American Planning Association
Pennsylvania Chapter

Making Great Communities Happen

Orientation Guide

This guide is for new members and those thinking about joining the Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Planning Association.

Who We Are

The American Planning Association (APA) is the national nonprofit professional organization that helps promote planning in the United States. It was founded in 1978 by the merger of the American Institute of Planners and the American Society of Planning Officials, which have roots dating back to 1917.

The Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Planning Association (Chapter or APA PA) is a part of APA and is in turn made up of 6 geographical sections. It was created in 1985 by the consolidation of 3 separate chapters of the American Planning Association located in Pennsylvania. APA PA has roughly 2,500 members from all around the state!

The American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP) is the APA's professional institute which certifies professional planners to promote ethical planning, professional development, planning education, and standards of practice through the Certification Maintenance (CM) program and associated continuing education credits.

Full information on the Chapter and its operation may be found in the bylaws and on our website. Please email questions to info@planningpa.org.

Our Purpose

First and foremost, APA PA raises awareness of the value of planning in Pennsylvania. APA PA is a professional organization, but planning touches many lives and you don't need to be a professional to join. We encourage you to join us whether you're an interested citizen, a student, a volunteer commissioner, an elected official, or someone who works in the profession. We have something for everyone!

A sample of what we do:

- **Promote planning** best practices in communities and at all levels of government
- Take the **lead on emerging technologies** and issues
- Create fun and enjoyable ways to **engage with like-minded peers**
- Encourage debate and the open **exchange of information** between members
- **Engage with voices not often heard** in the profession
- **Celebrate great planning** work done in Pennsylvania
- Provide relevant, **cutting edge training** and reference resources
- **Promote collaboration** between everyone engaged in planning in PA
- Develop policy for **advocacy in the community**

How We Work

The Chapter is governed and guided by a Board of Directors who are elected or appointed according to the bylaws. The Board of Directors guides and coordinates the work of committees and Sections. Board members include representatives from Sections and committees, plus student and advisory members. The standing committees are:

Awards – coordinates the Chapter's annual award program. This program recognizes outstanding professional work and leadership in a variety of categories through an annual ceremony.

Communication & Membership – works to provide consistent, quality messaging and content for use by the Board and other committees, disseminate information to our membership, increase the membership of APA PA, and support current members.

Great Places in PA – oversees the program of the same name, which includes choosing award categories and criteria, coordinating an annual application and selection process, and celebrating designated Great Places.

Healthy Communities in PA – a joint effort between planners and public health officials to identify topics that bring the two fields together. Activities include raising awareness among planners, advising the Board, and coordinating with partner organizations on healthy community design.

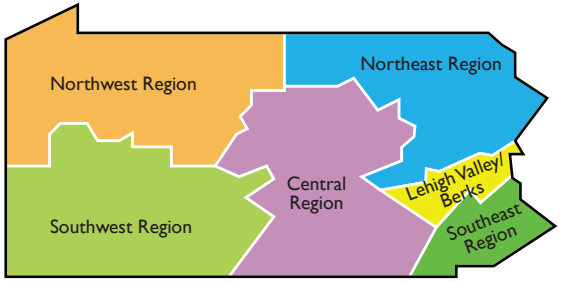
Legislative – monitors legislative proposals and drafts Chapter responses and recommendations, represents APA PA at legislative hearings or committee meetings, and takes part in legal advocacy efforts.

Nominating – coordinates nominations and creates a slate of candidates for the offices of Chapter President, Vice President, Secretary, & Treasurer.

Planning Commissioners/
Planning Officials Development – sponsors activities that strengthen the Chapter's relationship with planning officials and commissioners.

Professional Development – plans and produces professional development events and activities such as AICP prep sessions, workshops, and conference sessions across PA.

Student Engagement – acts as a clearinghouse for student employment, internship, scholarship, mentoring, and related opportunities.



