



The American Planning Association's  
Professional Institute

**American Institute  
of Certified Planners**

*Making Great Communities Happen*

# AICP Guide Part 1: Certification Application

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.



[planning.org/aicp](http://planning.org/aicp)

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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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### 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](http://planning.org/aicp).

Details about the Certification Maintenance program are at [planning.org/cm](http://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.

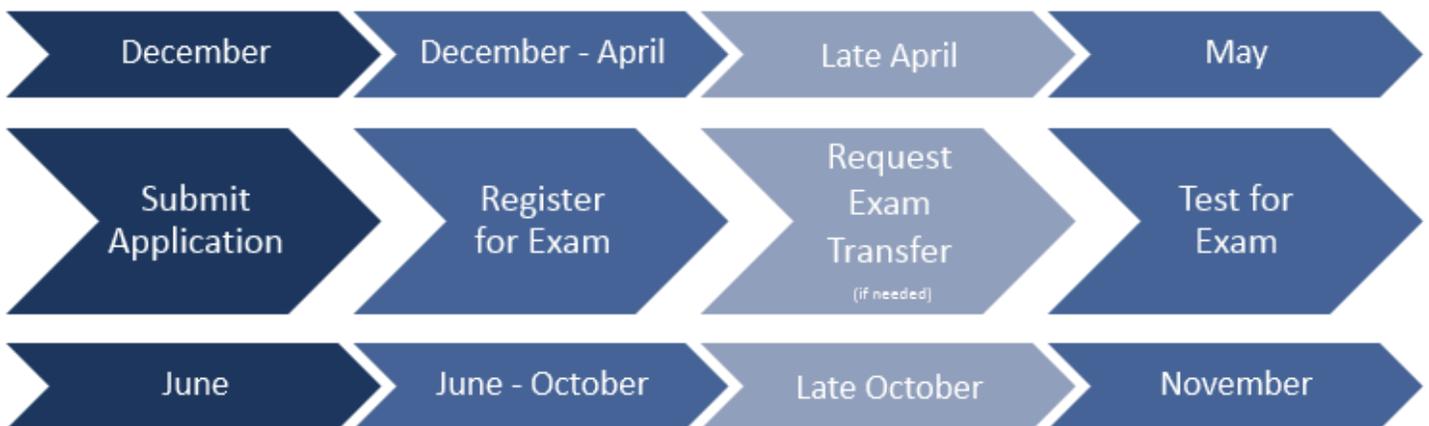
If you are enrolled in the AICP Candidate Pilot Program, the procedures and deadlines for taking the AICP Certification Exam are different from what is outlined in this guide. For more information about the procedures and deadlines for AICP Candidate Pilot Program participants, visit [planning.org/AICP/candidate](http://planning.org/AICP/candidate).

## BECOMING AN AICP-CERTIFIED PLANNER

### PATH TO AICP



## EXAM WINDOW SCHEDULE



## 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.

The majority of applicants apply right before the submission deadline. The volume of applications received at this time means more applications to review and a longer wait time to receive the status of your application. Testing centers fill up, and you may have difficulty finding one with availabilities. Apply early to avoid these stresses.

**TIP 3:** To ensure your verification letters will be accepted, provide your past employers with a copy of the [sample job verification letter](#).

**TIP 4:** Acceptable ways to verify your educational experience include:

- Providing a notarized 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 page 8.

**TIP 6:** Internship experience can count toward professional planning experience as long as the

internship was not part of course work for graduation and the work experience meets the criteria for professional planning experience. See page 9 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:** Carefully read the instructions and guidance provided before writing your application essays and use the [AICP Certification Criteria Checklist](#) to make sure your responses 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 responses. Spelling and grammar errors can make it difficult for exam reviewers to evaluate the content of the responses.

**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 responses 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 access to 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 page 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](http://planning.org/certification/currentexam).

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

- **SECTION 1: DESCRIBE AND VERIFY EDUCATIONAL HISTORY**

Enter university, graduation date, degree information, and upload valid verification for each degree entered.

- **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 page 15, and the AICP Certification Criteria Checklist on 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 (\$70) and registration fee (\$425) are paid separately. The \$70 application fee is due when you submit your application and the \$425 registration fee payment is due after your application has been approved. A \$70

resubmission fee is due if resubmitting an application for additional review as an Early Bird applicant (see page 7). 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.)

more details page 7). 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](https://www.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.

