

AICP Exam Prep

Professional Development Committee

Alexis Williams, AICP, PP PDO and PDC Chair

alexis.williams@stvinc.com

Scott Duncanson, AICP, LEED GA, ENV SP PDC Member

October 2025

APA-PA Conference



American Planning Association
Pennsylvania Chapter

Making Great Communities Happen

Today's Agenda

- Why/What of AICP
- Eligibility and Application
- Background and Tips
- Test Content Areas
- Sample Questions

What is AICP – American Institute of Certified Planners?

- APA's professional institute
- To be AICP, a planner must:
 - meet requirements for education and experience,
 - pass the AICP exam,
 - pledge to uphold ethical standards (AICP Code of Ethics), and
 - engage in ongoing professional development (Certification Maintenance)

Why AICP?

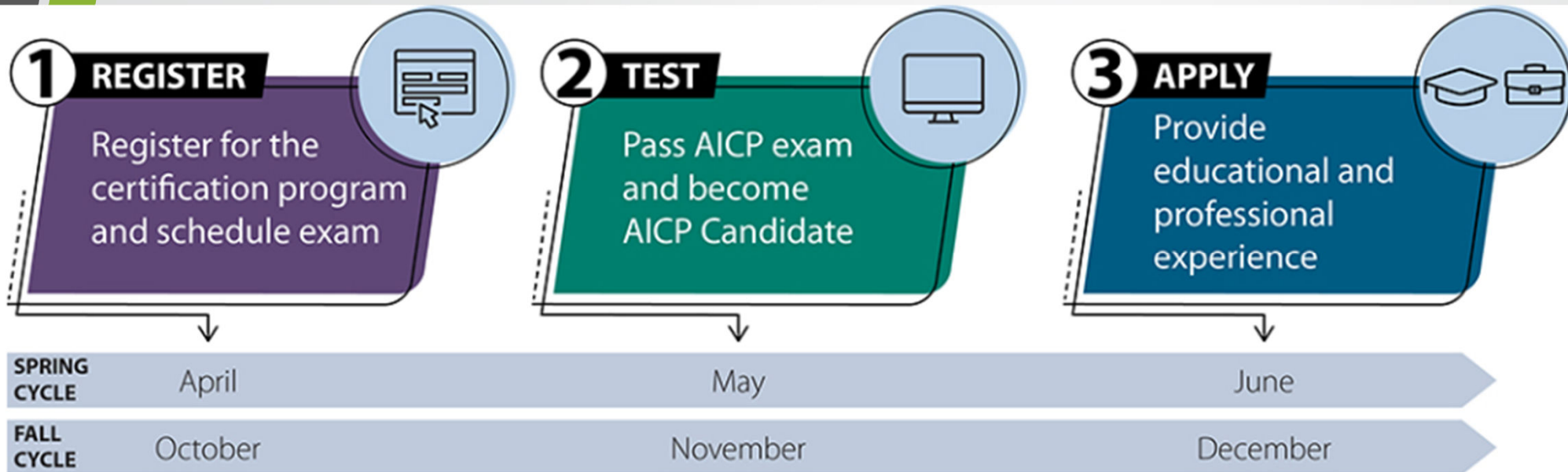
- Demonstration to elected officials, community leaders, and employers of a commitment to excellence
- Potential employment
- Salary survey

Education and Experience Criteria

Education	Required Years of Professional Planning Experience
Graduate degree in planning from a program accredited by the Planning Accreditation Board (PAB)	2
Bachelor's degree in planning from a PAB-accredited program	3
Graduate degree in planning from a program not accredited by the PAB	3
Any other post-graduate, graduate, or undergraduate degree	4
No college degree/no degree information provided	8

- ❖ Experience – *Professional Planning as defined by AICP*
 - Demonstrate a professional level of responsibility and resourcefulness while applying a planning process appropriate to the project or situation.
 - Evaluate multiple impacts to a community when implementing professional planning tasks.
 - Influence public decision making in the public interest

Certification Process – “One Path to AICP”



- ❖ Step 1: Register and Schedule Exam (\$305)
- ❖ Step 2: Test and earn the AICP Candidate designation when you pass
- ❖ Step 3: Planning Experience Assessment (\$305) - Apply your education, employment, and experience to meet the AICP professional planning practice requirements, and achieve AICP Certification

Certification Process – “One Path to AICP”

