CDME FINAL EXAM INSTRUCTIONS – 2026

This final exam is released for use between January 1, 2026 – December 31, 2026

Please read this document in its entirety before starting your final exam.

Assignments that do not meet the guidelines outlined in this document will be sent back for revision or a complete redo.

DEADLINES

- The CDME program requires completion of four core courses (and respective take-home papers), two elective courses, and final exam within a four-year time frame.
- Final exams are accepted year-round.
- Once the submission is "accepted" by the review team, the candidate has completed the program requirements and is deemed certified.
- **Tuesday, March 31, 2026:** **Deadline to submit final exam in order to be considered for recognition during the 2026 Annual Convention.**
- **Monday, June 15, 2026:** **Deadline for final exam to be approved in order to be recognized during the 2026 Annual Convention.**

CONTACT

- Submit all three assignments, labeled individually and saved as PDFs. Please note that all final assignments will be collected through the following link until the launch of the new CDME Program Portal. Submit your project here: **https://4s4mvrh2dth.typeform.com/CDME2026Final**
- Please include your name and organization in a header on each page of your documents.
- Any questions should be directed to cdme@destinationsinternational.org.

FINAL EXAM

The final exam provides the opportunity for the CDME candidate to demonstrate their ability to apply what was learned throughout their CDME experience, rather than the recall of specific items presented in the program. These questions are intentionally broad to encourage thought leadership and application of knowledge.

The final exam consists of three assignments (detailed instructions below):

- **Assignment #1:** *The Evolving Role of the Destination Organization* (essay format)
- **Assignment #2:** *From Vision to Action: Applying the DestinationNEXT Futures Study Strategic Themes*
  (essay format)
- **Assignment #3:** *Final Research Project* (written memo *AND* creative format)

FINAL EXAM RATINGS

☐ Final Exam Accepted

☐ Final Exam Accepted – Exemplary Work/Content should be considered for Destinations International programming

    ☐ "Red-pen" review needed prior to consideration for publication.

☐ Final Exam <u>NOT</u> Accepted. Reviewer will provide significant commentary, with direction given to the applicant as to what is needed for the final exam to be resubmitted and accepted.

AI USAGE GUIDELINES AND POLICY

Candidates may use AI for research purposes; however, you MUST disclose in your papers and presentations when Chat GPT or any AI tool has been used. Utilizing AI to generate the entirety of your responses for any of the assignments is not allowed, and will result in failure of your final exam.

- Always cite the use of AI tools appropriately, just as you would cite any other source or methodology.
- Clearly specify the extent to which AI was utilized and how it influenced the research outcomes.
- Respect intellectual property rights associated with the use of AI tools. Do not infringe upon copyrights or licenses when using third-party AI services.

INSTRUCTIONS: ASSIGNMENTS #1 AND #2

- Assignments 1 and 2 are designed to assess your grasp of essential elements of the broad CDME body of knowledge, including destination organization leadership and critical issues.
- Responses are expected to reflect insights gained during the program and as they relate to your current role.
- Responses are judged primarily on the application of knowledge as it relates to coursework and real-world work experience.
- Use specific examples from the courses you've taken or from your CDME peers.
- Be thoughtful and bring original thinking to your writing.

ASSIGNMENT #1: *The Evolving Role of the Destination Organization*

Destination Organizations are no longer just marketers or visitor-service providers— they are stewards of place, catalysts for community alignment, and leaders in destination competitiveness, resilience, and social impact. In an era marked by resident pushback, climate disruptions, digital transformation, and shifting workforce expectations, the traditional roles of "promotion and sales" are expanding into multi-dimensional leadership models.

In this assignment, explore how your destination organization / destination must evolve to remain relevant, sustainable, and valued in your communities and the broader visitor economy. Your response should reflect strategic thinking grounded in current trends, professional insights, and CDME course content.

For those working outside of a destination organization, how would you apply this to your current and future client relationships?

Your Task in 750-1,000 Words:
- Examine **how and why** your destination organization / destination is changing today.
- Analyze the opportunities and responsibilities that are emerging as central to destination success (e.g., workforce development, community advocacy, place storytelling, social impact).
- Identify how evolving expectations from residents, visitors, stakeholders, and policymakers are shaping new models of leadership and accountability.
- Incorporate a clear introduction, analysis section, action-oriented solutions, and a concise conclusion in this assignment.
- Integrate and reference key learnings and concepts gained throughout your CDME journey.

SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS

- Minimum of 750 words (3 pages double-spaced); do not exceed 1,000 words
- File Name: First Name, Last Name_CDME Final Exam_Assignment #1)
  - Example: *Jane Smith_CDME Final Exam_Assignment #1*

INSTRUCTIONS: ASSIGNMENTS #1 AND #2

GRADING RUBRIC (REVIEW CRITERIA)

Technical/Objective Criteria:

☐ Did the response consist of a minimum of 750 words (3 pages double-spaced), and not exceed approximately 1,000 words?

The candidate's response to Assignment #1 will be evaluated using the criteria below.

Criteria	Aligned with Assignment Expectations
Integration of CDME Concepts	Effectively incorporates concepts from CDME coursework such as destination stewardship, community engagement, advocacy, social impact, strategic leadership, and integration of DI resources.
Understanding of Context & Relevance	Clearly explains how and why their Destination Organization or client interaction is evolving. References relevant stakeholder expectations, industry trends, or global pressures (e.g., resident sentiment, climate urgency, workforce shifts, governance). Candidate must address both the evolution and refer to relevant references.
Depth of Analysis	Goes beyond surface-level description. Demonstrates critical thinking and understanding of the destination organization's role as a leader in placemaking, community alignment, social and economic impact, not just tourism promotion.
Strategic Recommendations (Actions or Practices)	Provides three or more clear, actionable, and relevant leadership strategies or organizational initiatives for destination executives to adopt in response to evolving expectations. These should reflect practical application to current or future roles.
Use of Data, Cases, or Industry Examples	Demonstrated understanding and integration of DI and industry tools/frameworks, case studies, or statistics to support analysis.
Clarity, Organization & Flow	Logical structure that follows recommended format (intro → analysis → actions → conclusion). Writing or speaking is clear, well-paced, professional and cohesive.
Professionalism & Tone	Clear, persuasive, reflective, and professional writing or delivery. Free of major, distracting errors. Appropriate, professional tone from a leadership context.
Overall Effectiveness	A compelling and forward-thinking submission that demonstrates strategic thinking and readiness to lead in the evolving landscape of destination management. Response could meaningfully influence or inspire a real destination leader or governing board.

INSTRUCTIONS: ASSIGNMENTS #1 AND #2

ASSIGNMENT #2: *From Vision to Action: Applying the DestinationNEXT Futures Study Strategic Themes*

The 2025 DestinationNEXT Futures Study identifies eight strategic themes that define the next phase of destination leadership. In 750-1,000 words, and referring to the body of knowledge presented in the CDME courses:

- *Identify three themes that are most relevant to your current or future role in destination management.*

- *Evaluate the ways in which the themes influence, enable, depend upon, or enhance one another, and translate these connections into actionable leadership steps, stakeholder engagement strategies, and organizational initiatives to implement the themes effectively.*

SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS
- Minimum of 750 words (3 pages double-spaced); do not exceed 1,000 words
- File Name: First Name, Last Name_CDME Final Exam_Assignment #2)
  - Example: *Jane Smith_CDME Final Exam_Assignment #2*

GRADING RUBRIC (REVIEW CRITERIA)
Technical/Objective Criteria:
☐ Did the response consist of a minimum of 750 words (3 pages double-spaced), and not exceed approximately 1,000 words?

The candidate's response to Assignment #2 will be evaluated using the criteria below.

Criteria	Description
Integration of CDME Concepts	Effectively incorporates concepts from CDME coursework such as destination stewardship, community engagement, advocacy, social impact, strategic leadership, and integration of DI resources.
Understanding of Context & Relevance	Clear identification of 2–3 themes and explanation of their relevance to candidate's role and the destination. Reference to research and statistics are clear and easy to understand.
Depth of Analysis	Goes beyond surface-level description. Demonstrates critical thinking, makes strategic connections between themes and provides clear relationship mapping between themes and relevancy.

