

ACFE FRAUD PREVENTION **CHECK-UP**



ASSOCIATION OF CERTIFIED FRAUD EXAMINERS





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One of the ACFE's most valuable fraud prevention resources, the ACFE Fraud Prevention Check-Up is a simple yet powerful test of your company's fraud health. Test fraud prevention processes designed to help you identify major gaps and fix them before it is too late.

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The Benefits of Taking the ACFE Fraud Prevention Check-Up

- ❑ Since fraud can be a catastrophic risk, taking the ACFE Fraud Prevention Check-Up can save your company or other entity from disaster. If you do not proactively identify and manage your fraud risks, they could put you out of business almost overnight. Even if you survive a major fraud, it can damage your reputation so badly that you can no longer succeed independently.
- ❑ The ACFE Fraud Prevention Check-Up can pinpoint opportunities to save you a lot of money. Fraud is an expensive drain on an entity's financial resources. In today's globally competitive environment, no one can afford to throw away the 6% of revenues that represents the largely hidden cost of fraud. Those businesses that have identified their most significant fraud costs (such as insurance and credit card companies) have made great strides in attacking and reducing those costs. If an entity is not identifying and tackling its fraud costs, it is vulnerable to competitors who lower their costs by doing so.
- ❑ Fraud is a common risk that should not be ignored. The incidence of fraud is now so common that its occurrence is no longer remarkable, only its scale. Any entity that fails to protect itself appropriately from fraud should expect to become a victim of fraud, or rather, should expect to discover that it is a victim of fraud.
- ❑ It is the least expensive way to find out the entity's vulnerability to fraud. Most entities score very poorly in initial fraud prevention checkups because they don't have appropriate anti-fraud controls in place. By finding this out early, they have a chance to fix the problem before becoming a victim of a major fraud. It's like finding out you have seriously high blood pressure. It may be bad news, but not finding out can be a lot worse.
- ❑ It is a great opportunity for an entity to establish a relationship with a Certified Fraud Examiner whom they can call on when fraud questions arise. Since the risk of fraud can be reduced but is rarely eliminated, it is likely that the entity will experience fraud in future and will need a CFE's assistance.
- ❑ Strong fraud prevention processes could help increase the confidence investors, regulators, audit committee members and the general public have in the integrity of the entity's financial reports. They could help to attract and retain capital.



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Before You Take the ACFE Fraud Prevention Check-Up

- ❑ Let your entity's general counsel or outside legal counsel know you plan to take the test. They may want to have you use the test under their direction, to protect your entity's legal rights.
- ❑ Do not take the check-up if you plan to ignore the results. If it shows you have poor fraud prevention processes, you need to fix them. Failing to act could cause legal problems.

Who Should Perform the ACFE Fraud Prevention Check-Up?

- ❑ The check-up should ideally be a collaboration between objective, independent fraud specialists (such as Certified Fraud Examiners) and people within the entity who have extensive knowledge about its operations. To locate a Certified Fraud Examiner in your area, visit www.CFEnet.com or call **(800) 245-3321**.
- ❑ Internal auditors bring extensive knowledge and a valuable perspective to such an evaluation. At the same time, the perspective of an independent and objective outsider is also important, as is the deep knowledge and experience of fraud that full-time fraud specialists provide.
- ❑ It is helpful to interview senior members of management as part of the evaluation process. But it is also valuable to interview employees at other levels of the entity, since they may sometimes provide a "reality check" that challenges the rosier view management might present, e.g., about management's commitment to ethical business practices.

How Many Points Should We Award For Each Answer?

- ❑ The number of points available is given at the bottom of each question. You can award zero points if your entity has not implemented the recommended processes for that area. You can give the maximum number of points if you have implemented those processes and have had them tested in the past year and found them to be operating effectively. Award no more than half the available points if the recommended process is in place but has not been tested in the past year.
- ❑ The purpose of the checkup is to identify major gaps in your fraud prevention processes, as indicated by low point scores in particular areas. Even if you score 80 points out of 100, the missing 20 could be crucial fraud prevention measures that leave you exposed to major fraud. So there is no passing grade other than 100 points.