Fall 2025 AICP Certification Cycle

STEP 1: REGISTRATION

Opens: Wednesday, October 1, 2025, at 9:00 am CST

Closes: Wednesday, October 29, 2025, at 3:00 pm CST

Transfer Deadline: Monday, November 24, 2025, at 3:00 pm CST

STEP 2: EXAM

Exam Window: November 3-30, 2025

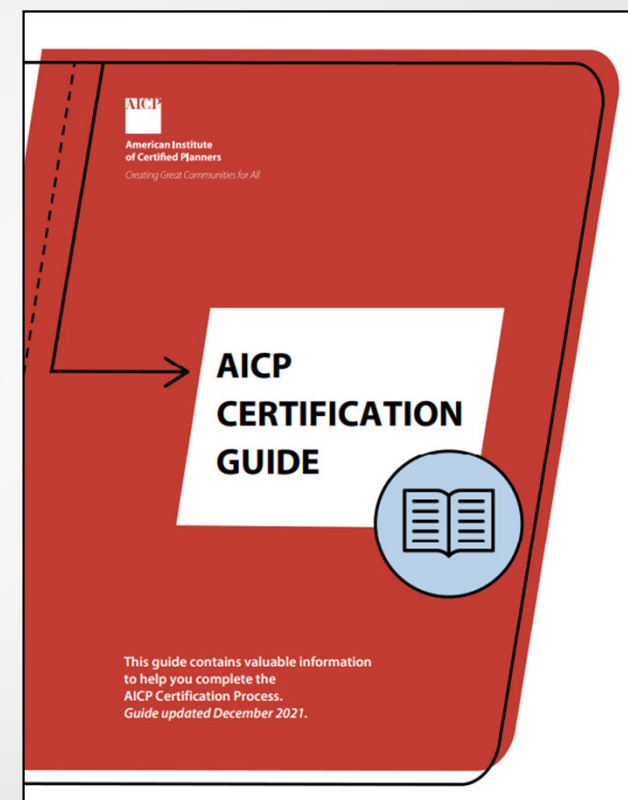
STEP 3: EXPERIENCE

Opens: Monday, December 1, 2025, at 9:00 am CST

Closes: Wednesday, December 31, 2025, at 3:00 pm CST

Certification Process

- ❖ AICP Certification Guide
 - ❖ Planning Experience Assessment Worksheet to review the professional planning experience requirements for certification
 - ❖ Interactive Experience Calculator to tally your years of professional planning experience to see how soon you can submit your Planning Experience Assessment
 - ❖ Planning Curriculum Worksheet to confirm how much professional planning experience you'll be required to provide
- ❖ Approved applicants may register for the exam and submit planning experience essays during the specified submission windows.
- ❖ Members must pass the AICP Certification Exam and their planning experience essays must be approved before AICP Certification is earned.



Testing Process

❖ Schedule on your own with Prometric. Testing options:

❖ In-person at a test center

- ❖ Bring proper ID (2 forms). You must arrive at the test center 30 minutes before your scheduled appointment to complete the required admission process before testing begins.

❖ Remote (ProProctor)

- ❖ Before you select ProProctor as your testing option, you must confirm your computer meets the basic system requirements for online proctoring, complete a system check, and confirm your testing environment is suitable.
- ❖ The room you test in must be empty with the door closed.
- ❖ You may not have other people, children, or pets in the room while you take the exam.
- ❖ Your proctor must complete a 360-degree scan of your testing environment, so be prepared to turn your webcam, so they can view your room.

Testing Process

- ❖ Transfers: Members may transfer online without contacting APA. A \$100 transfer fee must be paid online to complete the transfer.
 - ❖ You can transfer your exam registration to a future test window (May or November) if you've registered for the upcoming AICP Certification Exam and are no longer able to test during the current test window. You must cancel at least **three days** before your appointment.
 - ❖ Transfers are allowed only once. Once the transfer is redeemed, whether you take the exam or not, the registration cannot be transferred again.
- ❖ APA Exam Bulletin and APA staff for any questions – don't wait until it's too late

Application Process

❖ To apply for your AICP certification you must:

1. Be a current member of the American Planning Association (APA).
2. Pass the AICP Certification Exam.
3. Have completed one of the combinations of education and corresponding years of professional planning experience

❖ Section 1: Education Verification

❖ APA will accept education verification in one of the following three forms:

- ❖ University transcript. E-transcripts are also accepted.
- ❖ Photocopy of diploma.
- ❖ 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

Application Process

❖ Section 2: Employment History

❖ For each position needed to meet the experience requirements, provide:

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

Application Process

❖ Section 3: Planning Experience Assessment

❖ Must demonstrate that your experience meets AICP's definition of professional planning experience as specified in the three criteria by selecting all items that apply from comprehensive lists that align with each criterion and completing open-text fields with brief written examples from your verified employment history

❖ Criteria:

- ❖ Criterion 1: Demonstrate a Professional Level of Responsibility and Resourcefulness While Applying a Planning Process Appropriate to the Project or Situation
- ❖ Criterion 2: Evaluate Multiple Impacts to a Community When Implementing Professional Planning Tasks
- ❖ Criterion 3: Influence Public Decision-making in the Public Interest

Application Process

- ❖ A fee is due upon submission (\$305).
- ❖ Your assessment will undergo a review, and APA will email you with your assessment status within 8 weeks of submission.
 - ❖ If required education verification or employment history information is missing, you will be notified that your submission is incomplete, and you will need to submit the missing information for your application to move forward.
 - ❖ If your assessment is approved, you've completed the requirements in the certification process and will receive an email with your last step, including your AICP initial dues, that will begin your AICP Certification.
 - ❖ If your assessment is denied, you will receive notification via email that includes information 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 in the next application window with more focused assessment responses that better demonstrate how your work experience meets the professional planning experience criteria required for certification.

