This guide contains valuable information to help you prepare a successful AICP Certification Application.

Don't forget to read AICP Guide Part 2: Taking the Exam, which covers taking the AICP Certification Exam.

Updated May 2020
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GENERAL INFORMATION

American Planning Association
The American Planning Association (APA) brings together thousands of people—practicing planners, citizens, elected officials—dedicated to making great communities happen. APA is a nonprofit public interest and education organization committed to urban, suburban, regional, and rural planning. APA’s professional institute, the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP), provides leadership in professional development, ethics, and the standards of planning practice.

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Chicago, IL 60601
p. 312-431-9100
f. 312-786-6700
aicpexam@planning.org
planning.org

AICP-Certified Planners
AICP-certified planners are members of APA’s professional institute, American Institute of Certified Planners. They have demonstrated a commitment to high standards of professional practice and a mastery of theories and tools of planning. To become certified, an APA member must meet requirements for education and experience, pass the AICP Certification Examination, and pledge to uphold ethical standards and engage in ongoing professional development. The AICP Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct defines those aspirational principles and Rules of Conduct to which a certified planner must adhere. AICP’s Certification Maintenance program helps them engage in ongoing professional development. Under the Certification Maintenance program, certified planners engage in 32 hours of professional development every two years.

Details about the AICP Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct are at planning.org/aicp.

Details about the Certification Maintenance program are at planning.org/cm.

Becoming a Certified Planner is a multi-step process. You first need to obtain the necessary education and professional planning experience. Next, you demonstrate that you have been engaged in professional planning experience that qualifies you for AICP certification. This is evaluated through the AICP application, for which you provide employment verification and write three short essays that illustrate how your planning experience meets APA’s definition of professional planning practice. Applications are reviewed by both APA staff reviewers and a peer reviewer team made up of certified planners who have volunteered to help advance the planning profession by fostering the next generation of certified planners. Once your application has been approved, you take the AICP Certification Exam and become an AICP member!

AICP Guide Part 1 covers everything you need to know about education and experience requirements for becoming AICP and how to prepare a successful AICP application. AICP Guide Part 2 covers everything you need to know about the AICP Certification Exam.

If you are enrolled in the AICP Candidate Pilot Program, the procedures and deadlines for taking the AICP Certification Exam are different from what is outlined in this guide. For more information about the procedures and deadlines for AICP Candidate Pilot Program participants, visit planning.org/AICP/candidate.
BECOMING AN AICP-CERTIFIED PLANNER

EXAM WINDOW SCHEDULE

- December: Submit Application
- December - April: Register for Exam
- Late April: Request Exam Transfer (if needed)
- May: Test for Exam
- June: Late October
- June - October: Late October
- November:
APPLICATION TIPS

**TIP 1:** Carefully read the guidance provided in this guide before starting your application.

**TIP 2:** It pays to apply early! If you apply during the early bird window and your application is denied, you can address the issues and re-apply in the same exam window. This opportunity is available only for Early Bird applicants, so make sure to apply by the Early Bird submission deadline.

**TIP 3:** To ensure your verification letters will be accepted, follow the guidance on p. 13.

**TIP 4:** Acceptable ways to verify your educational experience include:
- Providing a copy of diploma(s)
- Providing an official transcript(s) from your university
- Providing a letter from the university confirming your degree and graduation date on letterhead.

**TIP 5:** A complete job history is not required. Focus on providing only enough verified experience to meet the Minimum Eligibility Requirements, as defined on p. 9.

**TIP 6:** Internship experience can count toward professional planning experience if the internship was not part of course work for graduation and the work experience meets the criteria for professional planning experience. See p. 11 for more information.

**TIP 7:** Part-time professional planning experience can count toward meeting professional planning experience requirements. Simply prorate that experience into a full-time equivalent. Similarly, persons working full time, but devoting a portion of their time to another field, may also prorate that experience into a full-time equivalent.

**TIP 8:** Use the [AICP Certification Criteria Essay Checklist](#) on p. 24–25 of this guide to make sure your essays meet the professional planning criteria requirements. Typically, up to one-third of first-time applicants are denied because their essays do not meet the criteria requirements as defined.

**TIP 9:** Proofread your essays. Spelling and grammar errors can make it difficult for exam reviewers to evaluate the content of the essays.

