



**American Institute  
of Certified Planners**

*Creating Great Communities for All*

# AICP Guide Certification Application

This guide contains valuable information to help you prepare a successful AICP Certification Application.  
*Guide updated October 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 creating great communities for all. 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.

Becoming a Certified Planner is a multi-step process. Once you have obtained the necessary education and professional planning experience, you may submit an application to verify that you are eligible to pursue certification. Once your application has been approved, you must successfully complete two components for certification. You must demonstrate qualified professional planning experience by writing three short essays illustrating how your planning experience meets APA's definition of professional planning practice. And you must pass the AICP

Certification Exam. AICP certification is achieved once your essays have been approved and you have passed the exam.

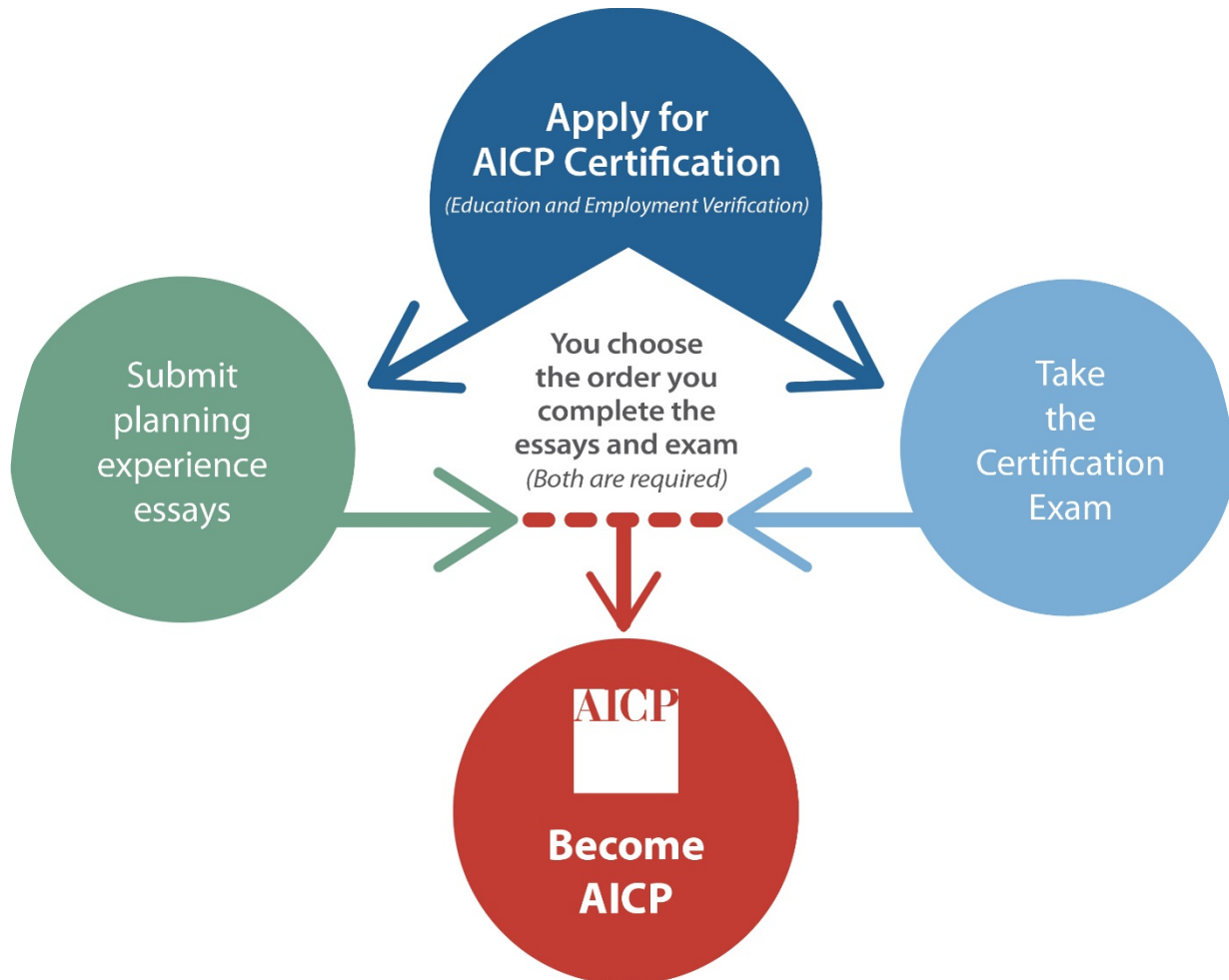
The AICP Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct defines those aspirational principles and Rules of Conduct to which a certified planner must adhere. AICP's Certification Maintenance program helps them engage in ongoing professional development. Under the Certification Maintenance program, certified 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/ethics/](http://planning.org/ethics/).

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

If you are enrolled in the AICP Candidate Pilot Program, the procedures and deadlines for submitting your essays and taking the AICP Certification Exam differ 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).

