



AICP Exam Survey Results

Beginning in 2013, APA Ohio has been conducting a survey of Ohio members who have been approved to take the AICP test. Once the testing period is opened, APA Ohio sends out an invitation to take the survey to all those who have been approved to take the exam. Our hope is that we will develop a robust data base of information on how much time and effort it takes to both apply for and study for the AICP exam, and advice on the best study materials and test taking tips.

A total of 42 members have participated in the survey thus far from May 2013-May 2015. Results are summarized below.

For more information, visit www.ohioplanning.org/aicpexam.

Pass Rate of Respondents: 88% pass rate. Of the 42 respondents, 40 had taken the test and 35 passed. Of those that passed the exam, five had taken the exam one time previously.

Application Preparation: On average, the respondents spent approximately 11 hours to prepare the application over a two week period, though the median was 9 hours and the range was from a few as 3 hours to as many as 35.

Test Preparation: Of the 38 who responded, the **average number of hours spent studying was 70**, close to the median of 60 hours. However, there was quite a range of responses, with one person studying about 3 hours and another studying over 300 hours. Of the 31 people who responded about the period over which they studied, the **average was about 10.5 weeks**, though the median was only about 8 weeks.

Advice for Future Test Takers: The survey provides respondents an opportunity to share their studying advice on what worked and didn't work for them. Not surprising, test takers have provided a wide range of tips to the open-ended question. A summary of recommendations and their frequency are highlighted in the table below, while the complete responses are located at the end of this report.

Common suggestions:

- Start early
- Use common sense/practical knowledge
- Go beyond APA/AICP Review material
- Don't rely on APA's Planning Prep website

Types of resources used sorted by frequency of response

12	Practice exams
11	Notecards and/or online flashcards
11	Planetizen Course
7	AICP Exam Prep 3.0
6	Read Planning Magazine
5	Study Guides
5	Reviewed AICP Ethics
3	APA Planning Prep website
3	Took a Pretest to identify weaknesses (see http://planningprep.com which offers a number of practice exams and feedback on your strengths and weaknesses)
3	CD study manual published by the Chapter President's Council available from APA Ohio Chapter
2	YouTube webinars of APA presentations
1	Know court cases
1	APA National Conference study session
1	APA podcasts
1	Study guide available from the APA Pennsylvania Chapter
1	Participated in a study group

Support from Employer. Of the 39 people who responded to the question about the type of support received from one's employer, 57% received some type of financial assistance to take the exam, while 55% received verbal support/encouragements, while 14% indicated that they didn't receive any type of support .

	No of Responses	% of 39
Verbal Support	23	55%
All financial support	14	33%
Some financial support	10	24%
Time off work to take exam	11	26%
Time off work to study	5	12%
None of the above	6	14%

General Testing Advice.

1. Don't rely on planning prep website. Questions were not at all like the actual test. I found the planning prep website and the AICP guide to not provide the same information that was on the test. I was actually very surprised.
2. Don't obsess about the history/time line. Questions are mostly not that detailed.
3. Do not focus overly on any subject and start early to identify your deficiencies. Take practice exams and questions and do not rely on APA material, it does little to help. The exam is not comprehensive and you can be given a poor list of questions that heavily lean to one topic or another. Do not read into questions and expect ethics questions to be much more of the exam than stated.
4. You can't study for everything on the exam, so don't get hung up on getting comprehensive studying and memorization done.
5. If you are a practicing professional don't spend too much time studying. The bulk of the questions are common sense and are logic based.
6. Focus on what is the best answer for the particular question. Knowing how to convert acres to square feet is a must.
7. Many things are intuitive or logical enough to puzzle through. The two things that aren't are the ethical sections and the law sections. You simply have to know the cases by name and what they are for, and you have to know the ethics well, because it's not intuitive.
8. Notecards are immensely helpful. And focus on making connections between information versus memorizing it.
9. Planetizen course was the best resource.
10. I took the Planetizen AICP Exam Preparation Course, which organized the course according to the exam topics and the proportion of questions related to each topic, which was very helpful. It also had a pre-test that helped benchmark progress and identify areas of weakness. Also, it was very clear that the exam is really meant for public-sector planners who work in planning/zoning departments. I do not feel that I would have been prepared for the exam, had I not had experience in such a work environment. I do feel like my private-sector and non-profit planning experiences were sufficient to give me the practical experience needed for many of the judgement-based questions.
11. The Planetizen study course was helpful. Try to take as many practice tests/quizzes as you can.
12. Study much more than the exam study guides that are provided by APA. Very few questions come from that material. Read Planning magazine and really understand the concepts. Take lots of practice exams. Many of the questions are worded very weird and you can tell they are trying to trick you.
13. I personally reviewed my old class notes and used both the 2.0 and 3.0 AICP exam prep produced by APA.
14. DON'T WAIT UNTIL THE LAST MINUTE! Read multiple sources multiple times; Make flashcards of key information (it is not so much the act of memorization, but the act of writing the info down on flashcards that helps ingrain the info);
15. Start earlier than you think you need to. I wish I would have begun about 12 weeks ahead so I could gather all the resources together and organize them ahead of time - I did do this about 10 weeks before - it may sound like a lot of time is still left, but there's so much information to look over that its best to start sooner than later. Lay out a rough timeline of how you're going to study - reading/making flashcards/taking practice exams, etc. Everyone has a different way of learning and remembering facts, so just do what works for you. Use the AICP exam study guide - I actually didn't look at this until about 4 days before the exam and wish I would have looked at it a little sooner. However, it was a good summary of all the things I had already studied from other resources (Planetizen, Georgia and North Carolina APA chapter ppts, etc). Make sure to look at budgeting and financial related information - luckily I looked over the AICP exam study guide the night before and happened to really study this section as I was not as familiar with some of the terms and processes. I ended up getting several questions related to this where I had to apply what I learned in order to answer the questions. So I guess just make sure to study the areas that you aren't as familiar with. The law and people portions don't come up very much during the exam, but those