Education and Experience

- Verifications!!!
 - For degrees and all employment you are claiming as professional planning experience
 - Check dates carefully

Test Background

- ❖ 170 multiple choice questions (20 sample, 150 real - must answer approximately 110 – 115 of 150 correct to pass)
- ❖ Scaled scoring - 55 has **typically been** the passing score on scaled range of 25 to 75
- ❖ Pass rate is approximately 65%
- ❖ 3 ½ hours to complete (brief tutorial before exam)

How Should You Prepare?

Review the APA outline of material

Allocate study time according to the APA outline

AND

your own background

Get at least one comprehensive study source and supplement with other sources as necessary

- Study early and often
 - Identify weak areas
 - Study groups
 - Practice exams
- Look for refreshed content

Test Tips

Study Materials from APA

www.planning.org and www.planning.org/certification/examprep

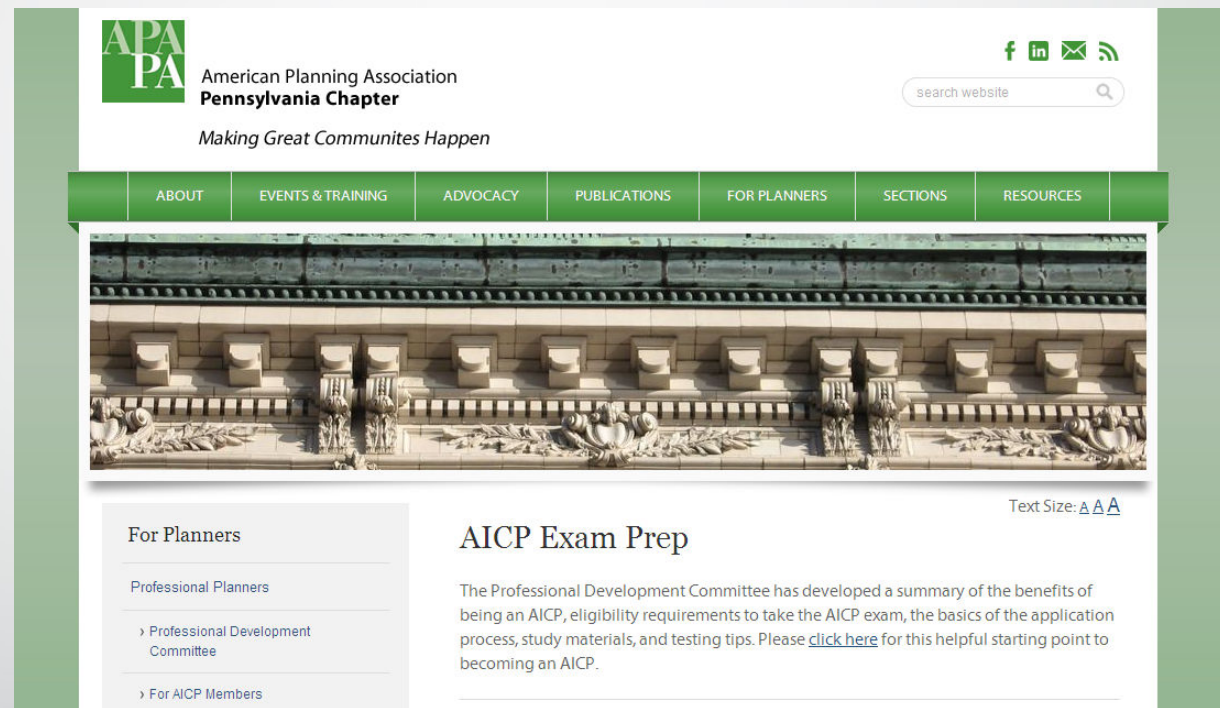
- Site updated to provide more general tips
- Prep Session Videos <https://www.planning.org/certification/exam/>
- Ethics Code and Information/PowerPoints
- Policy Guides (www.planning.org/policy/guides/index.htm)
- Legislative Information
- American Planning History Since 1900 – interactive timeline (<https://www.planning.org/timeline/>)
- Planning Advisory Service (PAS) Reports (www.planning.org/pas/reports/) --- these are now available at no cost to all APA members, and are a great resource

