



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.

So far, ***a total of 62 members have participated in the survey***, and the results to date are summarized below:

Pass Rate of Respondents

Of the 62 respondents, 61 had taken the test and 50 passed. Of those that passed the exam, 7 had taken the exam one time previously.

Application Preparation

On average, the respondents spent approximately 9.5 hours to prepare the application over a two week period, though the median was 10 hours and the range was from as few as 2 hours to as many as 35 hours.

A majority of the survey respondents gave some advice on completing the application, most frequently to allow enough time to prepare a thorough and thoughtful application. A listing of the complete responses is included at the end of this report (p 3).

Test Preparation

Of the 61 who took the exam and responded to the question of test preparation, the **average number of hours spent studying was 65.5**, with the median being 100 hours. There was quite a range of responses, with one person studying about 3 hours and another studying over 300 hours. Of the 61 people who responded about the period over which they studied, the **average was about 11 weeks**, with the median being 4 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 (p 5).

Common suggestions:

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

Types of resources used sorted by frequency of response

Practice exams

Notecards and/or online flashcards

Planetizen Course

AICP Exam Prep 3.0

Read Planning Magazine

Reviewed AICP Code of Ethics

Study Guides

APA Planning Prep website

CD study manual published by the Chapter President's Council available from APA Ohio Chapter

YouTube webinars of APA presentations

Study guide available from the APA Pennsylvania Chapter

Took a Pretest to identify weaknesses (see <http://planningprep.com> which offers a number of practice exams and feedback on your strengths and weaknesses)

Know court cases

APA National Conference study session

APA podcasts

Participated in a study group

Helpful Websites/Guides

- The website <http://planningprep.com/> provides a number of free practice tests with feedback on your results that identifies your strengths and weaknesses.
- Georgia APA chapter - includes downloadable PowerPoint presentations that are prepared and presented at the Chapter's annual AICP Exam Review session.
<http://georgiaplanning.org/aicp/aicp-exam-reviews/>
- North Carolina APA chapter – includes planning law materials and research methods presentation (as well as links to APA's AICP website and Georgia APA's website. <http://apa-nc.org/aicp/>
- Pennsylvania APA chapter – includes downloadable PowerPoint presentations from the chapter's Professional Development Committee's annual AICP exam prep session.
<http://planningpa.org/for-planners/professional-planners/aicp-exam-prep/>
- Takings Decisions of the U.S. Supreme Court: A Chronology. By Robert Meltz, Legislative Attorney. July 20, 2015 <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/97-122.pdf>

Support from Employer

Of the 47 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 and 55% received verbal support/encouragement, and 41% received some time off work. In contrast, 19% indicated that they didn't receive any type of support from their employer.

Support from Employer		
	Number of Responses	Percentage of Total
Financial Assistance	21	34%
Some financial support	11	18%
All financial support	10	16%
Verbal Support	20	33%
Some Time Off Work	20	33%
Time off work to take exam	11	18%
Time off work to study	9	15%

Advice for Completing the AICP Application – Complete Responses

Answer the questions they are asking. Use examples. Don't use fluff words or skirt around the topics.

Take it serious and thoroughly review the question and your response(s). Be sure to look at the application questions and responses from a point of view other than yours. And ask yourself does my response make sense and address the question.

Make sure to allocate enough time to write the essays and to give previous employers enough time to write letters of recommendation/proof of job experience.

Peer review.

Follow the advice given on the application bulletin. Be sure to answer all the questions as outlined in the bulletin.

Get your information together in advance. Submit your application during the early bird window. That way, you have the opportunity to update your submission if needed.

Find a good example and use it as a model for your application.

The application process gets onerous if you have had more than one employer in your past so keep that in mind. Also for past employers plan ahead to reach out to them to get their letters since it is very likely folks you knew then have moved on to other jobs.

Gather all your job data early. Have someone double check it for you. And get at least 3 sets of eyes on your essay answers, including at least one who isn't a planner.

Be succinct. Stick to your direct planning experience.

Focus on skills, experiences and how they relate to the application questions.

Start early.

Make reference to your experience and make sure to address all elements of the questions.

The application is the easiest part of the process to be honest. Although it is time consuming, if you meet all of the criteria to take the exam, this part is simple.

Start early to allow enough time to complete responses.

Don't let the application overwhelm you; focus on 2 or 3 projects or work experiences to complete each section.

Work on getting employment verification letters early to make sure you have them in time.

Focus on planning experience and be thorough. Include work done as internships and school projects.

Begin sending out letters of recommendation requests 4 weeks prior to application deadline.

Allow adequate time to completely respond. Don't try to complete all at once.

Application process is a little daunting, but it is good for 3 tries at exam so worth it.