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THE ACFE FRAUD PREVENTION CHECK-UP

ENTITY: _____
DATE OF CHECKUP: _____

RESULTS

1. Fraud risk oversight

- To what extent has the entity established a process for oversight of fraud risks by the board of directors or others charged with governance (e.g., an audit committee)?

Score: From 0 (process not in place) to 20 points (process fully implemented, tested within the past year and working effectively).

2. Fraud risk ownership

- To what extent has the entity created "ownership" of fraud risks by identifying a member of senior management as having responsibility for managing all fraud risks within the entity and by explicitly communicating to business unit managers that they are responsible for managing fraud risks within their part of the entity?

Score: From 0 (process not in place) to 10 points (process fully implemented, tested within the past year and working effectively).

3. Fraud risk assessment

- To what extent has the entity implemented an ongoing process for regular identification of the significant fraud risks to which the entity is exposed?

Score: From 0 (process not in place) to 10 points (process fully implemented, tested within the past year and working effectively).



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4. *Fraud risk tolerance and risk management policy*

- ❑ To what extent has the entity identified and had approved by the board of directors its tolerance for different types of fraud risks? For example, some fraud risks may constitute a tolerable cost of doing business, while others may pose a catastrophic risk of financial or reputational damage to the entity. The entity will likely have a different tolerance for these risks.

- ❑ To what extent has the entity identified and had approved by the board of directors a policy on how the entity will manage its fraud risks? Such a policy should identify the risk owner responsible for managing fraud risks, what risks will be rejected (e.g., by declining certain business opportunities), what risks will be transferred to others through insurance or by contract, and what steps will be taken to manage the fraud risks that are retained.

Score: From 0 (processes not in place) to 10 points (processes fully implemented, tested within the past year and working effectively).

5. *Process level anti-fraud controls/ re-engineering*

- ❑ To what extent has the entity implemented measures, where possible, to eliminate or reduce through process re-engineering each of the significant fraud risks identified in its risk assessment? Basic controls include segregation of duties relating to authorization, custody of assets and recording or reporting of transactions. In some cases it may be



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more cost-effective to re-engineer business processes to reduce fraud risks rather than layer on additional controls over existing processes. For example, some fraud risks relating to receipt of funds can be eliminated or greatly reduced by centralizing that function or outsourcing it to a bank's lockbox processing facility, where stronger controls can be more affordable.

- ❑ To what extent has the entity implemented measures at the process level designed to prevent, deter and detect each of the significant fraud risks identified in its risk assessment? For example, the risk of sales representatives falsifying sales to earn sales commissions can be reduced through effective monitoring by their sales manager, with approval required for sales above a certain threshold.

Score: From 0 (processes not in place) to 10 points (processes fully implemented, tested within the past year and working effectively).

6. Environment level anti-fraud controls

- ❑ Major frauds usually involve senior members of management who are able to override process-level controls through their high level of authority. Preventing major frauds therefore requires a very strong emphasis on creating a workplace environment that promotes ethical behavior, deters wrongdoing and encourages all employees to communicate any known or suspected wrongdoing to the appropriate person. Senior managers may be unable to perpetrate certain fraud



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schemes if employees decline to aid and abet them in committing a crime. Although “soft” controls to promote appropriate workplace behavior are more difficult to implement and evaluate than traditional “hard” controls, they appear to be the best defense against fraud involving senior management.