Test Tips

Study Materials from PA Chapter

www.planningpa.org
“For Planners”
“Professional Planners”
“AICP Exam Prep”

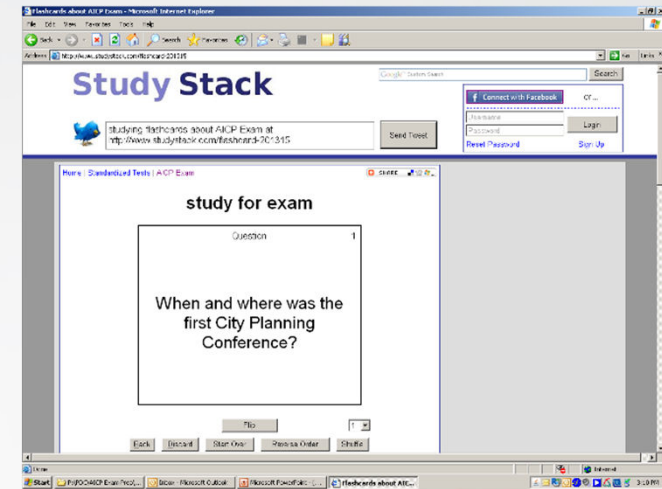
- Prior Prep Sessions PowerPoints (spring session is a full day)
- Ethics presentation and scenarios
- PDC Study Notes
- Other Chapter information (NC, FL, GA)
- Test Taker Perspective



Test Tips

Other Sources

- Webcast series (Planning Webcast on YouTube)
- www.planetizen.com
- www.planningprep.com (free now, perhaps dated?)
- Electronical flashcards: www.studystack.com (search AICP) and gFlash app for mobile devices
- www.oyez.org (legal...but use NC Chapter notes first)
- Cyburbia(<http://www.cyburbia.org/forums/>)
- Chapter Presidents Council manual
- *AICP Exam Secrets* (Mometrix Media publication)
- *The Ethical Planning Practitioner*, Jerry Weitz FAICP



Practice exams are critical, but don't study the questions – pay attention to the topic. Format quality varies greatly by source. Real questions are likely to require a mix of professional judgment and technical knowledge.

Test Tips

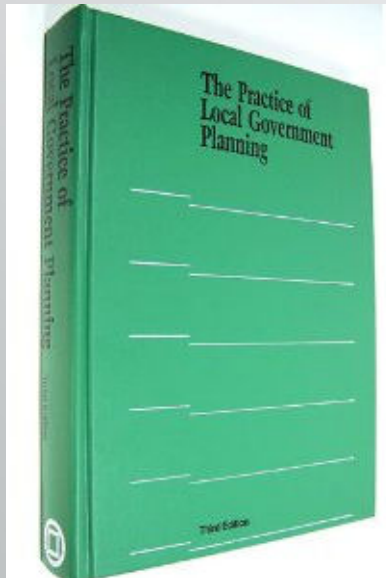
Comprehensive Study Sources

- PDC Study Notes...*free*
- Planetizen AICP Exam Preparation Course (\$299 and up)...*web-based with multiple practice exams and active online forum*

*These generally review all topics noted in the
APA outline of test content.*

Test Tips

Reading Materials



Membership Center Education and Events AICP Policy and Advocacy Career Center Community APA Foundation

AICP

Home > AICP > Get Certified! >

AICP Certification Exam Selected Resources

Planners preparing for the AICP Certification Exam should study the [content outline](#) and make note of the topical areas in which they need additional information. The following list is designed to be a guide to identifying those resources that can help the planner fill in the gaps in their knowledge based on their review of the content outline. Please note the following:

- Many readings are available as e-books to borrow from the [APA online library](#), from any well-stocked planning office, or a university library.
- Those choosing to purchase should consider purchases that not only help in preparing to take the exam but also serve as long-lasting references for professional practice.
- Those interested in additional APA-published reading lists should consider *The Essential Planning Library Revisited* and *100 Essential Books of Planning*.
- This resource list was compiled in December 2018.

Why AICP?

Get Certified!

Are You Eligible?

