

Certification Maintenance — What Is It?

Our communities are constantly changing and so too is the planning profession. New theories, new laws, new planning tools and techniques — all are available to planners as we define and guide community change. The Commission of the American Institute of Certified Planners believes that planners, to be credible professionals, must possess the knowledge and skills necessary to remain current in the practice of planning. We believe that planners should demonstrate professional credibility through continuing education and should follow professional certification standards that are similar to those of other professional organizations, including planning organizations in other countries.

To this end, the Commission is considering requiring Certification Maintenance through continuing education. This initiative is supported by the Presidents of Chapters of APA and many AICP members. Clearly, it is time to bring the professional standards of AICP on par with other professional organizations and require that the AICP credential be maintained through a program of continuing education.

The issue of requiring continuing education has been debated throughout the organization for many years. This report lays out the proposed parameters of such a new program including how many credits will be required, how often members will have to report their credits, what would qualify for credits and any exemptions that would be considered.

It is critical now, that we hear from you and about this proposed program. In 2005, a survey of the AICP membership was conducted on the issue of continuing education. A good deal of this proposed program is based on initial feedback from the survey as well as conversations with members of the organization's leadership and research on other professional continuing education programs.

Before a final decision is made about the introduction of new Certification Maintenance standards, the Commission would like to hear from members on your views of this proposed program. We are asking for your feedback to help us make a final decision.

What Will Certification Maintenance mean to me?

Certification Maintenance will mean that, in addition to maintaining AICP membership through dues payment and abiding by the AICP Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct, AICP certified planners will also be required to maintain a minimum level of professional development training.

Will Certification Maintenance and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) relate to one another?

Certification Maintenance will establish the procedures for the new professional development requirements of AICP. CPD will no longer be used once Certification Maintenance is in place.

How many credits will I be required to take to maintain my AICP certification?

The Commission is proposing that AICP planners will be required to take at least *48 credits* of eligible professional development activities in a *two-year period*. One credit is approximately equivalent to one contact hour of training. See below for how those credits may be earned.

What if I am a retired AICP member? Will I still be required to participate in continuing education to maintain my certification?

The Commission is proposing that retired members be exempt from the maintenance requirement. If you are a retired AICP member then you would be exempt from required continuing education to maintain your AICP certification. However, you would have to be recognized as a “retired” member as defined by APA: “You must have been an APA or AICP member continuously for 10 or more years, be 65 or older, and completely retired.”

Will there be requirements or restrictions on how my credits can be earned in a two-year reporting period?

As envisioned now, half of the eligible credits will need to come from *APA or APA-sponsored programs*. The other half of the required credits may be from other *registered* educational providers. Up to 25 percent of the non-APA credits may be “self study” credits. There may be exemptions to who is required to register, such as local governments.

What will qualify as APA programs?

APA offers many educational programs throughout the year. These programs are geared towards the professional development of practicing planners and qualify for Certification Maintenance credits. Such APA programs include:

- APA Chapter Conferences and programs
- National Conference (sessions, workshops, symposia, mobile workshops)
- PTS Workshops
- AICP Symposia
- Tuesdays at APA
- APA and AICP Audio Conferences
- APA National Independent Study (e.g. APA audio tapes, CD-ROMs or online courses)
- APA CD-ROM training programs
- APA Division training sessions

What will qualify as APA-sponsored programs?

APA, its chapters, and divisions sometimes sponsor programs that are conducted by other organizations. Sponsorship means that APA or APA chapters or divisions have contributed to the development of the program or have supported it financially. They must fully endorse an APA-sponsored program.

What are “self study” credits?

It is proposed that self-study credits can be achieved by reading books or articles that support professional development. Two hours of reading time will qualify for one credit and a maximum of 12 credits may be reported as self_study in a two-year reporting period. Self-study credits cannot be carried over to a next reporting cycle.

Will I need to attain a minimum number of credits per year?

No, as it is proposed now, you will not need to attain a minimum number of credits per year as long as you reach 48 credits in each two-year reporting period.

Will there be any course requirements that must be met within a reporting period?