**TIP 10:** Project managers or people with substantial experience in the field sometimes take for granted the application process. APA is concerned not only with the number of years of planning experience, but also with making sure the experience meets the established professional planning criteria. Experienced applicants should take care in making sure their essays meet each established professional planning criterion. For example, managers or directors should use examples that demonstrate their planning experience, not their administrative or managerial responsibilities, especially when responding to Criteria 1 and 2.
APPLICATION PROCESS

This section of the Guide reviews the steps in the AICP Application process. Be sure to carefully review these steps to make sure you have all the information you need before you start your application.

Application Process Overview

1. CONFIRM YOUR APA MEMBERSHIP STATUS
To apply to for AICP Certification, you must be a current member of the American Planning Association. Please make sure that your APA and Chapter dues are up to date before you start your application. If your chapter and national dues are not fully paid, you will not be able to access the online application.

2. REVIEW THE ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS FOR AICP MEMBERSHIP
To apply for AICP Certification, you must meet APA’s eligibility requirements for AICP membership. Be sure to review these requirements, listed on p. 8, before starting your application.

3. SUBMIT THE ONLINE APPLICATION AND PAY APPLICATION FEES
You will need to complete and submit the online application along with your education and employment verifications and pay the application fee by the application deadline posted at planning.org/certification/currentexam.

Before you can submit your AICP Application, you will complete the following sections on the application:

- SECTION 2: DESCRIBE AND VERIFY EMPLOYMENT HISTORY
Enter professional planning employment information and upload a valid employment verification letter for each position entered.

- SECTION 3: RESPOND TO ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA
Write three essays demonstrating how your verified work experience meets APA’s definition of professional planning experience. Please be sure to review the guidance and checklist provided in this guide to ensure that your essays meet criterion requirements as defined by APA. See the Demonstrating Professional Planning Experience section on p. 16 and the AICP Certification Criteria Essay Checklist at the end of this guide for full details.

- SECTION 4: READ AND VERIFY YOU HAVE READ THE AICP CODE OF ETHICS AND PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT
Click the button to agree to abide by the Code of Ethics in submitting your application.

- SECTION 5: APPLICATION SUMMARY AND REVIEW
Review your entire application prior to submission. You will not be permitted to change or edit the application once it has been submitted.

- SECTION 6: SUBMIT APPLICATION AND FEE
The application fee ($85) and registration fee ($425) are paid separately. The $85 application fee is due when you submit your application and the $425 registration fee payment is due after your application has been approved. A $100
resubmission fee is due if resubmitting an application for additional review as an early bird applicant (see p. 8). Payment must be made online with a credit card. Checks and purchase orders are not accepted. (Fees subject to change. See website for up-to-date information.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>APPLICATION (NEW APPLICANTS)</th>
<th>EXAM (DUE AFTER APPROVAL)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$85 (non-refundable)</td>
<td>$425 (non-refundable)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$100 early bird resubmission fee (non-refundable)</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

4. RECEIVE A NOTIFICATION EMAIL
Due to the volume of applications and thoroughness of the review process, you will be notified of the status of your application approximately 8-10 weeks after you submit. If you apply during the early bird application window you will be notified of application approval or denial by the early bird notification deadline (see the early bird application window section on p. 8 for more details). All other applicants will be notified of application approval or denial by the final notification deadline (relevant deadlines are posted at planning.org/certification/currentexam). Please note that applications submitted on or near the application deadline may take longer to process and review due to the high volume of applications received. Once your application is reviewed, your application status will be updated in My APA and you will receive an email notifying you of your application approval or an emailed letter notifying you of application denial.

5. REGISTER FOR THE EXAM AND SCHEDULE WITH PROMETRIC
Once your application has been approved, you may register for the exam and pay the $425 exam registration fee to receive an Eligibility ID for the current exam window. The registration confirmation email will include information on where to retrieve your Eligibility ID and instructions for scheduling the appointment to take the exam at a Prometric testing center of your choice or you may test remotely online. Full details on registering for and scheduling your AICP Exam appointment are available in the AICP Guide Part 2.

NOTE: If you submit your application before the early bird application deadline, but do not submit valid verification materials in time to be reviewed with the other early bird applicants, your application will be reviewed as a regular application. If your application is not complete at the time it is submitted, including valid verification documents, it will not be eligible for revision and resubmission in the same exam window if it is denied.
NOTES FOR SELECT APPLICANTS

Early Bird Application Window

Early bird applications are accepted during the first week of each application window. There are two benefits to using the early bird application window. The first is that if you apply early bird and your application is not approved, you will have the opportunity to revise and resubmit your application in the same exam window. The second is early notification of your application status. Regular applicants must wait until the following exam cycle to resubmit a revised application.