Apply for Certification

Prepare for the Exam

Candidate Pilot Program

Certification Maintenance

Maximize Your Credential

AICP Fellows

Ethics

Test Tips

- Get plenty of rest for the exam
- Dress in layers
- Eat before the exam
- Arrive early
- Answer every question
- **Use the “marking” option thoughtfully**
- Think of answer before reviewing choices
- Skim answers before reading long questions
- Do math twice
- **Think national**
- **Think APA**
- **Think AICP/Code of Ethics – the BEST answer**

Test Content Outline

New Outline

Fundamental Planning Knowledge – 15%

Plan and Policy Development – 15%

Plan Implementation – 12%

Research and Assessment Methods – 11%

Areas of Practice – 12%

Leadership – 6%

Administration and Management – 6%

Communication and Interaction – 13%

AICP Code of Ethics & Professional Conduct – 10%

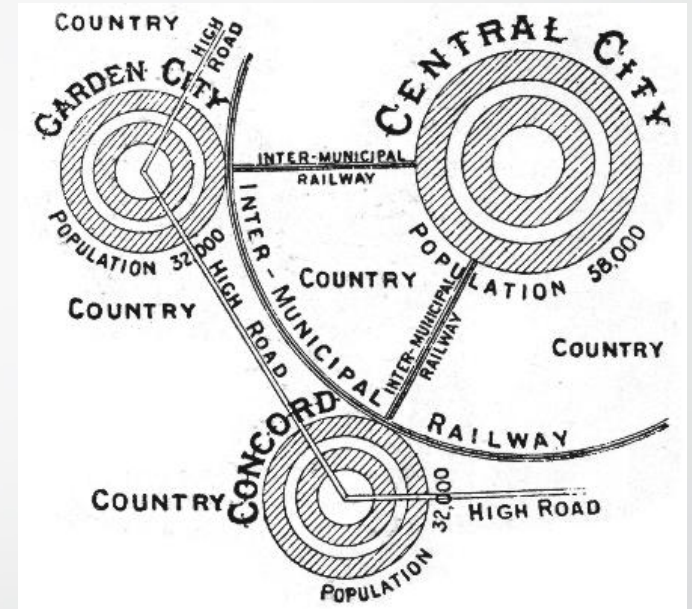
Fundamental Planning Knowledge– 15%

- ❖ History of planning, planning movements, influences on planning
- ❖ Foundational legal principles and decisions
- ❖ Theories of & about planning
- ❖ Patterns of human settlement
- ❖ General terminology, practices, & principles of related professions
- ❖ Natural, social, & economic systems
- ❖ Core values of planning (equity, social justice, democratic engagement, etc.)

Georgia Chapter has an extensive review
of fundamental planning knowledge on
their website

Fundamental Planning Knowledge – 15%

- Resources: Green Book, Timelines (or Pathways) of American Planning History, amendments 1, 5, and 14 and case law
- Know people and events, philosophies and movements, overall theories, urban design theories, city development theories...



*APA-NC's website is a great resource for law information:
Annotated Planning Law Outline
Planning Law Case Chart
Big Cases*

Plan and Policy Development – 15%

- ❖ Preparing to Plan
- ❖ Formulating and drafting policies (e.g., policy analysis, equity, economic and environmental implications)
- ❖ Familiarity with State and Federal Laws (statutory basis of planning)
- ❖ Vision, goal, objective, policy, and priority statement creation and their interrelationships

*Knowing appropriate
planning process is KEY
to passing this exam*

Plan and Policy Development – 15%

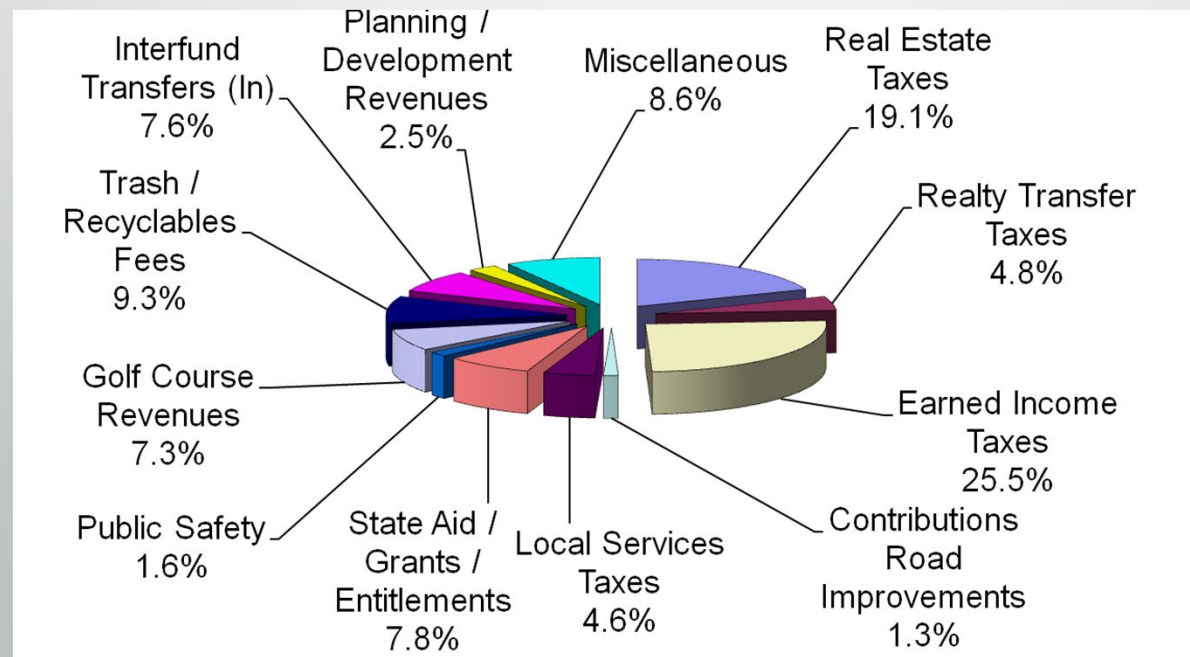
- Knowing appropriate planning process is KEY to passing this exam
- Consider the process in the different areas of practice and in the context of public participation and social justice
- Resource: Planners Communication Guide 2.0
www.planning.org/communicationsguide/