## PATH TO BECOME AN AICP-CERTIFIED PLANNER



## APPLICATION TIPS

**TIP 1:** Carefully read this guide before starting your application.

**TIP 2:** Employment verification requirements have been streamlined—APA no longer requires a letter from your employer. Provide your employment information, along with a detailed summary of your planning responsibilities for each position, directly within the AICP Application.

**TIP 3:** Acceptable ways to verify your education history include:

- Copy of diploma (notarized copy no longer required)
- University transcript (must show degree conferral date)
- Letter from the university confirming your degree and graduation date on letterhead.

**TIP 4:** A complete job history is not required. Focus on providing specific experience that meets the minimum eligibility requirements as described beginning on page 10.

**TIP 5:** Internship experience can count toward meeting the experience requirements if the internship was not part of coursework for a grade or educational degree requirements, and the work experience meets the criteria for professional planning experience.

**TIP 6:** Research or project experience can count toward meeting the experience requirements if the research was not part of coursework for a grade or educational degree requirements, and the work experience meets the criteria for professional planning experience.

**TIP 7:** Part-time professional planning experience can count toward meeting 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:** Volunteer planning experience can also count toward professional planning experience requirements. Volunteer planning experience must comprise substantive planning activities (e.g., research and data collection, report writing, presentations), and a summary of your experience must be included in the AICP Application.

**TIP 9:** International planning experience can count towards the professional planning experience requirements. The work must meet the criteria for professional planning experience.

## 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 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 page 9, before starting your application.

#### 3. SUBMIT THE ONLINE APPLICATION AND PAY THE APPLICATION FEE

You need to complete and submit the online application that verifies your education and employment information, and pay the application fee by the application deadline posted at [planning.org/certification/apply](https://planning.org/certification/apply).

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

#### SECTION 1: APPLICANT INFORMATION

Confirm your contact information and select your application type.

#### SECTION 2: DESCRIBE AND VERIFY EDUCATION HISTORY

Education information and supporting verification confirms you have received your degree, when the degree was conferred, and if the degree was in planning. This information is used to determine the amount of experience you are required to provide. APA will accept education verification in one of the following three forms:

- University transcript. Please open sealed transcripts, scan them, and save as a PDF. E- transcripts are also accepted.
- Photocopy of diploma. A notary seal is no longer required.
- Letter from school dean, registrar, or program director confirming that the degree was conferred. The letter must be printed on school/university letterhead and include the letter writer's title and contact information.

### **SECTION 3: DESCRIBE AND VERIFY EMPLOYMENT HISTORY**

Enter professional planning employment information for each position needed to meet the experience requirements:

- Employer
- Position title
- Dates of employment
- Full time or part time indication
- Current/former supervisor
- Email of supervisor
- Detailed summary of professional planning tasks and responsibilities

### **SECTION 4: READ AND VERIFY YOU HAVE READ THE AICP CODE OF ETHICS AND PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT**

Check the box 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 \$70 application fee is due when you submit your application. APA will email you with your application status within 4 weeks of submission. If your application is approved, you will be able to register to test for the AICP Certification Exam and submit your planning experience essays.

## NOTES FOR APPLICANTS

### Application Lifespan (Returning Applicants)

Your Certification Application approval does not expire, and you will not have to repeat this step in the path to certification once approved.

### Lapsed AICP Members

Former AICP members whose membership lapsed and who are not eligible for reinstatement must sit for the AICP Exam to reestablish certification. These members will be preapproved to sit for the exam and are not required to write the professional planning essays 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 preapproved status is in place.

### Other National Certifying Institutes

APA members who are also members in good standing with another professional planning national or international certifying institute that administers an exam as part of their certification may be preapproved for the AICP exam and do not have to complete the application or the Professional Planning Essays. 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 the other institute. APA staff will set up your approval status then email you with instructions to register for the AICP Certification Exam.



## EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL PLANNING EXPERIENCE

This section of the guide will help you determine if your combination of education and professional experience meets 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*	Total Years of Professional Planning Experience Required**
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

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**\*Education Details**

<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 accredited by the Professional Standards Board (PSB) for Planning in Canada. 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 membership 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> Other degrees include 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.

**\*\*Experience Details**

<sup>4</sup> Internships, part-time positions, and volunteer work may count toward your professional experience.

## DOES MY EXPERIENCE QUALIFY?

This section describes what does and does not qualify as professional planning experience to help you describe how your experience meets APA's definition of professional planning experience in your criterion essays. The information is particularly helpful if you have not worked for or provided planning services to a municipality or regional planning agency.

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

#### **NON-TRADITIONAL PROFESSIONAL PLANNING EXPERIENCE**

While AICP eligibility is 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 non-traditional professional-level planning experience to apply.

#### **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 providing detailed information on the scope in the AICP Application.

Applicants submitting non-traditional professional planning experience should ensure that the 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, file management, 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 for the position in the AICP application.

#### **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 "Work in Related Fields" section on page 11 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 coursework for a grade or for course credit. This must be documented in the AICP application.
- The internship cannot be a requirement to complete the degree program.
- The work as an intern must meet all criteria for professional planning experience found in the AICP Guide: Professional Planning Essays (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. 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 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