<b>APPLICATION (NEW APPLICANTS)</b>	<b>EXAM (DUE AFTER APPROVAL)</b>
\$70 (non-refundable)	\$425 (non-refundable)
\$70 early bird resubmission fee (non-refundable)	

**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. Full details on registering for and scheduling your AICP Exam appointment are available in the AICP Guide Part 2.

**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 for

**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 have to wait until the following exam cycle to resubmit an revised application.

Re-submittal of denied Early Bird applications: 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 \$70 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 responses or provide verification of education or employment. Lapsed AICP members must contact APA staff at [aicpexam@planning.org](mailto: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](mailto: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 responses 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 responses 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:

LEVEL OF EDUCATION <sup>1</sup>	TOTAL NUMBER OF YEARS OF PROFESSIONAL PLANNING EXPERIENCE REQUIRED <sup>1</sup>
Graduate degree in Planning from a program accredited by the PAB <sup>2</sup>	2
Bachelor's degree in Planning from a program accredited by the PAB	3
Graduate degree in Planning from a program not accredited by the PAB	3
Any other post-graduate, graduate, or undergraduate degree <sup>3</sup>	4
No college degree/no degree information provided	8

<sup>1</sup> The education may be obtained before, during, or after the experience.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> 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 sometimes be challenging, particularly if you have worked in a non-traditional capacity. 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 criterion 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 engaged in planning, instruction, or research, this is not a prerequisite. Persons with non-traditional professional-level planning experience are encouraged 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 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 to be 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**

AICP requires that education and experience remain separate entities. AICP will consider internships (or any professional planning work completed while enrolled in a degree program) towards the professional planning experience requirement provided that the following stipulations are met:

- 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 application (i.e., this work is not pre-professional in nature).

Examples of experience that can count towards meeting eligibility requirements include internships completed independent of degree requirements, capstone projects, and thesis work.

## **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 technical assistance and 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 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 on such a body 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, and 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.

- Subdivision design
  - Large-scale housing or site design work
  - Traffic engineering or highway design
  - Land surveying or mapping
  - Facility programming
- Community organization
  - Social work
  - Market research or analysis, and other types of physical and social science research normally performed by other professionals or academic disciplines

## 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 page 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.

A sample employment verification letter is available online [here](#).

### **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 independent consultants or as principals 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).<sup>4</sup>

**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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<sup>4</sup>APA will not use the client contact information for any other purpose than to confirm your work experience.

## DEMONSTRATING PROFESSIONAL PLANNING EXPERIENCE ON THE APPLICATION

This section of the Guide provides definitions of the professional planning experience criteria that you must address in your essays on the application and offers guidance on addressing each criterion. After demonstrating your combination of education and experience through the verification documents, the next step in the AICP application is to demonstrate that you have met APA's definition of professional planning practice through your work. You will do this by writing three short essays that demonstrate how your qualifications satisfy the established criteria that together define professional planning experience.

### Professional Planning Experience Criteria

Professional planning experience—whether acquired through practice, teaching, or research—must appropriately address all three of the following criteria. You should focus your responses on the examples from your professional experience that best meet each criterion requirement. All examples must be from positions that you have submitted verification documentation. You do not need to address each verified position listed on your application in your criterion responses.

### Criterion 1: Involve a Professional Level of Responsibility and Resourcefulness While Applying a Planning Process Appropriate to the Project or Situation

Professional urban, rural, and regional planning applies the classic process appropriate to the situation. The process involves a number of steps, including problem/opportunity definition, goal setting, generating alternates, selection of an alternative, implementation, and evaluation. A professional planning process should be oriented toward the future, examine unintended consequences as well as intended ones, and identify implementation options that include identification of resources and resource constraints. A clear process should be evident in the quality of research, analysis, and teaching (if applicable); process should also guide the format of the planning policy or program.

Professional urban, rural, and regional planners also involve a professional level of responsibility and resourcefulness, demonstrating initiative, judgment, substantial involvement, and personal accountability when defining and preparing significant substantive elements of planning activities.

**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 Checklist to help ensure that your criterion essay responses meet the requirements described below. Your application will be denied if criterion essay responses do not meet the requirements described, regardless of your verified educational or professional experience.**

Discuss both how you applied a planning process appropriate to the situation through one of the three sections of professional planning content listed below AND how you were a responsible and resourceful professional when applying that process. You should focus your response on the area of practice (1.1, 1.2, 1.3) for Criterion 1 that is most applicable to your work experience for the position in question.