The Commission is proposing a requirement of at least 1.5 credits be in current planning law and another 1.5 credits in planning ethics. The legal courses may be administered by other organizations. However, the ethics training must be conducted by an APA provider.

How do I record my credits?

There will be an on-line log system on the AICP web page you will be able to use similar to the current CPD program.

If I am involved with leadership at APA, either locally at my chapter or nationally, will my leadership involvement count towards my Certification Maintenance credits?

The Commission is proposing that if you are active with APA leadership, you will not be able to count the time spent in business meetings towards your credits. However, if there is professional development training sessions held for the leadership that would qualify for professional development, and then you could count those activities on your log.

If I am a mentor to someone, or I have a mentor myself, can this mentoring time count towards certification maintenance?

As we currently envision the program, mentoring will not be considered an eligible Certification Maintenance activity.

If I am involved with volunteer activities outside of the organization, such as the Rotary Club, will I be able to count my time undertaking such volunteerism towards certification maintenance?

As we currently envision the program, volunteer activities will not count towards certification maintenance.

What if I am a teacher or professor? Can I use my teaching time to count towards my credits?

If you are a paid teacher or professor, your work in teaching cannot qualify for credits. However, if you volunteer to teach a course which you prepare specifically for an event and are not paid for it, then you may use the qualifying credits towards your log. Certification Maintenance credit may be earned only once for teaching a particular course or seminar or for making a presentation of a professional paper. The amount of credit equals the length of the presentation in hours plus one hour for preparation.

What if I gain more than the required 48 credits in a two-year reporting period?

It is being proposed that if you gain more than 48 credits in a two-year reporting period, you will be able to carry over up to 24 of those extra credits to the next two-year reporting cycle. However, self-study credits cannot be carried over.

When will the two-year reporting cycle begin?

The goal is to get as much input as possible before the Winter Leadership meetings and have staff develop the program so the basics will be in place by The National Planning Conference in Philadelphia in April 2007. If the Certification Maintenance program is adopted after the review

and consideration of the comments received by AICP members, the requirements will be officially instituted in January 2008.

Will any of the credits I take in 2007 be counted towards the new reporting cycle that will start in January 2008?

The Commission is proposing that credits gained starting with APA's national planning conference in Philadelphia in April 2007 can be counted towards the first reporting cycle, which will start in January 2008. This will provide a period of over two years and eight months to satisfy the initial 48-credit requirement.

What if I have not completed my 48 required credits in a two-year reporting cycle?

If you have not reached the required 48 credits within the two-year reporting period, you may have a four-month grace period to complete the credit requirement. However, each cycle will likely begin every two years starting in January 2008. Any credits needed for the preceding cycle received during those four months may not be used for credits in the current cycle.

What happens if I have difficulty maintaining my certification due to personal reasons?

There may be special instances in members' lives where personal reasons or hardship prevent participation in certification maintenance. Documentation may be required to grant the Certification Maintenance suspension. While various situations exist, the following list represents a guideline of situations in which a temporary suspension of Certification Maintenance training requirements may be granted:

- Parental leave. A suspension of six months may be granted for the birth of a child or child adoption.
- Military service leave. A suspension may be granted to participants on active duty and those on foreign assignments.
- Health. A suspension may be granted for reasons of ill health.
- Care leave. A suspension may be granted to members who need to stay at home to care for another person.
- Foreign Residency. A suspension may be granted to members living outside of the U.S. and Canada for a temporary period of time.

Other reasons for suspension will also be considered on a case-by-case basis.

If I have been granted a suspension due to an approved cause, will I still be considered an AICP member and will I still be expected to pay my APA, AICP, and Chapter dues?

As is the case now, if you are granted a suspension, you will not be required to pay AICP dues during the suspension period. However, during this period, your membership will be suspended and you will not be able to use your AICP credential. You will remain a member of APA and will be required to pay APA dues. During the period of suspended membership, you will still be required to abide by the AICP Code of Ethics. You must reinstate your membership within four years and pay 20% of back dues owed since suspended status took effect. If you leave your membership in suspended status for more than four years, you will be required to retake the AICP exam and reenter the Institute following new member procedures.

What if I become unemployed?