Be active in your local **Section** for even more opportunities

NORTHWEST • SOUTHWEST • CENTRAL NORTHEAST • LEHIGH VALLEY/BERKS • SOUTHEAST

Sections

You are encouraged to take part in Section meetings, join in trainings and social activities, and use your Section as a resource. Our six sections sponsor many different activities and serve as a primary contact point for member interactions. Section Councils provide leadership and governance and act as liaisons with APA PA's Board of Directors. The Chapter's website maintains Council member lists and Section updates, websites, social media links, and upcoming activities.

- Examples of Section-sponsored activities and resources:
- Professional development scholarships
- CM-accredited webinars
- Light-hearted networking events
- Student/planner mentorships

Your address of record determines your Section membership, but you may change to a Section that borders your default assignment. This option is useful to planners who may live in one Section but work in another or who are generally better able to attend events sponsored by a neighboring Section.

APA PA's Annual Conference

APA PA's Annual Conference in mid-October is the premier statewide conference for planners. The location of the conference rotates every year, giving over 400 planners across the state an opportunity to learn about professional best practices, emerging issues and technologies, legislative and ethical guidance, and more – all while connecting to other professionals and having a little fun, too.

The Annual Conference always includes a huge variety of extra-curricular activities where you can meet new people and discover new sides to familiar colleagues and places. Whether you prefer a bicycle ride, a welcome reception in an incredible venue, hands-on mobile workshops, dine-arounds, exploring the local craft brew scene or prevailing in friendly trivia competitions, the conference has you covered.

Become a Member

There are a variety of ways to become an APA PA member:

- All APA members who live in PA are automatically members.
- APA members who do not live in PA may join the Chapter. Members who join this way vote in Chapter affairs but may not hold office.
- Anyone can join APA PA without being an APA member. Members who join this way may vote and serve in any office except for Chapter President and Professional Development Officer.
- An organization can join the Chapter. The organization holds one vote, although multiple individuals may participate in other ways under the organizational membership.

Member Support

APA PA offers a wide variety of networking and educational opportunities through Chapter Sections, the APA PA Annual Conference, and PMPEI (the PA Municipal Planning Education Institute). Many of these opportunities offer CMs for certified planners. APA PA also coordinates awareness and advocacy efforts to ensure that planning perspectives are heard in the legislature and in related professions.

Online Member Resources

APA PA's website maintains a directory of planning consultants, job postings, internships, RFPs & RFQs, a resource library of best practices and web tools, an In Memoriam page, a listing of Great Places in Pennsylvania, previous APA PA award winners, and a brochure that helps to explain the profession to those outside of it.

For Students & Emerging Professionals

APA PA maintains a number of resources for students and professionals at the beginning of their careers, including free and discounted membership fees, reduced conference fees, support and preparation in taking the AICP exam, student scholarships, and information on internships, job openings, and requests for proposals.

We encourage student participation in the Board of Directors, Section Councils, and committees. APA PA's Student Engagement Committee is devoted to increasing the number of ways we connect to students.

The most up-to-date dues schedules and information on how to join are always available on the Chapter's website.

Get the Most Out of Your Membership

The real power of APA PA is in bringing people together. We encourage you to be active in your Section, attend events, join us at the Annual Conference, join a Board committee that interests you, run for office – or all of the above! These activities help keep the Chapter healthy while allowing you to you build your knowledge base, gain experience, expand your professional connections, broaden your perspective, and round out your resume.

- Meet new people
- Take initiative
- Build your resume
- Attend the annual conference
- Take part in educational sessions & training
- Broaden your perspective
- Stay up to date professionally
- Become active locally
- Work toward AICP certification
- Join advocacy efforts

CM Credits for Pro Bono Planning Service

AICP members can obtain up to eight CM Credits for Pro Bono Planning Service, including volunteering time with an APA PA Committee or Section Council. More information is available on the APA National website.

Transparency

APA PA publishes an Annual Report and Annual Budget on its website, along with the Chapter's Development Plan. Board policies and meeting minutes may also be viewed. The Annual Conference includes an in-person, full meeting of the Chapter's membership. Questions about Chapter governance may always be directed to the Chapter President or Administrator.