**1.1 Plan Making and Implementation** was designed for applicants in professional practice who develop, implement, and enforce plans on a regular basis. AICP maintains that the list below exemplifies typical experiences of planners eligible for certification. The list is not intended to be exhaustive and applicants are not required to address every activity listed in this section. Applicants should focus their response on the strongest examples which demonstrate how their employment meets the criterion requirements of involving a professional level of responsibility and resourcefulness while applying an appropriate planning process in practice.

- Visioning and goal setting
- Demographics and economics
- Land use and development regulations
- Application of legal principles
- Growth management techniques
- Budgets and financing options
- Development plan and project review
- Program evaluation
- Communications techniques
- Intergovernmental relationships
- Stakeholder relationships
- Project and program management

**1.2 Functional Areas of Practice** was designed for applicants who practice in specialized fields within the profession who may not create, implement, and enforce plans on a regular basis. AICP maintains that the list below exemplifies typical functional areas of practice of planners eligible for certification. The list is not intended to be exhaustive. Applicants should focus their response on the functional areas of practice that best demonstrate how their employment meets the criterion requirements of involving a professional level of responsibility and resourcefulness while applying an appropriate planning process in practice.

- Community development
- Comprehensive or long-range planning
- Economic development and revitalization
- Educational, institutional, or military facilities
- Energy policy
- Food systems planning
- Hazard mitigation and disaster planning
- Historic preservation
- Housing
- Infrastructure
- Labor force and employment
- Land use
- Natural resources, and the environment
- Parks, open space, and recreation
- Planning law
- Policy planning
- Public services
- Social and health services
- Transportation
- Urban design

**NOTE: Relevant independent research undertaken towards a master's or doctorate degree is eligible, provided the following: the master's or doctorate degree is in a department of urban and regional planning, and the research cannot be part of course work that is counted toward a degree or a requirement for a degree (AICP requires that education and experience remain separate entities). Similarly, research completed towards the requirements of a non-degree or certificate program cannot be used to meet professional planning experience requirements.**

**1.3 Research, Analysis, and Teaching** was designed for applicants in academia or research institutions who are not practicing planners, but who conduct and publish planning research or teach planning related courses. Section 1.3.1 can also apply to applicants with significant experience in research and data analysis as well. Applicants should focus their response on the strongest examples that demonstrate how their employment meets the criterion of applying an appropriate planning process in research, analysis, and teaching.

### **1.3.1 Research and Analysis**

Quantitative and qualitative research methods; Collecting, organizing, analyzing, and reporting data; Economic analysis and forecasting; Environmental analysis; Spatial analysis and geographic information systems (GIS); Policy analysis and decision making; Design and implementation of research initiatives; Design and implementation of surveys; Professional literature search of best practices. The response should include the prime purpose of the research, the stage of the research, the organizational context of the research, and how the research affects the implementation of urban and regional planning policy, and should demonstrate how the applicant has employed a professional level of responsibility and resourcefulness while applying an appropriate process.

### **1.3.2 Teaching**

Experience should focus on the activities described in the sections of professional planning content above (Plan Making and Implementation; Functional Areas of Practice; and Research and Analysis). Courses should focus on

urban, rural, and regional planning or apply to interest groups or community groups in the context of policy engagement. Teaching activities may include course development (lesson plans), instruction, research, or writing scholarly papers. Responses must demonstrate how applicants' teaching experience meets the criterion requirements of involving a professional level of responsibility and resourcefulness while applying an appropriate process.

### **CRITERION 1 DOS AND DON'TS**

**DO** focus your response on the section of Criterion 1 most applicable to your work experience (1.1, 1.2, or 1.3).

**DON'T** provide answers for all three sections of Criterion 1.

**DO** use a specific project example to illustrate your application of a planning process by describing the steps of that process or describe a planning process that you routinely apply in your work, making your role and responsibilities clear. **DON'T** simply list different types of planning processes that you have applied; instead, illustrate how you have applied a planning process by describing the steps of that process in your response.

**DO** use one project example and write about it in sufficient detail to demonstrate your application of a multistep planning process with responsibility and resourcefulness. **DON'T** use multiple examples with descriptions too brief to adequately meet criterion requirements.

**DO** use a project example that demonstrates your involvement in significant substantive elements of planning activities; see the lists of plan making and implementation processes and functional areas of practice. **DON'T** use examples that involve pre-professional or administrative experience.

