



Personal Professional Development Plan

The American Planning Association, and its professional institute, AICP, encourage certified planners to maintain a personal professional development plan. While not a requirement of the Certification Maintenance Program¹, a personal professional development plan serves as an aid to AICP members as they participate in professional development activities. The Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI), one of our internal partners, has created an excellent model for the creation of a personal development plan for its members. The following instructions are based on this program (for more information, visit [Part 3](#) of RTPI's Continuing Professional Development Program).

Plan Basics

The personal professional development plan is a written document that a certified planner creates and saves for his or her personal reference. It is a tool that the planner can use to focus, evaluate and prioritize professional development activities. Although there is no specified length or format to the personal professional development plan, elements may include (but are not limited to):

- A description or listing of professional aspirations and goals.
- A description or listing of professional interests and activities.
- A history of previously completed professional development activities in order to keep information all in one place.
- A timeline for several years' worth of future activities or interests. APA recommends that planners use a timeframe of two years for their plans to remain consistent with the requirements of Certification Maintenance. However, planners may wish to use a longer (or even shorter) timeframe in their plans.
- Brochures, emails, or web links of specific potential professional development activities that may fit the interests and goals of the plan. Including enough materials may expand the plan into a folder or portfolio type of product.

What a Plan Can Do

¹ Members requesting an exemption due to foreign practice or hardship are required to submit a personal professional development plan. Please refer to the last page of this document for more details.

APA encourages its certified planners to develop a personal professional development plan because it can provide a number of important benefits that maximize planners' involvement with continuing educational activities.

A personal professional development plan:

- Affords the planner an opportunity to assess current professional development needs and anticipate future needs.
- Functions as a tool the planner can use to evaluate educational activities and identify those that meet his or her professional development needs.
- Allows the planner to target his or her resources toward those activities that best meet his or her professional needs.
- May provide greater justification to employers for granting participation or financial assistance for particular activities already identified in the plan.

How to Develop a Plan

There is no prescribed method for creating a personal professional development plan. However, here are several tips that can help your plan creation process.

- Begin by writing down all the tasks you are currently responsible for, areas you must be knowledgeable about, the skills you need to possess, and changes that are likely to occur in the next two years.
- Seriously consider any short or long-term goals you might have for developing or adapting your career. Be realistic about your ambitions and about the time needed to achieve them.
- Develop ideas about your continuing education needs, what priority each need has, and then list your priorities for the next two years (or whichever timeframe you have chosen.)
- Don't necessarily restrict yourself to thinking about your current professional responsibilities. Think about your career and its development, and consider whether this is a time to strengthen existing skills, develop new skills or broaden your understanding of the planning process.

- You may wish to divide specific continuing education activities into three major categories:
 - Activities needed in order to undertake or advance your current planning work.
 - Activities that keep you in touch with planning issues not directly related to your day-to-day work.
 - Activities that develop skills complementary to professional planning activities and are designed to help career progression or to maintain competence.

- Remember that your personal professional development plan is a flexible document. Return to this document every few months to re-assess its contents, add new ideas, and revise elements that may no longer apply.

Exemptions due to foreign practice or hardship

Members who have been approved for an exemption due to foreign practice or hardship are required to develop a personal professional development plan to maintain certification (see www.planning.org/cm/exemptionswaivers.htm for details). Please submit your personal professional development plan to Cathryn Johnson, Certification Maintenance Program Associate, at AICPCM@planning.org with “Applying for CM exemption” in the subject line or to the address below. Members should maintain a record of attendance should they be audited.

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