Strategic Recommendations (Actions and Practices)

Provides two or three clear, actionable, and relevant leadership strategies or organizational initiatives for destination executives to adopt in response to evolving expectations. These should reflect practical application to current or future roles.

Use of Data, Cases, or Industry Examples

Demonstrated understanding and integration of the DestinationNEXT Futures Study and other DI tools/frameworks, or industry statistics to support analysis.

Clarity, Organization & Flow

Logical structure that follows recommended format (intro → analysis → actions → conclusion). Writing or speaking is clear, well-paced, professional and cohesive.

Professionalism & Tone

Clear, persuasive, reflective, and professional writing or delivery. Free of major, distracting errors. Appropriate, professional tone from a leadership context.

Overall Effectiveness

A compelling and forward-thinking submission that demonstrates strategic thinking and readiness to lead in the evolving landscape of destination management. Response could meaningfully influence or inspire a real destination leader or governing board.

INSTRUCTIONS: ASSIGNMENT #3

Throughout your CDME journey, the goal has been to equip you and the destination you serve with the tools, insights, and confidence needed not just to survive, but to truly thrive. These tools are designed to strengthen your organization's leadership, deepen community impact, and prepare you for the next steps in your professional path.

Now, as you reach the final phase of this journey, we present you with a culminating challenge:

A highly vocal and influential faction in your community is actively questioning the purpose and value of your Destination Organization. They are working to eliminate your funding and organizational charter because _____.

(Choose the following challenge based on your destination situation: overtourism, other uses for destination funding, amount of funding the destination organization receives, inability to understand why marketing to visitors and/or visitor management should be funded, or another challenge relevant to your destination).

Your task is to identify and describe this faction and defend the role of your Destination Organization in your community to fight this battle. Build a persuasive, strategic, and evidence-based case for why your Destination Organization should continue to be funded and remain in operation. Your response must draw upon CDME learnings, industry data, destination-specific insights, key performance indicators, and your own professional experience or perspective within your organization to the faction you have identified within your community.

Using both a written narrative (a five-page strategic memo) and a creative format (a slide deck accompanied by an 8–10-minute recorded presentation), clearly articulate the case for why your organization matters and outline the actions you will take to build and activate support within your community. Your final submission should be structured as if you are delivering a 10-minute presentation to a group of elected officials whom you have identified. Be sure to include a compelling hook at the beginning and a strong, memorable closing to reinforce your message.

As you develop your response, draw upon the CDME coursework, peer discussions, industry trends, research and tools such as the DestinationNEXT Futures Study and the Destination Marketing Accreditation Program (DMAP). Use these resources to demonstrate your strategic insight, ability to lead through change, and readiness to advocate for the future of your destination.

Reviewers are not looking for professionally produced videos; you will be evaluated upon integration of key concepts, compelling delivery of strategic recommendations and clarity and flow of your presentation.

Note: If you do not work directly for a Destination Organization, place yourself in your client's perspective and use this lens to defend this case on behalf of your local or client destination organization.

INSTRUCTIONS: ASSIGNMENT #3

DEVELOPING THE PROJECT

You are strongly encouraged to start thinking about your final research project when you start the CDME program. Then, plan out your project, perhaps several months before you begin drafting it, so you can digest the material and bring your unique perspective and insight to your work, as well as gather sources for material.

- It is recommended to begin developing your project at least six weeks prior to submission, to allow yourself time to be thoughtful in the approach taken and to think critically.
- Begin drafting the project when you have plenty of time to think through the material, perhaps on a day off or during the weekend when you are uninterrupted.
- It can be extremely beneficial to create a draft and set it aside for a few days before continuing your work. It will look different to you than the day you drafted it.
- Review and organize your notes and references ahead of time so you can build the project. If more research is required to validate your assumptions, you will have the time to do that without facing a deadline crunch.
- Plan on creating at least two or three drafts before you finalize your submission.

This is your chance to show that you have gained the knowledge, skills and abilities necessary to manage and lead a destination successfully. Consider this assignment a capstone to the program; it is the most extensive piece of the final exam process. Don't be afraid to discuss your project with colleagues in the office, CDME instructors and/or CDME Board members; they can be a powerful sounding board and may be helpful in providing insights and references. Your contacts can also test your assumptions.

SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS

Your final research project should demonstrate strategic depth, original thought, and a clear ability to apply CDME learnings to a real-world challenge facing your destination. Each prompt reflects the realities of today's operating environment and requires more than surface-level reflection. Your submission will be evaluated on the strength of your analysis, the freshness of your ideas, and your ability to synthesize course concepts, industry research, and your own professional perspective.

You are expected to draw meaningfully from the full body of knowledge gained throughout the CDME program—including course content, peer discussions, the DestinationNEXT Futures Study, DMAP, relevant resources and readings, and industry best practices. Simply restating class material or offering generic observations will not be sufficient for successful completion. Instead, demonstrate critical thinking, insight, practical application, and persuasive communication tailored to the audience you have identified.

Your final research project consists of two complementary components designed to test both your analytical abilities and your capacity to communicate strategic arguments effectively.

INSTRUCTIONS: ASSIGNMENT #3

Part 1: Strategic Memo (4-5 Pages, Double-Spaced)

A brief written document that:

- Summarizes the challenge and problem context
- Clearly identifies the target audiences: vocal faction and the elected official
- Articulates your case for continued funding and existence
- Provides up to five (5) actionable community engagement strategies
- References relevant data, case studies, CDME frameworks, and DI tools and resources

Format for this memo:

- **Executive Summary** (abstract – approximately 150 written words)
- **Introduction** (background and purpose – your opening statement and context around the situation)
- **Main Findings/Viewpoints** (analysis – presentation of your evidence-based argument and strategic response to support your case)
- **Conclusion** (application of findings/viewpoints and your call to action)

Format: Word or PDF (11–12 pt. professional font; 4 -5 pages)

Part 2: 8 - 10-Minute Recording and Presentation

1. **Compelling Opening and Closing Narrative**

   - A concise and compelling opening statement that frames the urgency to learn more and demonstrates the value of your organization.
   - A compelling closing statement that changes minds of your target audience

Format: Written script (Word or PDF) included in presentation file and delivered at the beginning and end of the recorded presentation

2. **Supporting Slides**

   - A professional, visually compelling creative component such as:
     - Slide deck (PowerPoint, Google Slides or Canva presentation)
     - Short videos (embedded or linked)
     - Supporting visuals/graphic displays
   - Designed to support the core argument in a mock governing body setting.
   - Must include a recording of the candidate giving the presentation

Format: PDF export of slides. Must include link to or file of video recording of presentation.

3. **Evidence of CDME Course Integration**

INSTRUCTIONS: ASSIGNMENT #3

Your submission should demonstrate:

- Application of CDME concepts and knowledge gained through the program (e.g. destination stewardship, community alignment, strategic leadership, stakeholder engagement, etc.)
- Application of DI tools and resources such as the DestinationNEXT Futures Study, DMAP, and/or industry case studies
- Insights learned through peer discussions, class exercises, guest speaker presentations, and/or coursework

Format: Embedded and cited throughout written and presentation components

4. **Use of Research and Data**

- Include relevant, credible, and current industry data, examples, and outside resources to support your arguments, such as industry journals, online publications, videos, podcasts, etc.
- It is recommended to cite at least five current, outside sources of information.
- Citations may be formal or embedded within your narrative and visuals
- Include a list of all references at the end of the presentation

Format: Embedded and cited throughout written and presentation components

- **References MUST be cited. We highly recommend using the American Psychological Association (APA) style: Purdue University Online Writing Lab APA Guidelines**
- Please include a list of references at the end of the project.
  Include in-text citations where applicable.
- It is recommended to cite at least five (5) current, outside sources of information.

