

Planning Associates Program Overview

May 14, 2020

Q&A Session

This webinar provided an overview of the Planning Associates (PA) Program from Nate Richards (Regional Planning and Environmental Division North). The vision of the PA Program is to develop and sustain a national network of agile and informed planning leaders who are capable of solving the Nation's most complex water resource issues. The presentation discussed details about the PA Program, tips on how to prepare for the PA application process, application details, and observations and experiences on the program from graduates. For more about the PA Program, visit the [Planning Community Toolbox](#). Potential applicants may reach out to Nate Richards or Joy Muncy, PA Program Manager, to discuss any questions regarding the application process.



This summary of the Question / Answer session of the webinar is not a transcription; questions and responses have been edited and reordered for clarity.

PA Program Schedule

Is the Washington, DC experience split up, or is it held over four weeks in a row?

The Washington, DC experience portion of the program is split up: two weeks are held during the first year of the program and two weeks are held during the second year.

Has the program considered allowing Planning Associates the option to complete all requirements within one year as opposed to two years on an individual basis to reduce the time commitment?

In short, no. The program is designed such that a portion of the required courses are offered the first year and the remaining courses are offered the second year. All Planning Associates are expected to complete all required courses across the two years.

When is the first expected date of travel for the next Planning Associate class entering the program in September 2020?

The first expected in-person meeting will be the two-week team building experience taking place in early December. The PA Program team has been working to develop contingency plans and options for continuing the program virtually should travel restrictions continue through the fall and winter due to the COVID-19 public health emergency.

PA Program Requirements

Are Planning Associates allowed to accept detail assignments while participating in the PA Program?

The program does not stipulate whether Planning Associates can accept details while they are active in the program; this is a decision that would be made between the Planning Associate and his or her supervisor. However, the expectation is that Planning Associates will prioritize their PA Program work and commitments while they are active participants. Past examples of Planning Associates accepting details while in the program demonstrated that doing so adds complexity and stress to the PA Program experience, and also creates conflicts and constraints. Ultimately, if taking a detail would interfere with

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a Planning Associate's ability to perform at the highest levels, he or she should consider finding a different time to either complete the program or accept a detail position.

One current PA program member noted: "I would highly recommend that you take these developmental opportunities one at a time. You will get more out of the program if you are able to dedicate your time to it. While it is possible to "do it all," you will lose some of the value of the program [if you take on a detail at the same time]."

Can Planning Associate applicants receive an exemption to the Planning Core Curriculum (PCC) course requirements if an applicant completed the final Capstone class?

Applicants must have completed either PCC 1 ([USACE Civil Works Project Development Process](#)), 2 ([Planning Essentials](#)), and 3 ([Plan Formulation and Evaluation Capstone](#)) or PCC 1, 2, and 6 (Plan Formulation) from prior years, per the application letter and submittal requirements. However, potential applicants who may have a slightly different training portfolio are still encouraged to apply. In limited cases, the selection committee may find the breadth and depth of training and experience of an applicant may be satisfactory to meet the minimum training requirements.

Do applicants have to be part of the Planning Community of Practice, or can project managers or engineers who work on planning studies also apply?

Non-PCoP members may apply to the PA Program as long as they meet all of the application requirements, including sufficient knowledge of and experience in Planning.

Can any of the 5 to 15 years of Civil Works Planning experience required to apply to the program include non-USACE experience?

Yes – experience required as part of the application process may include non-USACE experience, as long as its relevance to Civil Works Planning is well described in the applicant's resume.

Can a District Commander recommend more than one person from a District per application cycle?

District Commanders can recommend as many PA applicants as they would like each application cycle. Ultimately, the MSC will decide who to put forward for the program based on District Commander recommendations.

By applying, do applicants make a formal commitment to their District or USACE more broadly to stay within the District or organization for a certain period time after completing the program?

Planning Associates are required to maintain a position in the U.S. Government for at least one year following the completion of the program, although it is preferred that this employment is with USACE. There is no issue with Planning Associates moving to another District after applying to or completing the program.