If you become unemployed, your Certification Maintenance requirements may be waived during your period of unemployment. However, you will be required to apply for the APA/AICP unemployed member status and pay your AICP dues at the unemployed dues rates. You can continue to use your AICP credential as long as you maintain at least 25 percent credits such as through self study.

Will I receive a CM certificate when I’ve completed each two-year reporting period?

Yes. It can be downloaded from the web. AICP will not furnish paper certificates.

How will I comply with the Certification Maintenance?

We have developed two possible scenarios to give you an idea of how you may gain credits to fulfill the Certification Maintenance requirements. This just provides a guideline of how it would be possible to maintain your credits. Our investigation shows that chapter registration costs range from around \$100 to \$450, the national planning conference registration fee begins at \$660. Some APA sponsored events are free and others have a small charge.

Scenario I:

Course offering	Number of credits earned
APA Chapter Conference	15
2 AICP audio conferences	6
Self guided reading/study	12
APA-sponsored program	3
Non-APA conferences	12
Total for 2-year reporting period	48

Scenario II:

Course offering	Number of credits earned
APA National Conference	36
Self study	12
Total for 2-year reporting period	48

How do I know what programs will qualify for Certification Maintenance credit?

As we currently envision the program, educational providers will be required to *register* with APA in order to become qualified providers of credits. This means that the provider and all their eligible educational offerings will be reviewed and, upon approval, will be entered into the online directory of approved credits to be accessed by all members. These courses will also be entered into APA’s educational calendar so that members are aware of these approved programs.

Must courses be registered in order to qualify for Certification Maintenance credit?

As we currently envision the program, all providers will be required to register their courses in order for their credits to be eligible for Certification Maintenance. All registered courses will be posted on the online directory and on APA's educational calendar.

Will there be a fee to become a registered provider?

That depends. If the educational provider offers their training for *free* to AICP members, then they can qualify for registration without paying a fee to APA. If the educational provider offers their training for a *fee*, then they will be required to pay a fee to APA in order to become a registered provider.

Why would APA charge a registration fee to providers?

The new Certification Maintenance program will require administrative expenses. The Commission does not want to raise AICP dues for the purposes of covering the cost of the program. Therefore, requiring a registration fee from professional development providers is one fair way to raise some funds to cover the program costs. It also give us oversight to the programs being offered to help ensure that the quality of offerings is the best available.

What if I am practicing planning outside of the United States?

If you are a practicing planner outside the U.S., you will be exempt from the 50 percent APA or APA-sponsored requirement, but you will still be required to maintain your certification through professional development. If you are also a member of another planning organization that maintains a rigorous credential program (e.g. RTPI, CIP, PIA) and have to uphold Certification Maintenance for two organizations, you will be able to satisfy your AICP requirements through your host country's requirements as long as you maintain 48 credits over a two-year period.

What if I drop out of the profession? What will happen to my certification status?

If you stop working as a planner, you may maintain your AICP certification as long as you keep up with all the requirements, including the continuing education requirement. However, if you do not maintain your credits, do not suspend your membership, and do not use the four-month grace period, you will lose your AICP designation and will have to retake the AICP exam and follow new member procedures to reinstate your membership.

What if I still haven't fulfilled my certification requirements beyond the four-month grace period?

It is proposed that the online logging system will no longer be accessible to you after the four-month grace period is over. That means that you need to maintain external log details and prove that you have kept up with your Certification Maintenance requirements. However, if you do not do this within a four-year period, your AICP membership will be dropped entirely and you will be required to retake the AICP exam and follow new member procedures to reinstate your membership.

How do I comment on this proposed program?

We strongly encourage your feedback as we develop the details of the Certification Maintenance program and as the AICP Commission makes its final decision on whether to introduce

Certification Maintenance, and if so, how. Please send your comments to AICP-CM@planning.org. All comments must be received by Tuesday, January 9, 2007, in order to be considered.

What's next?

Your comments will be forwarded to the AICP Commission for their review and consideration when they next meet in January 2007. Another report will be available to members for comment in February 2007. The comments of the second report will then be presented to the AICP Commission for their review and consideration at their meeting in April 2007. It is expected that a final decision on the Certification Maintenance program will be made in April 2007.