

CAPSTONE PROJECT GUIDELINES

TENNESSEE CERTIFIED ECONOMIC DEVELOPER

Congratulations on your successful completion of the Tennessee Certified Economic Developer course work! You are ready for the last step of this prestigious program, the Capstone Project, where you can express the knowledge gained through the courses to address an economic development opportunity or challenge in your community or within your organization.

Your capstone project will consist of two major components:

- 1. Report (10- 15 pages)**
- 2. Presentation (5 minutes)**

Eligibility – You may begin the process after successful completion of the TBEDC four of the six TCED core courses. As of February 2017, the TCED Advisory Board voted to enforce a two year maximum for TCED candidates to complete their Capstone Projects after completing course work. After your last TCED course is completed, you will have two years to finish the Capstone Project process

Time to Completion – Most Capstone Projects are completed in two to six months.

Process for Capstone Project Approval and Completion:

1. Candidate Submits Application Form for Capstone Project to the Capstone Coordinator for initial approval of project concept
2. TCED Program Staff review application, notify candidate of eligibility, and provide general guidelines for capstone projects (project type, report content and requirements, process for review, etc.) TCED Staff provides feedback on topic and provides candidate with list of potential mentors based on topic. Mentor is available to assist candidate throughout the process. Candidate develops an outline, works with mentor to improve it, and submits it to TCED Capstone Advisor and copies TCED Mentor and Capstone Coordinator for review and feedback.
3. Candidate undertakes project and prepares report (according to capstone guidelines); Mentors and TCED Capstone Advisor are available to assist candidate during the process.
4. Candidate submits report to Capstone Advisor, copies Mentor and Capstone Coordinator for review and approval.
5. TCED Capstone Advisor approves report and Capstone Coordinator forwards to the TCED Advisory Board with a recommendation for TCED certification.
6. Candidate delivers 5 minute presentation to small group of TCED Advisory Board members.
7. TCED Director awards successful candidates with TCED certification.

Capstone Report Outline Requirements:

Candidates should prepare an outline which describes the project, and includes the following elements:

1. Background
 - a. Information on community and organization
 - b. Description of the opportunity or need that the project addresses
 - c. Applicable TCED coursework
 - d. State or national standards or trends identified in research
2. Project Description:
 - a. Project Name
 - b. Who is Involved
 - c. Goals and Objectives
 - d. Project Timeframe

- e. Results
 - f. Etc.
3. Results and Lessons Learned

Capstone Project Topics:

Your Capstone Project should address a substantial challenge or opportunity related to economic and community development impacting your community or organization. Participant may select a new project or a project conducted within the final year of TCED course work. The topic you select should be a project you are passionate about implementing in your organization or community.

Examples of Capstone Project topics include:

- Leveraging ThreeStar Grant Funds to Launch Digital Hub in Order to Address Digital Workforce Skill Gap in Community
- Participation in TVA's Valley Sustainable Communities program to Increase Community Competitiveness
- Participation in Connected Tennessee's Certified Connected Community Program to Increase Competitiveness and Create a Technology-Ready Community
- Facebook & Economic Development: How this Social Media Tool Can Be Used in Economic Development
- Transitioning from Main Street to Regional Economic Development
- Improving Industrial Development Readiness Through Select Tennessee Certified Sites Program
- Creating a Local Incentive to Retain One of a City's Largest Employers
- University Facilitated Economic Development: Creating an Effective Regional Center

Guidelines for Capstone Project Report Content

Make your Capstone Project report the result of a process of data collection (internet, news, interviews, etc.), source evaluation, analysis, organization, and composition. The goal of this Capstone Project report is to draw on the course material to offer potential solutions to the opportunity or issue at hand.

Your Capstone Project should consist of a **challenge** or **opportunity** you face as a member of the Economic Development community. If you work for a specific community or region, this would likely be a community issue or opportunity. If you are less directly connected to communities, this would be a challenge or opportunity you face in your organization, part of the larger Economic Development community.

Your Capstone Project report should answer the following questions: Has this issue or challenge arisen in other communities, or with other individuals? What did they do to address the opportunity? Why? Did they solve the problem, or make improvements? Is this a potential solution to the challenge/opportunity cited in your project? Why or why not? What information, ideas, sources, or contacts from the TCED courses is/are relevant to the opportunity or challenge? How can the information imparted in the courses address the opportunity or improve the situation? What's next?