**DO** focus your response on the process steps for which you were responsible, clearly describe your involvement in the process, and make the connection between the steps you describe and how they demonstrate that you were a responsible and resourceful professional. **DON'T** simply describe a project without making the connection to how it demonstrates that you were a responsible and resourceful professional.

**DO** write about yourself in the first person and discuss only processes tied to positions for which you have provided verification on your application.

**DON'T** write your response in the third person or provide an example from a position not listed on your application.

**DO** carefully proofread your essay and review it against the AICP Certification Criteria Checklist to make sure that your response as written meets the criterion requirements as defined and stated by APA.

**DON'T** write a response without reviewing the criterion guidance—if your response does not meet the criterion requirements as stated by APA, it will result in a denial of your application.

## **Criterion 2: Demonstrate a Comprehensive Point of View When Implementing Professional Planning Tasks**

Professional urban, rural, and regional planners employ a comprehensive point of view when implementing professional planning tasks. A comprehensive point of view means looking at multiple consequences of a

planning-based decision as it affects various aspects of a community's quality of life (e.g., physical, social, environmental, and economic).

To meet the requirements of the criterion, applicants must demonstrate through their response how they have applied a comprehensive point of view in their planning practice, as defined above. Applicants should discuss how they considered multiple issues or consequences of their planning work and the potential impacts of proposed decisions or projects, demonstrating that they understand the big-picture implications of their planning work on the communities they serve.

Examples of issues or areas to be discussed may include:

- Environmental issues or considerations
- Economic impacts
- Social or equity issues or concerns
- Connections across various spatial contexts (e.g., from regional to local, from urban to suburban)
- Intergovernmental cooperation between neighboring jurisdictions and broader geographic areas
- Consistency across multiple policies, actions, or systems
- Stakeholder concerns

## **CRITERION 2 DOS AND DON'TS**

**DO** demonstrate consideration of the multiple consequences that a decision may have on a variety of aspects of a community's quality of life (environmental, economic, social, physical, etc.), as defined by the criterion. **DON'T** use examples of department management or intra-departmental coordination that do not make the greater connection to the impact of your planning work on the community.

**NOTE: For those planners in research or academia and not practice, focus your response for Criterion 3 on how your work (studios, lecture materials, publications) promotes decision-making in the public interest. Your response 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.**

**DO** make the connection to your own use of a comprehensive point of view (i.e., consideration of the consequences of planning decisions) in the example you provide. **DON'T** simply describe a project (such as a comprehensive plan,) or describe working with stakeholders without addressing how you considered multiple impacts of your planning work on the community's quality of life.

**DO** use a specific example that clearly identifies a project, policy, action, or other planning-based decision to demonstrate how you personally have used a comprehensive point of view in your work, especially if your work was done as part of a team. **DON'T** talk generally or aspirationally about the importance of using a comprehensive point of view.

**DO** describe how you arrived at the planning outcome in your example—the thought process you used to identify, consider, and balance multiple consequences of your planning work and its impact on community quality of life—to demonstrate your use of a comprehensive point of view. **DON'T** simply describe the steps in the planning process that you followed or focus on providing extensive project background.

**DO** write about yourself in the first person and discuss only projects tied to positions for which you provided verification on your application. **DON'T** write your response in the third person or provide an example from a position not listed on your application.

**DO** carefully proofread your essay and review it against the AICP Certification Criteria Checklist to make sure that your response as written meets the criterion requirements as defined and stated by APA. **DON'T** write a response without reviewing the criterion guidance—if your response does not meet the criterion requirements as stated by APA, it will result in a denial of your application.

### **Criterion 3: Influence Public Decision-Making in the Public Interest**

The primary obligation of professional urban, rural, and regional planners is to serve the public interest. To fulfill this obligation, planners act as leaders during the planning process, working with elected and appointed officials toward the goal of creating communities of lasting value. Planners' input, direction, and guidance influences those with decision-making authority to make decisions that are in the best interests of the public. Discuss how you have influenced public decision-making by elected or appointed officials in the public interest in a given position.

#### **CRITERION 3 DO'S AND DON'TS**

**DO** clearly indicate the decision-making authority with whom you are working (e.g. boards, elected officials, and others with decision-making authority) and how you have influenced them through your work. **DON'T** simply discuss working with the public without making the connection to your influence on the decision-making of elected or appointed officials.

**DO** clearly identify a specific planning outcome or decision made by elected or appointed officials in the example that you use. **DON'T** describe a project or situation without clearly indicating the outcome or decision that was reached and your role in shaping that decision in the public interest.

