AICP Prep Class 2026

Exam overview
&
AICP-tailored study strategies and other sources of prep material

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American Planning Association
Massachusetts Chapter
Creating Great Communities for All

Why AICP?

The AICP is APA's professional institute and provides the only nationwide, independent verification of planners' qualifications. Certified planners pledge to uphold high standards of practice, ethics, and professional conduct, and to keep their skills sharp and up to date by continuously pursuing advanced professional education.

AICP Exam Prep
Goals of these Sessions

All classes take the approach that it's impossible to review everything that may show up on the AICP exam. The sessions are intended to:

- Provide a basic foundation of major topics highlighted by the APA.
- Show where additional information for in-depth study can be located.
- Establish a clear baseline for future study on your own.

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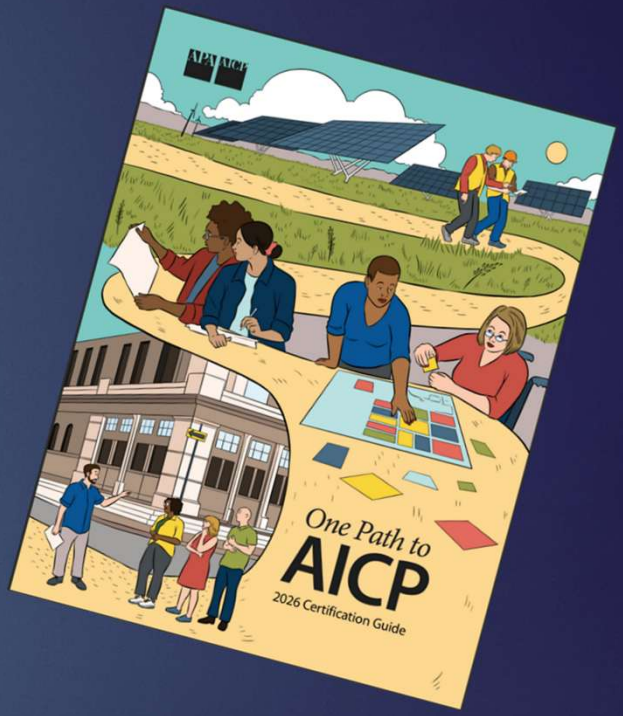
The AICP Certification Guide outlines each step toward certification. You will need to confirm you have read it when registering for the exam.



AICP Certification Guide (2026)Link

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OnePath to AICP - 2026

The *tentative* dates are:

Activity	2026 Window
Exam Registration	April 1 – September 11
Exam Administration	April 1 – September 30
Experience Assessment Submission	April 1 – November 30

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Basic Certification Criteria

- Must be a current member of APA
- Must pass the AICP exam
- Must complete one of the combination of education and corresponding years of professional planning experience

Education/Experience

Education[1]	Required Years of Professional Planning Experience
Graduate (master's or doctoral) degree in planning from PAB-accredited program[2]	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]	3
Any other graduate or undergraduate degree	4
No college degree/no degree information provided	8

Professional Experience Criteria

- Demonstrate a professional level of responsibility and resourcefulness.
- Evaluate multiple impacts to a community when implementing professional planning tasks.
- Influence public decision-making in the public interest.

Use the Experience Assessment Worksheet (in the AICP Certification Guide) to evaluate your professional experience. The APA can assist you if you have questions.

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Exam Overview

- Testing the application of planning knowledge and experience.
- Reduced emphasis on rote memorization of facts and figures.
- More decision making on the part of examinees
- Current practice and emerging trends.

https://www.planning.org/certification/exam prep/examdevprocess/

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Step 1: Map your study plan

Outline of Exam Subject Matter

I. RESEARCH AND ASSESSMENT METHODS (11%)
II. FUNDAMENTAL PLANNING KNOWLEDGE (15%)
III. COMMUNICATION AND INTERACTION (13%)
IV. PLAN AND POLICY DEVELOPMENT (15%)
V. PLAN IMPLEMENTATION (12%)
VI. ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT (6%)
VII. LEADERSHIP (6%)
VIII. AREAS OF PRACTICE (12%)
IX. AICP CODE OF ETHICS AND PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT (2022 REV) (10%)