The best Capstone Project reports avoid:

- Simply informing your reader what others have to say about a topic.
- Summarizing what you read from various sources or creating a simple overview/outline.
- Capturing your thoughts about past experiences or telling "war stories."

Specific Capstone Project report Requirements

Your Capstone Project report will describe how your project addressed the specific problem in your community or work, and the next steps taken to apply the lessons learned.

1. The topic should be approved in advance by the Capstone Coordinator through the submission of the Capstone Application form. Following topic approval, an outline of the content should be submitted to the Capstone Advisor and Capstone Mentor for review and approval.
2. The final Capstone Project report should be 10-15 pages, typed, double-spaced, in 12 pt. Times New Roman font, 1" margins on all four sides.
3. Prepare a title page that contains the title of the Project, your name, the date, and to whom the report is being submitted.
4. Completed reports shall be submitted to the Capstone Advisor (copying Mentor and Capstone Coordinator), who review and evaluate them for conformity to these standards.
5. Feedback will be provided and the report will be revised until both you and your mentor are satisfied.
6. Reports meeting the criteria will be approved by the Capstone Advisor and forwarded by the Capstone Coordinator to the TCED Advisory Board with a recommendation for approval of the applicant as a candidate for Tennessee Certified Economic Developer designation.

Organizing the Capstone Project Report

STEP 1. DEFINE YOUR TOPIC

Choose an aspect of your community or your work which interests and challenges you. Your attitude towards the topic may well determine the amount of effort and enthusiasm you put into your research.

Focus on a limited aspect, e.g. narrow it down from "Economic Development" to "Business Attraction" to "Identifying target industries". Obtain approval for your topic by submitting the Capstone Application form before embarking on a full-scale research. If you are uncertain as to what is expected of you in completing project, re-read the Capstone Project Guidelines carefully or ASK your Capstone Mentor or the Capstone Coordinator.

STEP 2. FIND INFORMATION

Begin your Capstone Project report by reviewing handouts received during TCED class sessions. Which of them pertain to your topic?

Search the Internet (websites and news) to find some additional relevant information on your topic.

Read and evaluate. Bookmark your favorite Internet sites. Print out and take notes of relevant information.

STEP 3. FORMULATE YOUR GOAL STATEMENT

Do some critical thinking and write a statement down defining your topic in one sentence. The goal statement should state exactly what the project is to accomplish. It should be phrased using action words (such as "design," "build," "implement," etc.). It should be limited to those essential elements of the project that communicate the purpose of the project and the outcome expected.

STEP 4. MAKE AN OUTLINE

How do you create an outline?

- **Brainstorm:** List all the ideas that you want to include in your report.

- **Organize:** Group related ideas together.
- **Order:** Arrange material in subsections from general to specific or from abstract to concrete.
- **Label:** Create main and sub headings.

The purpose of an outline is to help you think through your topic carefully and organize it logically before you start writing. A good outline is the most important step in writing a good paper. Check your outline to make sure that the points covered flow logically from one to the other. Include in your outline an INTRODUCTION, a BODY, and a CONCLUSION.

INTRODUCTION - State your topic (what question are you trying to answer, or what problem are you trying solve) and the purpose of your case study paper clearly. What do you hope to learn by writing the paper? State also how you plan to approach your topic. Is this a descriptive report, a review of techniques or programs, a comparison with what other organizations are doing, or an analysis of a problem? Explain briefly the major points you plan to cover in your report and **why readers should be interested in your topic.**

BODY - This is where you present your information to support your goal statement. Your project outline should include the following information:

1. **Background**
 - a. Information on community and organization
 - b. Description of the opportunity or need that the project addresses
 - c. Applicable TCED coursework
 - d. State or national standards or trends identified in research
2. **Project Description:**
 - a. Project Name
 - b. Who is Involved
 - c. Goals and Objectives
 - d. Timeframe
 - e. Results
 - f. Etc.
3. **Results and Lessons Learned**

CONCLUSION - Restate or reword your goal statement. Summarize your high-level outcomes, or expected outcomes.