If your early bird application is denied, the revised application must be resubmitted before the deadline conveyed in the denial letter in order to be considered for the same application window. A $100 resubmission fee is due at checkout to submit the revised application. You will be notified of the outcome of the second review by the final notification deadline. A second submission of a revised application in the same window does not guarantee an approval.

Application Lifespan (Returning Applicants)

Approved applications have a lifespan of three years, or the equivalent of six consecutive exam windows. During the five subsequent exam windows, you are considered a returning applicant and you do not need to reapply. Instead, you will need to register your intent to take the exam by paying the exam fee before the registration deadline. After an application expires (after six exam windows or three years) you must reapply even if you never took the exam. This includes submitting a new application (including essays), providing updated employment and education verifications, and waiting for application review and approval.

Lapsed AICP Members

Former AICP members whose membership lapsed and who are not eligible for reinstatement must sit for the AICP exam to re-establish certification. These members will be pre-approved to sit for the exam and are not required to write the criteria essays or provide verification of education or employment. Lapsed AICP members must contact APA staff at aicpexam@planning.org prior to starting an application to ensure the pre-approved status is in place.

Canadian Institute of Planners (CIP)

APA members who are also Members of the Canadian Institute of Planners may be pre-approved for the AICP exam and do not have to complete the formal application. Please contact aicpexam@planning.org during an open registration window with your APA ID number and verification of your membership with CIP. APA staff will set up your approval status then email you with instructions to register for the AICP exam.

NOTE: A previous approval does not guarantee a second approval. If one or more of your essays were approved in a previous exam cycle, but your application is beyond the application lifespan, APA encourages you to carefully review current criteria guidance and revise your previous essays accordingly.
EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL PLANNING EXPERIENCE

This section of the Guide will help you determine if your combination of education and professional experience meet the requirements to apply for AICP Certification.

To apply for AICP Certification, you must meet the following requirements:

1. Be a current member of the American Planning Association (APA).
2. Be engaged in professional planning, either currently or in the past, as defined by AICP.
3. Have completed, at the time of application submission, one of the combinations of education and corresponding years of professional planning experience listed in the chart below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Education</th>
<th>Total Years of Professional Planning Experience Required</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Graduate degree in Planning from a program accredited by the PAB</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s degree in Planning from a program accredited by the PAB</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate degree in Planning from a program not accredited by the PAB</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any other post-graduate, graduate, or undergraduate degree</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No college degree/no degree information provided</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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1. The education may be obtained before, during, or after the experience.

2. Accredited degrees have been determined by the Planning Accreditation Board to meet standards approved by the American Institute of Certified Planners and the Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning or recognized by the Canadian Institute of Planners. AICP gives educational credit to applicants holding these degrees if the degree was received (1) during the period the university has been accredited (or previously recognized), and (2) by the time that an application for member is filed. If you are unsure about the status of your planning degree, consult the Planning Accreditation Board’s list or contact AICP.

3. Non-accredited undergraduate planning degrees and degrees in related and other disciplines (i.e. Geography, Architecture, History, Music, etc.) at undergraduate and post-graduate levels.
DOES MY EXPERIENCE QUALIFY?

Determining if your professional experience qualifies can be challenging, particularly if you have not worked for, or provided planning services to, a municipality or regional planning agency. This section looks at what does and does not qualify as professional planning experience. You will describe how your experience meets APA’s definition of professional planning experience in your criteria essays.

Experience That Generally Does Qualify: Non-Traditional, Part-Time, and Internship Experience

NON-TRADITIONAL PROFESSIONAL PLANNING EXPERIENCE

While AICP’s professional planning criteria are more likely to be met in an agency (private or government), institute, or firm providing planning services, instruction, or research, this is not a prerequisite. APA encourages individuals with nontraditional professional-level planning experience to apply if they can demonstrate how their experience meets the criteria for professional planning experience listed in the AICP application.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY “NON-TRADITIONAL PROFESSIONAL” PLANNING EXPERIENCE?

Examples of “non-traditional professional” planning experience include unpaid work or work done in a volunteer capacity. Like traditional professional planning experience, non-traditional professional planning experience must be supported by verification documentation.

Applicants submitting non-traditional professional planning experience should ensure that the experience meets the definition of professional-level planning experience (involves a high level of personal responsibility and substantive technical accomplishments). For example, volunteer work at a community-based organization would not usually be considered professional planning experience if the applicant was only responsible for setting up meetings, supporting administrative functions such as data entry or file management, or providing general customer service, etc. However, the experience may be considered at a professional level if the applicant was also involved with or responsible for:

- The preparation of research and documents
- The supervision of projects
- The presentation of proposals and plans before decision-making bodies
- Providing significant input in one or more facets of a project (e.g., giving technical expertise in areas such as computer application, strategy development, impact analysis, etc.)