Read the application materials at least 3 months before you want to apply. That will give you time to get certain documentation that is required without feeling rushed.

Read the questions carefully and provide examples.

Read the Exam Candidate Bulletin.

Try to meet the required work experience through one work position so that you only have to write one series of application essays.

My application was not approved although I cannot figure out why. Need help with the essays, I guess. I wrote about my 7 years leading zoning code revision projects that included participation from a range of stakeholders.

Gather needed materials early. Ask co-workers or professional friends to review answers.

Make sure you put thought into the application. Don't rush through it.

The application is overly cumbersome. Plan to take a good amount of time just to fill it out.

Make your project experience relevant to planning.

Organize your thoughts/responses beforehand, then the writing comes easy. Proof your responses.

Make sure you have enough real world experience, and/or a planning degree.

Be as thorough as possible.

Have several coworkers proofread the application to ensure you are addressing all components of the Criteria.

Write about your work experience as if you are interviewing for a job. Even if your work experience doesn't quite match up with a question on the application, you can relate your tasks to this in some way. Pick questions to answer that are more general (ethics, thorough decision making) that can give you a strong essay even if your work experience wasn't necessarily working for a city or county planning department.

Phone and ask questions if you're in an unusual situation, because the application isn't very specific. (In my case, I waited YEARS until my actual hours on the job added up to the required experience, but it turns out that the way the hours are computed I could have applied earlier -- like 2008 instead of 2013.)

Read questions carefully and keep responses tied to question.

Do it early. Don't wait for the last minute.

Do not try to do the application all at once. It helps to develop the essays over time. Also, do not wait until the last minute to get information from others, such as transcripts.

Use the Microsoft word document they give you to fill out the application. Look at the questions and understand what they are looking for and write down some tasks / skills that you've done to fulfill that question. Try and use different projects / examples for each question - then go back over and complete each question thoroughly. I used my resume as a guide and applied it to the application.

It's easier if you're only using one job to meet the eligibility criteria, otherwise you have to write the same 4 essays for each additional position.

Use all planning experiences to answer the questions. Much of planning is interrelated, so something may not at first look as if it applies, but there are many ways the application questions can be successfully answered.

DON'T WAIT UNTIL THE LAST MINUTE! Treat it like a take-home exam. Typical college exams included multiple choice and then an essay at the end; applicants should view the application process as the AICP exam's essay questions.

Answer questions, but not too wordy. Found process to be a little intimidating.

Advice for Future Test Takers – Complete Responses.

Start studying early and study often. Don't get hung up on too much memorizing. Think big picture.

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.

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.

Study virtually every single case regarding takings and other legal issues. The landmark cases such as Euclid Vs. Ambler, Pennsylvania coal vs. Mahon, Penn Central vs. City of New York, and Berman vs. Parker are not at all discussed. Munn vs. State of Illinois will be asked. Use this link as a resource:

<https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/97-122.pdf> also use this one: <http://www.studystack.com/flashcard-32462>

Also learn as much as you can about FDR's new deal and the programs that were started under the New Deal.

There are at least a dozen questions that cover this section. Don't bother studying any GIS because it's not really covered except know the difference between raster and vector data. Study social justice hard. Study planning theory hard. Know the different types of quantitative research methods. Know your architecture nomenclature.

There are tons and tons of trick questions and some of the nomenclature questions will not be familiar to you.

The obvious questions are skipped. I graduated from an accredited college with a 4.0 and this exam is NOT designed for the faint of heart.

Focus on ethics and law.

Take it as soon as possible so the information learned in school is easier to remember.

Understanding how the exam and the questions are structured was key for me. I took practice exams, then went back and studied the concepts I missed and made related flashcards. Repeated test and flashcards until it was clear.

Start early and focus on areas of weakness.

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.

The test focuses more on situations and broader concepts rather than specific data. It makes it more difficult to study for, but provides a better measure of your experience rather than your ability to memorize information.

The PDF on CD from the local chapter was very helpful. Memorize the history and law items.

You can't rely on just the AICP Exam Prep 3.0 course, material covered on the exam is taken from a variety of sources.

Pick a study tool like the APA AICP Study Guide or the Planetizen AICP Exam Prep Corporation and work your way through that; focus on history and law, know the AICP Code of Ethics, and focus on areas of planning practice that you are less familiar with.

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.

You can't study everything.

Study early and often. 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 taking it, though.

There were questions on the exam that were not in either of the above study guides.

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.

Be ready for test taking and knowing the difference between the right answer and the most right answer...

It is a commitment and expensive-save time and money up if you want to pass.

Think broadly.

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.

Use APA Study Guides, but there are some questions that were not in any of the materials.

The test is more about memorization rather than practical planning. Memorize methods of survey and history dates and cases.

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.

Study broadly, but deeply.