Remember: Creating an outline before writing your paper will make organizing your thoughts a lot easier. Before starting your first draft, your outline should be approved by the Capstone Coordinator and your Capstone Mentor. Be sure to allow yourself enough time to incorporate feedback received on your outline.

STEP 5 RESOURCE PAGE

As you organize your notes, jot down resource information for each reference used (class materials, magazine/periodical articles, and websites, etc.) and have it ready to transfer to your Resource Page. This should include title, author, date published or accessed, publication and/or web address. Your Resource Page should be the final page of your document and will not count towards your overall page total.

Do not include any information that is not relevant to your topic, and do not include information that you do not understand. Make sure the information that you have noted is carefully recorded and in your own words, if possible. Of course, plagiarism is definitely out of the question.

STEP 6. WRITE AND REVISE YOUR FIRST DRAFT

Use your approved outline and feedback received from Capstone Mentor and Capstone Advisor to write a first draft. Your outline should guide the flow of your report and ensure all topics of importance are addressed.

Read your report for any content errors. Double check the facts and figures. Arrange and rearrange ideas to follow your outline. Reorganize your outline if necessary, but always keep the purpose of your report and your readers in mind.

CHECKLIST:

1. Is my topic statement concise and clear?
2. Did I follow my outline? Did I miss anything?
3. Is my information presented in a logical sequence?
4. Are all resources properly noted to ensure that I am not plagiarizing?
5. Have I made my intentions and points clear in the paper?
6. Did I begin each paragraph with a proper topic sentence?
7. Any run-on or unfinished sentences?
8. Any unnecessary or repetitious words?
9. Varying lengths of sentences?
10. Does one paragraph or idea flow smoothly into the next?
11. Any spelling or grammatical errors?
12. Quotes accurate in source, spelling, and punctuation?
13. Are my resources accurate and listed on resource page?
14. Did I avoid using contractions? Use "cannot" instead of "can't", "do not" instead of "don't"?
15. Did I use third person as much as possible? Avoid using phrases such as "I think", "I guess", "I suppose"
16. Have I made my points clear and interesting?

Re-read your paper for grammatical errors. Use a dictionary or a thesaurus as needed. Run spell check. Correct all errors that you can spot and improve the overall quality of the paper to the best of your ability.

STEP 7. SUBMIT FIRST DRAFT FOR FEEDBACK

After making revisions to your first draft, work with your Capstone Mentor and when both of you are satisfied, submit it to the Capstone Advisor (copying the Capstone Coordinator and Mentor) for feedback.

After receiving and considering the feedback, make necessary revisions and/or additions to your first draft. You may find it beneficial to revise your original outline to incorporate the feedback to ensure your ideas flow smoothly.

Your Capstone Mentor will help you revise drafts based on their feedback until you meet the TCED Capstone Criteria and you are satisfied with your report.

STEP 8. FINAL CAPSTONE PROJECT REPORT!

Congratulations! You are almost finished. After your draft is approved by your Capstone Mentor and the Capstone Advisor, you will be asked to submit your final Capstone Project report. This should be submitted in Microsoft Word format. Please delete any in-text feedback or comments from the document.

Aim to have your final paper ready a day or two before the deadline. This gives you peace of mind and a chance to triple check.

Reports meeting the criteria will be approved forwarded to the TCED Advisory Board with a recommendation for approval of the applicant as a Tennessee Certified Economic Developer.

Prepare Your Capstone Project Presentation

You will share the results of your Capstone Project with a small group of TCED Advisory Board Members, Mentors, and TCED Staff during the Tennessee Economic Development Council (TEDC) Fall Conference or at a designated presentation and graduation event. Be prepared to share the highlights of your work in a 5 minute, 7 slide presentation. Due to the number of presentations, strict adherence to the 5 minute time will be essential. Your presentation should focus on the highlights of your project and could include your results, lessons learned, why your project is important, and your next steps.

Your detailed final Capstone Project report will be available in PDF format to TEDC Members, TCED Advisory Board, and fellow TCED graduates following the graduation celebration.

Final Overall Step: Celebrate Your Accomplishment!

Your achievement will be celebrated at the Fall Tennessee Economic Development Conference

More tips for writing an effective paper can be found in “A Research Guide for Students”
<http://www.aresearchguide.com/1steps.html>.