In order for examples of volunteer service performed as a function or extension of a salaried planning position (e.g., appointment to an advisory committee) to be eligible as an example of professional planning experience, applicants must include this service as part of their job description in the verification letters for that traditional employment.

PART TIME EXPERIENCE

Part-time professional planning experience may be used toward meeting the minimum eligibility requirements. Part-time experience will be prorated into a full-time equivalent. For example, if an applicant worked 20 hours/week for six months that would equate to three months of professional planning experience.

Similarly, persons working full time but only part time on planning related activities may also prorate that experience into a full-time equivalent. See the Experience in Related Fields or Professions section for more details.
INTERNSHIP EXPERIENCE

Because eligibility to apply for AICP Certification depends on a combination of education and employment experience, these variables must remain separate and distinct. Applicants can only count internships (or any professional planning work completed while enrolled in a degree program) that satisfy the following conditions toward their professional planning experience requirement:

- The internship cannot be part of course work for a grade or for course credit. This must be documented in your employment verification letter.
- The internship cannot be a requirement to complete the degree program.
- The work as an intern must meet all criteria for professional planning experience listed in the AICP Guide, Part 1 (i.e., this work is not pre-professional in nature).

An example of experience that can count towards meeting eligibility requirements include internships completed independent of degree requirements.

Experience That Does Not Qualify: Pre-Professional Experience, Elected or Appointed Officials, and Work in Related Fields

WORK AT A PRE-PROFESSIONAL LEVEL

Although there is often a fine line between professional experience and pre-professional experience, the latter generally involves less personal responsibility and less substantive technical accomplishments along the lines of the criteria that define professional planning experience and more time dedicated to administrative functions and providing assistance to other staff. Work at a pre-professional level may include substantial time dedicated to providing general information to staff and the public in the administration of specific planning programs areas or ordinances; performing routine office tasks in designated program areas, including data entry, file management, copying and answering the telephone; and preparing public notices or property owner verifications and maps, charts, or tables of limited complexity.

ELECTED AND APPOINTED OFFICIALS

While contributions by mayors and members of city councils, boards of commissioners, planning commissions, boards of zoning appeals, and citizen advisory boards are invaluable to the advancement of planning, service in this capacity alone does not constitute professional planning experience.

WORK IN RELATED FIELDS (NOT GENERALLY CONSIDERED PROFESSIONAL PLANNING EXPERIENCE)

There are important distinctions between planners and allied professionals and between planning and related fields. Planners approach problems comprehensively, have a long-range perspective, and deal with unique place-based issues. Although people in related professions (e.g., law, architecture, landscape architecture, engineering, real estate development, etc.) and disciplines (humanities, psychology, etc.) often work with planners, they do not necessarily have the same knowledge base, skillset, or approach.

Persons working full-time but devoting a portion of their time to another field, may prorate that experience into a full-time equivalent. For example, a position in which an environmental planner worked 40 hours/week for two years and devoted half her time to environmental science and half her time to professional planning may be prorated into the full-time equivalent of one year of professional planning experience.

The following illustrates types of work in related fields sometimes performed by planners, but more often by
other professionals. These areas are generally not considered to be professional planning experience and will not satisfy the experience requirements.

- Site platting and engineering
- Traffic engineering or highway design
- Land surveying or mapping
- Facility programming
- Community organization
- Social work
- Market, physical, and social science research and analysis not connected to a planning process
- Construction/development logistics and management
- Business development
VERIFICATIONS OF EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Now that you’ve determined that your combination of education and experience qualify you to apply for AICP Certification, this section of the guide covers requirements for education and employment verifications. When you apply for AICP Certification, you must submit verifications for each degree and job listed on your online application to document that you meet eligibility requirements to apply for certification. You are responsible for ensuring that acceptable verifications are provided in support of your application. Unverified experience and degrees will not be considered and may cause a delay in reviewing your application.

Your verification documents must be uploaded in PDF format directly in the application. Your goal should be to make sure that you’ve received all your verification documents prior to beginning your application.

Education Verifications

Education verification confirms you have received your degree, when the degree was conferred, and if the degree was in planning. The degree must already be conferred at the time you submit the online application (i.e., have your diploma in hand), and reviewers will only consider degrees for which APA has received acceptable verifications. Education verifications are used to determine the amount of verified experience that you are required to provide. APA will accept education verifications in one of the following three forms:

- Official transcript. Please open sealed transcripts, scan them, and save as a PDF. E-transcripts accepted.
- Notarized photocopy of diploma. The Notary Public is confirming the copy is a true replica of the original diploma.
- Letter from school dean, registrar, or program director confirming that degree was conferred. The letter must be printed on school/university letterhead and include the letter writer’s title and contact information.