- To what extent has the entity implemented a process to promote ethical behavior, deter wrongdoing and facilitate two-way communication on difficult issues? Such a process typically includes:
 - Having a senior member of management who is responsible for the entity’s processes to promote ethical behavior, deter wrongdoing and communicate appropriately on difficult issues. In large public companies, this may be a full-time position as ethics officer or compliance officer. In smaller companies, this will be an additional responsibility held by an existing member of management.
 - A code of conduct for employees at all levels, based on the entity’s core values, which gives clear guidance on what behavior and actions are permitted and which ones are prohibited. The code should identify how employees should seek additional advice when faced with uncertain ethical decisions and how they should communicate concerns about known or potential wrongdoing affecting the entity.
 - Training for all personnel upon hiring and regularly thereafter concerning the code of conduct, seeking advice and communicating potential wrongdoing.

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- Communication systems to enable employees to seek advice where necessary prior to making difficult ethical decisions and to express concern about known or potential wrongdoing affecting the entity. Advice systems may include an ethics or compliance telephone help line or e-mail to an ethics or compliance office/officer. The same or similar systems may be used to enable employees (and sometimes vendors, customers and others) to communicate concerns about known or potential wrongdoing affecting the entity. Provision should be made to enable such communications to be made anonymously, though strenuous efforts should be made to create an environment in which callers feel sufficiently confident to express their concerns openly. Open communication makes it easier for the entity to resolve the issues raised, but protecting callers from retribution is an important concern.
- A process for promptly investigating where appropriate and resolving expressions of concern regarding known or potential wrongdoing, then communicating the resolution to those who expressed the concern. The entity should have a plan that sets out what actions will be taken and by whom to investigate and resolve different types of concerns. Some issues will be best addressed by human resources personnel, some by general counsel, some by internal auditors and some may require investigation by fraud specialists. Having a pre-arranged plan will greatly speed and ease the



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response and will ensure appropriate persons are notified where significant potential issues are involved (e.g., legal counsel, board of directors, audit committee, independent auditors, regulators, etc.)

- Monitoring of compliance with the code of conduct and participation in the related training. Monitoring may include requiring at least annual confirmation of compliance and auditing of such confirmations to test their completeness and accuracy.
- Regular measurement of the extent to which the entity's ethics/compliance and fraud prevention goals are being achieved. Such measurement typically includes surveys of a statistically meaningful sample of employees. Surveys of employees' attitudes towards the entity's ethics/compliance activities and the extent to which employees believe management acts in accordance with the code of conduct provide invaluable insight into how well those items are functioning.
- Incorporation of ethics/compliance and fraud prevention goals into the performance measures against which managers are evaluated and which are used to determine performance related compensation.

Score: From 0 (process not in place) to 30 points (process fully implemented, tested within the past year and working effectively).

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7. *Proactive fraud detection*

- To what extent has the entity established a process to detect, investigate and resolve potentially significant fraud? Such a process should typically include proactive fraud detection tests that are specifically designed to detect the significant potential frauds identified in the entity's fraud risk assessment. Other measures can include audit "hooks" embedded in the entity's transaction processing systems that can flag suspicious transactions for investigation and/or approval prior to completion of processing. Leading edge fraud detection methods include computerized e-mail monitoring (where legally permitted) to identify use of certain phrases that might indicate planned or ongoing wrongdoing.

Score: From 0 (process not in place) to 10 points (process fully implemented, tested within the past year and working effectively).

TOTAL SCORE (Out of a possible 100 points):

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Interpreting the Entity's Score

A brief fraud prevention checkup provides a broad idea of the entity's performance with respect to fraud prevention. The scoring necessarily involves broad judgments, while more extensive evaluations would have greater measurement data to draw upon. Therefore the important information to take from the checkup is the identification of particular areas for improvement in the entity's fraud prevention processes. The precise numerical score is less important and is only presented to help communicate an overall impression.

The desirable score for an entity of any size is 100 points, since the recommended processes are scalable to the size of the entity. Most entities should expect to fall significantly short of 100 points in an initial fraud prevention checkup. That is not currently considered to be a material weakness in internal controls that represents a reportable condition under securities regulations. However, significant gaps in fraud prevention measures should be closed promptly in order to reduce fraud losses and reduce the risk of future disaster.

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