Consider this process in the different areas of practice and in the context of public participation and social justice

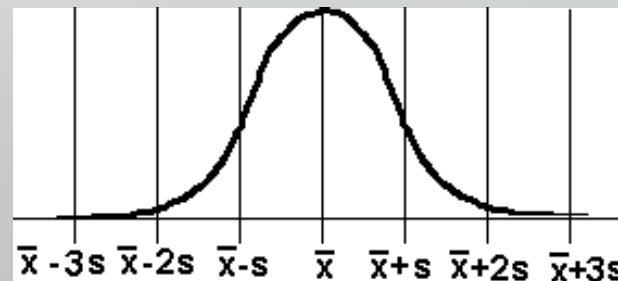
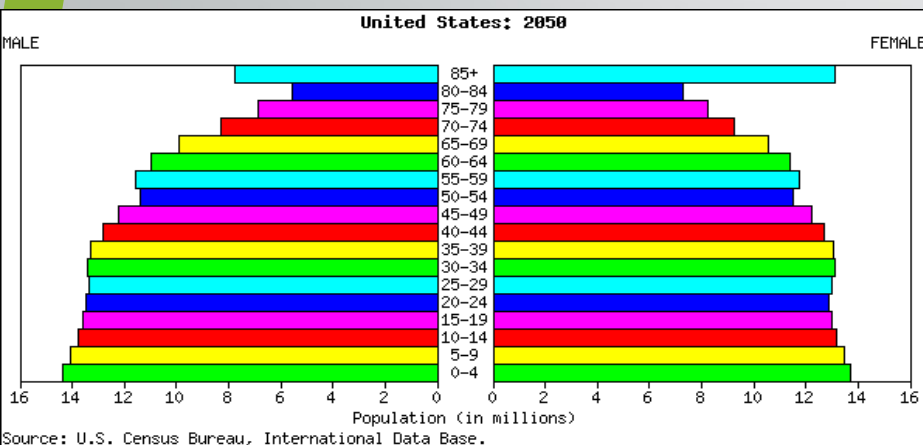
Plan Implementation – 12%

- ❖ Develop and interpret rules, regulations, policies, and programs (e.g., codes and regulations, budgeting and finance, decision making, capital improvement)
- ❖ Proposal or project assessment for consistency with adopted programs and plans, laws, regulation, and policy

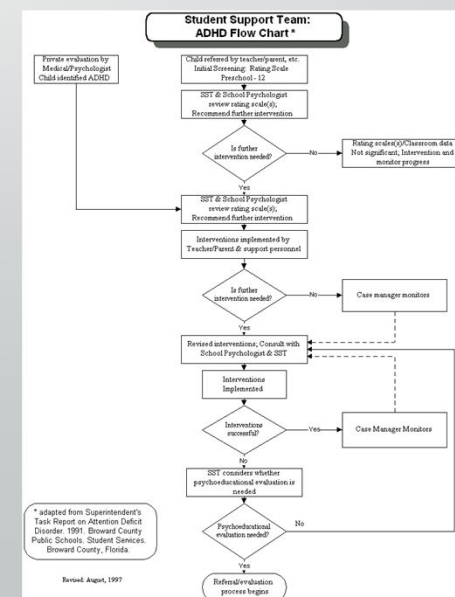


Research and Assessment Methods – 11%

- ❖ Conducting research and acquiring knowledge (e.g., qualitative and quantitative research, experiential, oral histories, research methods, precedents and examples, best practices, analysis and reporting, surveying, sources of data, metadata, recognizing implicit bias)
- ❖ Spatial analysis (e.g., GIS, mapping, interpretation, 3D visualization, modeling)
- ❖ Community involvement and engagement to develop a sound understanding of a community