Employment Verification Letters

Employment verification letters are used to verify the professional planning experience that you have documented in your online application. The signed letter, on department/company letterhead, should come from either an immediate supervisor or principal of the firm, if still employed at the company/firm, or human resources department if your supervisor is no longer employed with the company.

NOTE: Any verification uploaded through the application must be a PDF of the original printed document. APA will not accept verifications submitted to APA via post mail, email or fax.

IMPORTANT: Review all verification documents for accuracy prior to submission. You are responsible for ensuring that your verification documents meet requirements. Verifications that contain inaccurate information or that do not meet requirements may cause a delay in application review or lead to an incomplete application for the exam cycle (see Incomplete Applications on p. 21).
NOTE: The employment verification letter is not a reference letter. It is used to verify that positions provided on the application meet AICP eligibility requirements. Information beyond what’s listed below is not reviewed.

Each letter must include:

Your name,
Your APA ID number (provided by you to the employer)
Your position/title,
Your dates of employment (e.g. February 2010 through November 2015),
A brief summary of your duties as a professional planner, and
The name, title, and phone number of the letter writer should be noted in the signature.

ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS:

Current Employment: If the letter is verifying current employment, the letter must be dated. Employment verification letters can only be used to verify experience up through the day they were written.

Part-Time Employment: The dates of part-time employment must be specified in your verification letter (e.g. full-time February 2010 through November 2015 and part-time December 2015 through March 2016). Unless otherwise specified in the employment verification letter, part-time experience is assumed to be 50% of full-time experience.

Multiple Positions: Letters verifying multiple positions at the same company must address each position separately (i.e. position/title, dates of employment, and summary of duties).

Intern Experience: Verifications for intern experience must confirm that the experience was not completed for academic credit and was not part of coursework required for graduation (i.e., the experience must be separate from your education). This includes any work completed to meet the requirements of a degree, even if your actual title was not “intern.”

Letter Author: All employment verifications must come from the actual employer. If your former immediate supervisor is no longer employed with the organization, the verification letter must be written either by human resources or the principal of the firm. Employment verification letters written by a former immediate supervisor now working for another organization will not be accepted.
Defunct Employer: If your former employer has gone out of business or no longer exists, you will still be required to provide acceptable verification for the experience. Applicants in this situation should contact AICP staff for assistance. Unverified experience will not be considered.

Employment Verification Letters for Principals and Consultants

If you work as an independent consultant or as a principal of your own small firm, you may not have an employer or human resources department to write an employment verification letter. Applicants in this situation will need to provide a letter that contains the information required in the standard employment verification letter, as well as a project-client list that includes:

- Your role in each project,
- The dates that you were involved in each project, and
- Client contact information for each project (minimum of contact individual and phone number).

NOTE: This option is only for individuals who do not have an employer to verify their experience. Principals of large firms who have a human resources department to verify employment should submit the standard employment verification letter.

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4APA will not use the client contact information for any other purpose than to confirm your work experience.
DEMONSTRATING PROFESSIONAL PLANNING EXPERIENCE ON THE APPLICATION

The AICP Commission has established three criteria that distinguish the experiences of professional planners from those of layperson planners, allied professionals, community stakeholders, and elected or appointed officials:

1. Professional planners demonstrate a professional level of responsibility and resourcefulness while applying a planning process appropriate to the project or situation.
2. Professional planners evaluate multiple impacts to a community when implementing professional planning tasks.
3. Professional planners influence public decision making in the public interest.

To earn the AICP credential, all applicants must write three short criteria essays that describe or explain how their professional experiences align with these normative criteria. This section of the guide provides criteria essay requirements and general tips for applicants before explaining each criterion and offering criterion-specific essay instructions and guidance.

Criteria Essay Requirements

• Each essay must be between 250 and 500 words in length.
• Each essay must be based on the applicant’s verified professional experience (but does not need to address the entirety of that experience).
• Each essay must be unique and aligned with its respective criterion (i.e., an essay cannot be repeated for multiple criteria).
• Each essay must be self-contained and self-explanatory (i.e., an essay must not be dependent on information provided in a different essay, an employment verification letter, or external documentation).

