOPICS (applicable to all areas and job functions)

Suggested themes may include but are not limited to the following:

Applicable Securities Laws, Rules and Regulations *(Communications with the Public, Political Contributions, Information Barriers, Suitability/Best Interest, Code of Ethics, OFAC/ABC/AML, Personal Trading, Outside Business Activities, Private Investments)*

Firm Policies and Procedures *(new, current and updated)*

Changes in Organizational Structure, Business Model, Supervision Framework

Industry Trends Related to Firm Business Model

BUSINESS-SPECIFIC TOPICS (applicable to a particular business or support area)

Suggested themes may include but are not limited to the following:

Product *(new, modified, high risk)*

Function *(sales, trading, deal execution, research, operations)*

Applicable Securities Laws, Rules and Regulations *(new, modified, existing)*

Supervision

Persistent Surveillance Exceptions

Operational Risk and Control Assessment Findings and Remediations

Internal Audit Findings

Operational Risk Events and Near Misses*

*Incidents that could have led to monetary loss



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REGULATORY DRIVERS

Suggested themes may include but are not limited to the following:

Annual SRO Priorities Letters, Rule Interpretations, Regulatory Notices, Information Notices/Circulars, SEC Guidance

Notices from Clearing Firms (with respect to regulatory items)

Regulatory Enforcement Actions and Disciplinary Cases

Regulatory Inquiries and Sweep Letters

Firm-specific Exam Findings

Complaint Trends

Approved and Reviewed by:

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