INSTRUCTIONS: ASSIGNMENT #3

GRADING RUBRIC (REVIEW CRITERIA)

Part 1: Written Submission

Evaluate the written portion of the candidate's Assignment #3 submission using the criteria below. Score each category as follows:

Criteria	Scoring Description
Integration of CDME Concepts	Effectively incorporates concepts from CDME coursework such as destination stewardship, community engagement, advocacy, social impact, strategic leadership, and integration of DI resources.
Understanding of Challenge & Context	Clearly identifies the community opposition and explains the external and internal risks. Uses destination-specific insights, stakeholder dynamics, and realistic scenario framing.
Depth of Analysis	Presents a persuasive, strategic argument for the continued existence and funding of the Destination Organization. Includes economic, social, cultural, and community lenses supported by evidence.
Strategic Recommendations (Actions and Practices)	Provides up to five (5) actionable and relevant strategies to activate stakeholder support, rebuild trust, and mitigate opposition. Clear alignment with destination leadership role and organizational capacity.
Use of Data, Cases or Industry Examples	Incorporates credible data from tourism impact studies, community surveys, DI or industry benchmarks, and case studies. Data supports, rather than overwhelms, narrative and is cited properly.
Clarity, Organization & Flow	Logical structure that follows recommended format (intro → analysis → actions → conclusion). Writing or speaking is clear, well-paced, professional and cohesive.
Professionalism & Tone	Clear, persuasive, reflective, and professional writing or delivery. Free of major, distracting errors. Appropriate, professional tone from a leadership context.
Overall Effectiveness	A compelling and forward-thinking submission that demonstrates strategic thinking and readiness to lead in the evolving landscape of destination management. Response could meaningfully influence or inspire a real destination leader or governing board.

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INSTRUCTIONS: ASSIGNMENT #3

Part 2: 8 –10 -Minute Recording and Presentation

Evaluate the opening and closing hook and conclusion, and presentation materials of the candidate's Assignment #3 submission as if being presented live to a governing body.

Criteria	Scoring Description
Integration of CDME Concepts	Effectively incorporates concepts from CDME coursework such as destination stewardship, community engagement, advocacy, social impact, strategic leadership, and integration of DI resources.
Compelling Opening Statement	Clear, compelling, and confident introductory verbal statement that frames the stakes, sets context, and captures attention. Aligned with full presentation content.
Professional Design & Delivery Readiness	Well-organized, polished visuals, appropriate layout, audience-ready materials (e.g. slide deck, video, speech). Graphics, data visuals, and messages reinforce key arguments.
Strategic Recommendations (Actions and Practices)	Conveys a realistic, strategic plan to activate supporters and engage stakeholders long-term. Tactics are clearly outlined and audience-specific.
Use of Data, Cases or Industry Examples	Incorporates credible data from tourism impact studies, community surveys, DI or industry benchmarks, and case studies. Data supports, rather than overwhelms, narrative and is cited properly.
Clarity, Organization & Flow	Argument convincingly presents the economic, social, community, and cultural value of the Destination Organization, using real destination and industry insights.
Professionalism and Tone	Candidate presents with confidence, clarity, and executive presence. Tone is appropriate for skeptical and supportive audiences alike.
Overall Effectiveness	Demonstrates urgency, clarity, and leadership readiness. Would this presentation convince a real governing body to maintain the organization's funding and existence?

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Most Common Revision Requests:
- Candidate did not illustrate the application of knowledge gained during the CDME program.
- References have not been properly cited, and/or current, outside resources have not been used.
- Project did not include section labels or entire section is missing.
- Writing or presentation focused on a past project, work or initiative; rather than enhancing, changing, growing and evolving the organization, destination, and/or industry.
- Project was off topic or was repurposed from a previous presentation, resulting in a complete rewrite.

For Additional Advice:
If you would like to be paired with a CDME graduate who can act as a resource throughout the process, we recommend engaging through our online Mentorship program here:
https://community.destinationsinternational.org/participate/mentoring.

If you have any questions, please visit https://destinationsinternational.org/cdme- final- project-recognition or email cdme@destinationsinternational.org

REVIEWER COMMENTS ON OVERALL FINAL EXAM SUBMISSION

Strengths of the Submission:

Opportunities for Improvement:

Instructions for Revision:
To guide the candidate to provide necessary information to complete final evaluation. Be sure to specify the assignment number corresponding to your comments.

Final Exam Rating

☐ Final Exam Accepted

☐ Final Exam Accepted – Exemplary Work/Content should be considered for Destinations International programming

☐ "Red-pen" review needed prior to consideration for publication.

☐ Final Exam <u>NOT</u> Accepted. Reviewer has provided significant commentary (above), with direction given to the candidate as to what is needed for the final exam to be resubmitted and accepted.