General Tips for Applicants

• Follow the criterion-specific instructions for each essay.
• Identify the position held in each example used.
• Provide one specific example from your professional experience for each essay to illustrate your alignment with the criterion; avoid generalities or aspirational statements about planners.
• Describe or explain one specific example in detail for each essay rather than briefly mentioning multiple examples.
• Write about your experiences in the first person and identify your personal contributions to all team efforts.
• Proofread each essay carefully.
• Use the checklist on p. 24–25 to make sure that your essays as written meet the requirements as defined and stated by APA.

IMPORTANT: Please read the Professional Planning Experience Criteria carefully before you begin your online application. You are also strongly encouraged to make use of the AICP Certification Criteria Essay Checklist on p. 24–25 of this Guide to help ensure that your criteria essays meet the requirements described below. Your application will be denied if criteria essays do not meet the requirements described, regardless of your verified educational or professional experience.
**Criterion 1: Demonstrate a Professional Level of Responsibility and Resourcefulness While Applying a Planning Process Appropriate to the Project or Situation**

Professional urban, rural, and regional planners apply multistep processes related to managing change in communities. Typical process steps include defining a problem or opportunity, setting goals and objectives, generating alternative strategies, selecting a preferred alternative, implementing the preferred strategy, and monitoring and evaluating strategy performance.

**Essay Instructions**

First, identify the position(s) you held while applying a specific planning process. Then, describe your step-by-step application of this process. Clearly state your role(s) and describe the professional planning responsibilities, knowledge, technical skills, and/or initiative you applied throughout the process.

**Examples of Professional Planning Responsibilities**

A typical planning process involves several different professional responsibilities. The list below highlights some examples of professional planning responsibilities that applicants may choose to reference when describing their application of a planning process:

- Collecting, analyzing, or visualizing data
- Conducting public, partner, or stakeholder outreach
- Facilitating meetings
- Rendering ministerial land-use decisions
- Preparing staff reports, grant proposals, or grant reports
- Drafting studies, plans, or ordinances
- Providing public information, public testimony, or technical assistance
- Critiquing development proposals or student work
- Defining learning objectives or methods
- Preparing presentations, manuscripts, or exercises

**Tips for Applicants**

- **DO** describe your step-by-step application of a single example of a planning process.
- **DON’T** list different planning activities in which you have participated or describe your participation in multiple different planning processes.
- **DO** provide details about your personal roles and professional responsibilities when applying a multistep planning process.
- **DON’T** limit your essay to your contributions during a single process step; describe the entire multistep process.
- **DO** explain how you brought professional knowledge, technical skills, personal initiative, or other indicators of resourcefulness to the process you applied.
- **DON’T** choose a project example comprising mostly administrative or pre-professional responsibilities.
Criterion 2: Evaluate Multiple Impacts to a Community When Implementing Professional Planning Tasks

Professional urban, regional, and rural planners consider the interrelated effects of policies, programs, projects, and actions that cause or influence change in communities. They identify and evaluate the potential positive and negative effects of specific planning interventions and work to shape those interventions in ways that minimize negative impacts and create quality-of-life improvements for the communities they serve.

Essay Instructions
First, identify the position(s) you held while working on a specific planning task that required you to consider the interrelated effects of a specific policy, program, project, or action. Explain your thought process as you identified and evaluated multiple potential consequences of this intervention to community quality of life. Then, describe how your evaluation informed your work products or decisions in such a way as to protect or improve quality of life for the community you served.

Examples of Interventions
An applicant does not need to be employed by, or provide services to, municipalities or regional planning agencies to satisfy this criterion. The list below highlights some examples of interventions that applicants may choose to reference:
- A comprehensive, functional, or subarea plan
- Land-use or development regulations
- A financial or technical assistance program
- A public investment, facility, or service
- A partnership or agreement
- A land-use or development project
- A public awareness or education campaign
- A research project
- An instructional module or activity

Examples of Consequences
Policies, programs, projects, and actions often have multiple intended and unintended consequences that affect the quality of life in a community. The list below highlights some examples of consequences that applicants may choose to reference:
- Effects on housing choice or affordability
- Effects on transportation access, safety, or convenience
- Effects on fiscal health
- Effects on air or water quality
- Effects on habitat
- Effects on public health or safety
- Effects on economic or social welfare
- Effects on energy supply or use
- Effects on historic or cultural resources
- Effects on community identity or appearance

Tips for Applicants
- **DO** identify multiple, specific consequences of a specific intervention and describe your thought process in considering their impacts to community quality of life (see lists above for examples of consequences and interventions).
- **DON'T** focus on the procedural steps of a planning process you applied; instead, describe your thought process in identifying, considering, and addressing the multiple potential impacts of an intervention.
- **DO** explain how your thought process informed your specific work products or decisions to result in outcomes that benefited the quality of life for the community you served.
- **DON'T** use an example of an administrative or management process—instead focus on planning interventions that directly impact a community’s quality of life.
Criterion 3: Influence Public Decision-Making in the Public Interest

Professional urban, regional, and rural planners influence decisions related to managing change in communities made by elected or appointed public officials in ways that protect or improve the well-being of the general public. This influence may be through direct communication with public officials or through intermediary processes.

