AICP Exam Survey Results
November 2013 – May 2018

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 78 members have participated in the survey*, and the results to date are summarized below:

Pass Rate of Respondents
91%

Support from Employer

Type of Support	%
Some financial	25%
All financial	23%
Verbal	45%
Time off work to study	20%
Time off work to take exam	29%

THE APPLICATION PROCESS

Time Spent on Application Process

	No. of Hours	Timeframe
Average	9.5 Hours	2 Weeks
Range	2-35 Hours	1-4 Weeks

Advice for Applying

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.

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.

Budget enough time to get through the questions and application.

I liked the peace of mind offered by submitting early. Knowing I could correct any errors helped.

Turn in by the early bird date. Pay close attention to the criteria, and make sure you've hit upon each one. (Read over your responses with the check sheet after you've finished.)

Discuss with former bosses your work to assist in writing the essays.

Have the application peer-reviewed.

TEST PRAPARATION

Time Spent on Test Preparation

	No. of Hours	Timeframe
Average	65.5 Hours	11 Weeks
Range	3-300 Hours	1-16 Weeks

Test Preparation Resources

Practice exams

Notecards and/or online flashcards

Planetizen Course

AICP Exam Prep 3.0 *(phasing out as of November 2018)*

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.
  https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/97-122.pdf

Most Popular Advice for Test Takers

- Start studying early
- Use common sense/practical knowledge
- Focus on modern policy and ethics, well known court cases, and less on history dates and numbers
- Go beyond APA/AICP Review material - don't rely solely on APA's Planning Prep materials

Advice for Test Takers

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 then 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.

Study beyond the exam prep material that is provided. Maybe even be part of study groups as well.

Do not focus on memorizing dates. Focus on the impact of the events, case law etc

Focus on applicability. Start early. Utilize your available resources.

If you are going to buy a study course, do so early and make a plan for spacing out the lessons. For me, the APA's practice exam was harder than the real exam, so don't sweat your practice results too much. Don't overlook the ethics portion, as the answers are not always intuitive (try to find extra example questions for this portion, starting with the APA website).

Things that you learned in school is not what this test is quizzing you over. This is real life situations.

Unless you are an excellent test taker, START EARLY AND GATHER AS MANY RESOURCES AS YOU CAN! Take as many practice tests as you can - focus on understanding how questions are worded, and interpreting the questions, as opposed to rote memorization.