**DO** clearly describe how the public interest was served as a result of your work with decision-making authorities in shaping their decisions.

**DON'T** simply state that you have worked with public officials without making the connection to how your work has served the public interest.

**DO** carefully proofread your essay and review it against the AICP Certification Criteria Checklist to make sure that your response as written meets the criterion requirements as defined and stated by APA. **DON'T** write a response without reviewing the criterion guidance—if your response does not meet the criterion requirements as stated by APA, it will result in a denial of your application.

## 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.

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

### 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 responses 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](mailto:aicpexam@planning.org) or 312-431-9100.

**NOTE: For denied applicants, while your application will pre-populate with your previously denied response(s), you will need to revise your response(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 response(s).**

## 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 responses 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.

## 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 criterion responses 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 responses 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 responses, significant revisions, or additional examples or information not addressed in the original responses 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](mailto: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 criterion response(s) and articulate how it meets the requirements outlined in the criteria guidance section on page 15.
- **DO** provide additional insight and perspective into the denied criterion response. This is your opportunity to clarify your response and demonstrate how it does meet the criterion requirements.



The American Planning Association's  
Professional Institute

**American Institute  
of Certified Planners**

*Making Great Communities Happen*

# AICP CERTIFICATION CRITERIA CHECKLIST

The first step in becoming a certified planner is demonstrating your professional experience meets AICP requirements by submitting three criteria essays.

Before submitting your criterion essays, please use the following checklist to make sure your responses meet the criterion requirements as defined. If your answer to any of the following questions is NO, please revise your response accordingly before submitting your application.

The full criteria guidelines can be found in the AICP Guide Part 1: Certification Application.

## CRITERION 1

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### ***Involve a professional level of responsibility and resourcefulness while applying a planning process appropriate to the situation***

1. Does my response describe a complete, multi-step planning process that I applied, described in a step-by-step manner in appropriate detail? YES NO
2. Is my response written in the first person and does it clearly indicate my role and involvement in this process? YES NO
3. Does my response demonstrate how I showed responsibility and resourcefulness as a planner? YES NO
4. Does the process I describe involve substantive planning-related principles and tasks that are not purely administrative or pre-professional in nature? YES NO
5. For 1.3 responses:
  - a. Does my response describe a process I carried out as part of my research, analysis, or teaching experience? YES NO
  - b. Does my response show the relevance of the project I describe to the field of urban and regional planning? YES NO
6. Did I carefully proofread my final response to ensure that it is free of grammatical and typographical errors and represents the professional level of expression expected of a certified planner? YES NO

## CRITERION 2

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### ***Demonstrate a comprehensive point of view when implementing professional planning tasks***

1. Does my response show that I employed a comprehensive point of view as defined by the criterion: considering the consequences of planning decisions as they affect a community's quality of life? YES NO
2. Does my response describe not just one, but multiple considerations or impacts covering environmental, economic, social, spatial, intergovernmental, and/or stakeholder concerns? YES NO
3. Does my response not just list multiple impacts, but describe how I identified them, considered them, and balanced any conflicts or negative impacts on the community's quality of life? YES NO
4. Does my response use a specific project example to show how I personally applied a comprehensive point of view in my planning practice? YES NO
5. If I discuss working with multiple governments or stakeholders, do I make clear connections to how I used their input in employing my comprehensive point of view? YES NO
6. If I describe a comprehensive planning project, do I clearly demonstrate how I employed a comprehensive point of view while working on this project? YES NO
7. Is my response written in the first person and does it clearly indicate how I myself employed a comprehensive point of view? YES NO
8. Did I carefully proofread my final response to ensure that it is free of grammatical and typographical errors and represents the professional level of expression expected of a certified planner? YES NO

## CRITERION 3

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### ***Influence public decision making in the public interest***

1. Does my response use a specific example to show how I or my work influenced the decision making of elected or appointed officials in the public interest? YES NO
2. Does my response clearly identify the decision makers (elected or appointed officials, or those with decision making authority) in my example? YES NO
3. Does my response clearly identify the outcome: the decision that I helped influence and promote in the public interest? YES NO
4. Does my response describe how the decision that I influenced was made in the public interest? YES NO
5. Is my response written in the first person and does it clearly indicate my involvement in the example I describe? YES NO
6. Did I carefully proofread my final response to ensure that it is free of grammatical and typo-graphical errors and represents the professional level of expression expected of a certified planner? YES NO