Essay Instructions
First, identify the position(s) you held while participating in a specific planning process that provided you with an opportunity to influence either a specific decision or a type of decision by elected or appointed public officials. Then, explain how your actions or work products influenced either a specific public decision or a type of public decision. Be sure to clearly describe the decision point, the decision maker(s), and the decision made. Finally, explain how your influence over this decision or type of decision protected or improved the well-being of the general public.

Examples of Methods of Influence
An applicant does not need to be employed by, or provide services to, municipalities or regional planning agencies to satisfy this criterion. The list below highlights some examples of methods of influence that applicants may choose to reference:

- Providing formal written recommendations
- Providing public testimony
- Drafting research or policy briefs
- Preparing educational or training materials
- Conducting educational or training activities
- Presenting research findings or analysis
- Participating in advisory body meetings

Examples of Decision Points
Professional planners influence a wide range of public decisions. The list below highlights some examples of decision points that applicants may choose to reference:

- A legislative body votes on adoption of a plan, ordinance, resolution, agreement, or budget
- A chief elected official signs an executive order
- A planning commission votes on approval of a plan or discretionary use permit
- A zoning board votes on approval of a variance
- A chief appointed official issues an administrative rule or policy
- A judge or court issues findings and conclusions

Tips for Applicants

- **DO** explain how your work influenced either a specific decision or type of decision by elected or appointed officials (see lists above for examples of methods of influence and decision points).
- **DON'T** use an example in which public officials made a decision that conflicted with your recommendations or analysis.
- **DO** explicitly identify the decision makers, the decision point, and the decision made.
- **DON'T** simply describe the theoretical or aspirational connections between your work and public decision making.
- **DO** explain how your influence over a specific decision or type of decision served the public interest.
- **DON'T** use an example in which the primary beneficiaries of a decision are a small number of private individuals or organizations rather than the general public, or in which you influenced a staff-level decision or a decision by a private individual or organization rather than a decision by public officials.
- **DON'T** use an example in which the officials that you identify have not yet made their decision.
NOTE: For those planners in research or academia and not practice, focus your essay for Criterion 3 on how your work (studios, lecture materials, publications) promotes decision-making in the public interest. Your essay must make a direct connection between your work and the criterion requirements by focusing on how decision makers use your work. Simply describing how your students will take what they have learned and one day apply it to influence decision-making in the public interest will not meet criterion requirements.
THE APPLICATION REVIEW PROCESS

After you submit your application, it will take up to 10 weeks for APA to review. This section provides information on the status updates that you will receive while your application is under review, as well as your options for appealing the decision if your application is denied.

Application Status Key

During the review process, APA provides status updates on submitted applications to inform members of where their application is in the review process. A member can view their application status in My APA. Applicants are responsible for checking the status of their application.

Below are the possible application statuses and their meaning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STATUS</th>
<th>MEANING</th>
<th>DEFINITION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>Not Yet Submitted</td>
<td>An application was started but has not been submitted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>Pending</td>
<td>Your completed application has been submitted and received by APA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V_C</td>
<td>Verification Complete</td>
<td>Your verification documents were reviewed and validated. Your application will move forward into the review process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Incomplete</td>
<td>Your application was found to be incomplete. APA will email you with notification that explains why your application is incomplete.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R</td>
<td>Under Review</td>
<td>Your application is under review and APA will email you with your final application status by the final notification deadline.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Approved</td>
<td>Your application was approved. You can now register your intent to sit for the AICP exam then schedule your exam appointment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Denied</td>
<td>Your application was denied. APA will email you with notification and your denial letter detailing the reasons for denial.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Incomplete Applications

If you receive notice that your application is incomplete and your application status changes from Pending to Incomplete, this is the final status for your application for the exam cycle. Members whose applications are incomplete can reapply for the next exam cycle.

Incomplete applications do not undergo a review of the criteria essays as the education and/or employment information provided could not be verified by staff. If it is unclear what is wrong with your verification documents or why your application is incomplete, please contact AICP staff for assistance at aicpexam@planning.org or 312-431-9100.