Flow Chart



Areas of Practice – 12%

- ❖ Comprehensive and Sectoral Planning
- ❖ Communities, Subareas, Corridors, and Neighborhoods
- ❖ Rural Areas and Small Towns
- ❖ Sustainability and Growth Management
- ❖ Housing
- ❖ Land Use and Development Regulation
- ❖ Hazard Mitigation and Resiliency
- ❖ Environment and Natural Resources
- ❖ Historic and Cultural Resources
- ❖ Institutions
- ❖ Energy
- ❖ Infrastructure
- ❖ Transportation
- ❖ Economic Development
- ❖ Urban Design
- ❖ Parks, Recreation, and Open Space
- ❖ Health and Active Living
- ❖ Food Systems

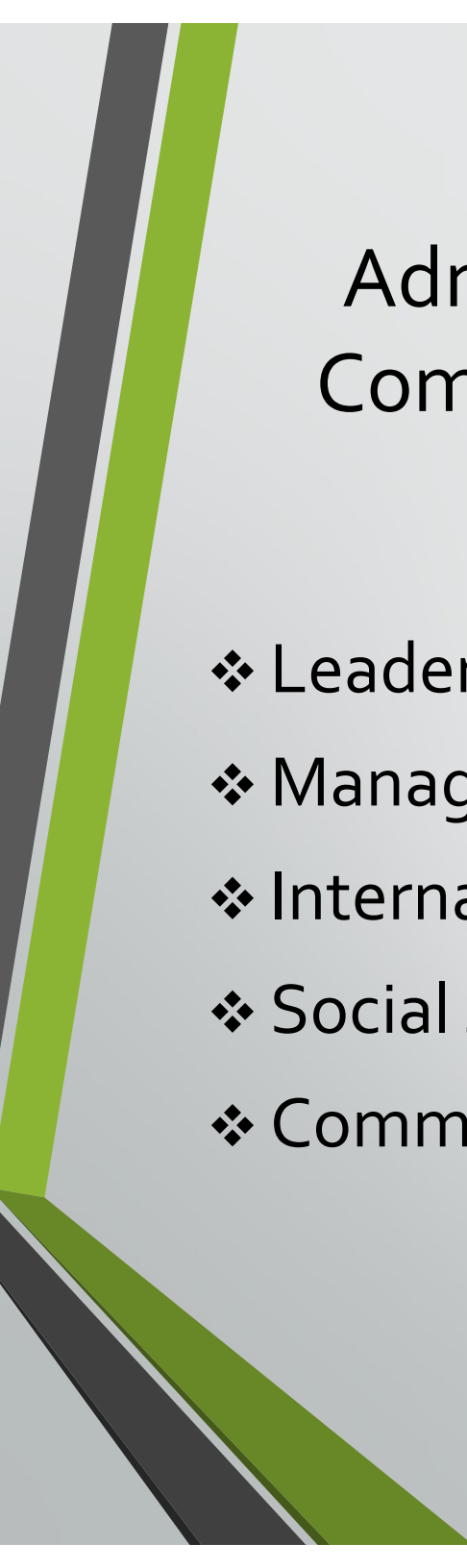


Kennedy & Montgomery Streetscape Concept

Areas of Practice – 12%

- Understand the history, legislative background, terminology, and implementation tools for these topics – and how to plan for them!
- Do Not Think State Specific!!
- Read the APA Policy Guide for any topics you are not familiar with.





Leadership – 5%
Administration & Management – 6%
Communication and Interaction – 13%

- ❖ Leadership
- ❖ Managing external relationships
- ❖ Internal organizational management
- ❖ Social Justice
- ❖ Communication

Communication and Interaction

Social justice

e.g., planning for diverse or underserved communities, social empowerment

- ❖ Public involvement planning
- ❖ Public participation techniques
- ❖ Identifying, engaging, and serving underserved groups
- ❖ Social justice issues, literature, and practice
- ❖ Working with diverse communities
- ❖ Coalition building

*Knowing the
public process of
planning is KEY to
passing this exam*

*Understand techniques and how they function
and when they are best used*

Know names – Alinsky, Davidoff, Arnstein

*Understand basic social justice issues and
approaches to solving them*

AICP Code of Ethics & Professional Conduct – 10%

- ❖ Most recent version last revised and adopted November 2021 that became effective **January 2022**
- ❖ Available on the APA website
- ❖ 5 sections to the Code :
 - A. Principles to Which We Aspire
 - B. Our Rules of Conduct
 - C. Advisory Opinions
 - D. Adjudication of Complaints of Misconduct
 - E. Discipline of Members

AICP Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct – 10%

- Learn the differences between principles that we aspire to and rules of conduct we are required to meet
- Learn how advice can be sought
- Learn how charges are filed and defended
- Learn who the players are – Ethics Officer and Ethics Committee



AICP Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct – 10%

- Resources:
 - *The Ethical Planning Practitioner*, 2016 – Jerry Weitz
 - PA Chapter AICP Exam page
 - Toolkit for Conducting Ethics Session
 - Ethics Cases of the Year
 - Planning Ethics in Action Blog

Exam Questions

Practice exams are critical, but don't memorize specific questions – use them to understand your grasp of the topic. Format quality varies greatly.