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Access APA resources

- APA Resources
- AICP Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct (rev. 1/2022)
- PAS Reports
- *Planning* magazine
- APA Policy Guides
- APA Knowledge Center: Applied Research Reports and Guides

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Additional APA online resources

- National Planning Pioneers
- Planning and Law Division
- Foundational Land Use Law Cases
- Chapter Presidents Council Exam Prep
- History Timeline
- American Planning History Since 1900

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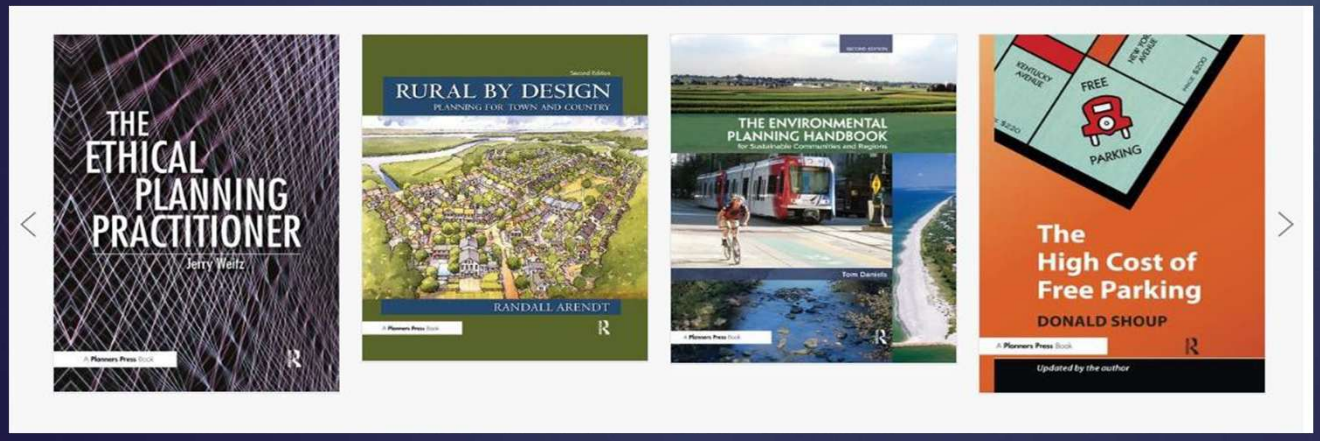
Access published resources

Selected Resources: AICP Certification Exam

- Borrow as e-books from the APA online library, from a well-stocked planning office, or a university library.
- Consider purchases that also serve as long-lasting references for professional practice.
- Additional APA-published reading lists: *The Essential Planning Library Revisited* and *100 Essential Books of Planning*.

Many discounted through APA



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Other Chapters with good resources to utilize:

- CT. Chapter: March 28, 2026 – All day prep session. Free!
- FL. Chapter : Great resource with classes and video archives.
- MI. Chapter : Loaded with stuff.
- MA. Chapter: Why isn't this first on the list?

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Access online Non-APA Resources:

- Planning Prep
  http://planningprep.com/
- Planetizen
  http://www.planetizen.com/courses/ai_cp

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In General:

- Familiarity with the public planning process:
  - planners' roles;
  - responsibilities of planning commissions and zoning boards;
  - zoning and decision making;
  - public hearing process;
  - citizen participation.

- "What would you do" planning process questions
- Emphasis on agency management, policy and decision making, citizen participation & ethics.
- Great breadth of subject matter, not depth.
- Professional judgment, intermixed with technical knowledge

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In General:

- Know current trends
- Study the AICP Code of Ethics
- Focus on citizen participation issues
- U.S. Census – Go to www.census.gov
- Exam typically includes trends, not information specific to any geography.
- Think nationally, NOT MA.

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Study Tips

- Start early and continue to refresh
- Flash cards for rote knowledge
- Memorize significant dates and events
- Take practice tests – but not for content
- Focus on your weak areas
- Think in terms of a National perspective
- Based on an assumption that the taker works in a municipal planning office
- Find a study partner or group.

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Questions?

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