should be the easy questions you get right if you studied - just use the AICP exam study guide for this and then make flashcards.

16. Since there is such a broad range of information, study early and often but in small intervals. Keep up with current events in the planning world. The Planetizen online course really helped a lot. Taking practice exams probably was the best preparation because it laid out how questions were asked. It seemed that knowing HOW to take the test was just as important as knowing the information that was on the test. Be prepared for things that come up that can take away time from studying (eg. work, sickness, a life event, etc.)
17. Four people from our office took it at the same time, so it was easier to hold each other accountable. Study your ethics, people, current trends, and Census data. I used planningprep.com to take a number of practice exams, and Planetizen has a nice course as well, but you have to pay for it. Georgia has a nice study guide and Pennsylvania does too. Most of the test is Plan Implementation and Functional Areas of Practice, but your experience will help you answer these questions. You cannot study for everything, so you just have to use your best answer. As far as the ethics section, think would would the APA do, and don't consider your actual situation (politics, etc.) when making your decision. As far as the actual test: Don't be nervous! The worst part about taking the actual test is at the end. The screen goes blank for a few seconds (that feels like an eternity) and then a survey pops up. Once you take the survey, the screen goes blank again for what seems like an eternity, and then you get your score. The test is written in a weird way. For example, you need to know your people, dates, etc., but it will ask you about them in a roundabout way. One question I remember asked which case was most likely to lose an eminent domain lawsuit in court, and listed four cases as choices. Use common sense, read each question carefully, and pay attention to every question. In my case, a question late in the test gave me the answer to a question early in the test. If you studied more than 30-40 hours, you'll do fine.
18. Start studying early so that you have enough time to study the latest trends.
19. I suggest taking a preparatory class to assist you with determining on which topics you need to focus your studying efforts.
20. A lot of the questions require basic reasoning, not specific knowledge of planning concepts.
21. Have multiple study guides available and make certain to take the practice exams.
22. Spend more time than you'd like to on the people behind the theories, rather than just theories themselves. The exam seemed to have a bias towards the creators of ideas, rather than the ideas themselves.
23. Give yourself at least 3 months to study so you can pace it out. Last couple weeks should be kept to go through focused notes and those areas that you may be least confident in.
24. Vary your source of study materials. Don't just rely on one or two sources, no matter how good. My exam was vastly different than the materials I was using.
25. Study planning processes--Comprehensive vs. strategic vs economic vs EIS, etc. However, I was not very impressed with the exam. There was so much important information that could have been covered, yet I felt that many questions on the exam were somewhat arbitrary.
26. It is not about how long you study, it is about how you study. Study in a way that is best for you. In my case, the practice exams were the most useful.
27. It is possible to get your AICP even after many years of planning practice. In fact, I found that my experiences gave me a lot of insight into aspects of planning that I had not formally studied. Experience DOES count a lot toward practical situations you might not know on the test but are forced to guess. I found the studying hard to fit into the day while working full time, but I made it work. In the end, I am glad I did this, because it made me realize how much I love planning and how interdisciplinary the field is. I am a better planner for studying for the AICP and have found that I am using the new knowledge in my job and the community. I did not use a study group, but found it didn't matter. Sometimes that takes more time away from focused study.
28. Start studying early and study often. Don't get hung up on too much memorizing. Think big picture.
29. Give yourself plenty of time to study. I would also recommend taking an online course such as Planetizen as they provide guidance and great study material relevant to the test.
30. Figure out concepts and figure out how to pick best answer since questions had multiple correct answers. I was surprised with how much I studied; it was still a very difficult test. The second time, I felt much more comfortable.