Denied Applications

If your application is denied, you will receive notification via email. The email will include an attached letter that addresses the specific reasons behind the denial decision. Depending on your situation, you may need to wait to gain more professional planning experience, or simply reapply with a new application containing more focused criteria essays that better describe how your work experience meets the professional planning experience criteria required in the application. Your application will remain in our files for 2 years, so if you choose to reapply, the online form will pre-populate with your previous application information.

NOTE: For denied applicants, while your application will pre-populate with your previously denied essay(s), you will need to revise your essay(s) based on the information in your denial letter in order for your re-application to be approved. In most cases, this involves substantially revising or expanding upon the essay(s).
Appeals

Denied applicants have the right to appeal the decision. Appeals are reviewed by the AICP Membership Standards Committee in time to allow members with overturned denials to sit for the same exam period for which they applied.

If you decide to appeal, please write an appeal letter that is professional in tone that explains why your application should have been approved. Your appeal letter must demonstrate how your existing criteria essays meet the professional planning criteria requirements. It should clearly address the reasons for denial cited in the denial letter and may expand upon and clarify the information provided in your submitted criteria essays in order to demonstrate how you have met the criteria; however, it cannot include new or supplemental examples and materials that were not included as part of your original application.

Note: Appeals that include new essays, significant revisions, or additional examples or information not addressed in the original essays will not be accepted.

If you wish to appeal, please write a letter addressing the reasons for denial cited in your denial letter and email it to aicpexam@planning.org by the deadline specified in your denial letter. An APA staff member will contact you via email once the AICP Membership Standards Committee has reached a decision.

When writing your appeal letter:

- **DO** carefully review the denial statement provided.
- **DO** prepare a professional appeal letter that addresses each point of denial in your appeal letter.
- **DO** cite specific information from your original criterion essay(s) and articulate how it meets the requirements outlined in the criteria guidance section above.
- **DON’T** provide additional information that was not included in your original submission. Only the information provided in the original essay may be considered in your appeal.
AICP CERTIFICATION CRITERIA ESSAY CHECKLIST

Please use this checklist to make sure your criteria essays meet the requirements described in this Guide.

If your answer to any of the following questions is NO, please revise your essays accordingly before you submit.

Overall Checklist Items

- Are my essays between 250 and 500 words in length?
- Do my essays use examples drawn from the professional experience verified in my AICP application?
- Are my essays self-contained and self-explanatory?
- Did I follow the criterion-specific instructions when writing my essays?
- Did I carefully proofread my essays?

Criterion 1: Demonstrate a Professional Level of Responsibility and Resourcefulness while Applying a Planning Process Appropriate to the Project or Situation

In this essay, applicants must describe how they have applied a complete, multistep professional planning process in their professional work; they must make clear the sequential nature of the steps in the process, the role they personally played, and the special knowledge, techniques, or initiative they applied.

- Does my essay identify the verified professional position I held for in the project example I describe?
- Did I write this essay in the first person and identify my personal role(s) and professional planning responsibilities while applying this planning process? (See p. 17 for a list of examples of professional planning responsibilities.)
- Does my essay demonstrate how I used my planning knowledge, technical skills, personal initiative, or other indicators of resourcefulness while applying this planning process?

Criterion 2: Evaluate Multiple Impacts to a Community When Implementing Professional Planning Tasks

In this essay, applicants must show that they understand the big-picture effects of their planning work on the communities in which they work; they must demonstrate that they are able to identify, evaluate, and balance multiple, potentially conflicting consequences of planning-related interventions to the community.

- Does my essay identify the verified professional position I held for the project example I describe?
- Does my essay identify and describe multiple specific potential consequences of a specific planning-related intervention that could affect a community’s quality of life? (See p. 18 for lists of examples of interventions and examples of potential consequences to a community.)
- Does my essay describe my thought process as I evaluated those multiple specific consequences of the intervention?
- Does my essay demonstrate how these considerations affected my work products or decisions to result in beneficial outcomes for the community?
Criterion 3: Influence Public Decision Making in the Public Interest

In this essay, applicants must demonstrate that they or their work has influenced a decision made by elected or appointed officials in a way that serves the public interest.

- Does my essay identify the verified professional position I held for the project example I describe?
- Does my essay explain, in detail, how I or my work influenced either a specific decision or type of decision by elected or appointed officials? (See p. 19 for a list of examples of decision points.)
- Does my essay clearly identify the decision makers, the decision point, and the decision made?
- Does my essay explain how my influence over a specific decision or type of decision served the public interest?