Real questions require a mix of professional judgment and technical knowledge. In the past APA has noted that the exam tests 40% knowledge and 60% skills.

The real exam has a much greater percentage of longer, scenario based questions than most practice exams currently available.

Sample Question

Industry	Local Employment	National Employment
X	3%	6%
Y	10%	7%
Z	11%	3%

5. Listed above are two types of employment percentages for industries X, Y, and Z in a metropolitan area. The local employment for each industry is listed as a percent of total local employment, and the national employment in each industry is listed as a percent of total national employment. Under the location quotient method, an economic planner can assign which of these industries to the export sector of the metropolitan area?

- A. Y only
- B. X only
- C. X and Z
- D. Y and Z

Answer: D. This is a realistic example of the type of calculation question that the exam may have (from the Georgia Chapter).

Sample Question

Which of the following pieces of federal legislation focused on slum clearance?

- A. 1906 Antiquities Act
- B. 1934 Federal Housing Act
- C. 1949 Housing Act
- D. 1968 New Communities Act

Answer: C. Know this level of detail on key federal legislation.

Sample Question

Which of the following court case(s) is/are concerned with takings:

- I. Renton v. Playtime Theatres Inc.
- II. Pennsylvania Coal Co. v. Mahon
- III. Metromedia, Inc. v. City of San Diego
- IV. Agins v. City of Tiburon

- A. I only
- B. II only
- C. I and III
- D. II and IV

Answer: D. Three points here – one, this question format will appear frequently. Two, court case questions can be important to mark, or make notes from, since they can overlap somewhat (see next slide/question). Three – this is a simple case law question. See the next slide for a more difficult case law question.

Sample Question

The landmark case *Agins v. City of Tiburon* (1980) established a test: a regulation is a taking if it can be shown that it:

- I. Prompts a property owner to file a lawsuit.
- II. Deprives property of all economically viable use.
- III. Creates a nuisance on the affected property.
- IV. Fails to advance a legitimate governmental interest.

- A. I and II
- B. II and IV
- C. II and III
- D. III and IV

Answer: B. Similar points as the prior slide. One – question format. Two – marking (or notes) can help you answer questions due to potential overlap of questions. Three – this is an example of a more difficult case law question, focused on the details of the ruling.

Sample Question

You are a planning director at a county that is going to be implementing countywide zoning for the first time. Which steps would be critical in this process?

- I. General public education on the purpose and value of zoning.
- II. GIS analysis of existing land uses throughout the county
- III. Planning department staff review of the Future Land Use Plan in the County Comprehensive Plan.
- IV. Specific outreach to stakeholders (including business community, developers, and community interest groups).
- V. Outreach through a variety of methods (including website, social media, traditional print media, and public meetings).

- A. I only
- B. I, II, and V
- C. I, II, III, and V
- D. I, II, III, IV, and V

Answer: D.

Sample Question

You are an urban planner for a city, working on a revitalization plan for a commercial area that is a distinct entry point for the city, as well as an important provider of commercial services to the adjacent residential neighborhoods. The area has two anchor stores that are still vibrant, along with a few new businesses and several vacant or underutilized properties. For this project, the least appropriate method of public outreach and engagement would be:

- A. Delphi Method
- B. Design Charette
- C. Taskforce Meetings
- D. Targeted Interviews

Answer: A.

Ethics Sample Question (often scenario based)

You are the planning director in a small town. Your husband runs the local country club and is applying for construction of a new swimming pool. This application will be reviewed by the planning commission for approval. What will you do?

- A. Invite the planning commission to tour the country club to see exactly where the pool will be built.
- B. Ask your husband to offer complimentary memberships to all commissioners.
- C. Inform the commission about your connection to the situation and remove yourself from the review process.
- D. Write an extensive staff report about the benefits of the pool for the community.

Answer: C.

Sample Question

An AICP member charged with misconduct under the AICP Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct can appeal the initial determination to which entity?

- A. AICP Commission
- B. Executive Committee of AICP
- C. Executive Director of AICP
- D. AICP Ethics Committee

Answer: D.

Alexis Williams, AICP, PP
PA Chapter Professional Development Officer
Alexis.Williams@stvinc.com

Scott Duncanson, AICP
PA Chapter Professional Development
Committee Member

www.planningpa.org



American Planning Association
Pennsylvania Chapter

Making Great Communities Happen