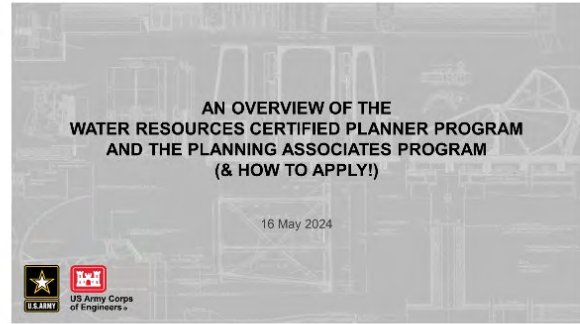


This webinar provided an overview of two developmental opportunities available to the Planning Community, including qualifications for each program and the application process. Kim Townsend (WRCP Program Manager, HQUSACE) presented the Water Resources Certified Planner (WRCP) program. The Planning Associates (PA) program was introduced by Lisa Rabbe (PA Program Manager, IWR) and Brandon Wadlington (PA Class of 2023).



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

This summary includes questions and responses from prior PCoP Webinars on the WRCP and PA Programs in order to serve as a comprehensive, up-to-date resource.

For additional information and resources:

- [Planning Associates Program Knowledge Management Portal Site](#)
- [Water Resources Certified Planner Program Knowledge Management Portal Site](#)
- [Planning Core Curriculum \(PCC\) Planning Community Toolbox page](#)

Water Resources Certified Planner (WRCP) Program

For the WRCP program application processes, does presenting a webinar count as teaching?

Yes, webinars count towards instruction experience. Additionally, applicants have the opportunity to elaborate on their answers in each section by using the “Comments” area. Applicants with any experience that they feel isn’t accurately captured within the application should use that space to provide additional context.

Is there an opportunity to view the essays required for the WRCP Program before beginning the application in the Planner Database?

No. Essay questions are only provided to those candidates who qualify. After the application window closes and all applications have been scored, the WRCP Program Manager will reach out to qualifying candidates by email and provide the essay questions and instructions.

Do WRCP Planners get priority as Planning Mentors?

Yes. Headquarters primarily solicits volunteers to be Planning Mentors from the existing pool of WRCPs.

What is the benefit of becoming a WRCP for a planner who is not planning on applying for a higher-rated position on the General Schedule (GS)?

The WRCP designation is a way of formally recognizing planning expertise within USACE. The program provides the Planning program with a pool of candidates to assist with complex studies or mentor younger planners. However, planners without the WRCP certification can still be recognized, consulted, and sought out for their expertise. When deciding whether to apply to the WRCP program, potential applicants should consult with their mentors and supervisors on their individual goals and career trajectories.

Can planners provide experience on non-General Investigations (GI) studies (e.g., Interagency and International Services, work for others, major rehabilitations) that have a commensurate level of complexity as part of their application? Are these types of studies given the same weight as a GI study submission?

Credit is given for all different study types, with some submissions weighted more heavily due to the complexity of the study. There are many regional programs that don't fit into the study type categories. It is important for applicants to select the type (GI-like or CAP-like) that best fits from the drop-down box in the Planner Database. Applicants may also select "other" and provide the study type and a description in the application comments. Scoring is based on complexity. As a result, GI-like studies will likely be assigned a score commensurate with a feasibility study, general reevaluation report, watershed study, or dam safety modification report depending on the description provided within the comment feature of the application. Applicants may be contacted to confirm the level of effort and complexity.

Planning Associates (PA) Program

Will this year's PA cohort include other disciplines aside from planners, as in past cohorts?

PAs have an intended focus on planning based on its goals of providing an opportunity for students to develop knowledge, skills, and abilities that will help them grow into expert planners, and to develop future planning leaders who can influence the Civil Works Program, including study execution, planning processes, and development and application of policy. However, the program does encourage other disciplines to apply, especially if they are heavily involved in developing Civil Works projects. In addition, there is definite interest in having members of all four planning sub-CoPs (Plan Formulation, Econ, Environmental, and Cultural Resources) apply and be involved in the program.

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

The program handbook does not stipulate whether PAs can accept details while they are active in the program; this is a decision that would be made between the PA and their supervisor. However, the expectation is that PAs will prioritize their PA Program work and commitments while they are active participants and accepting/pursuing a detail assignment during the PA Program is discouraged. When PAs accepted details while in the program in the past, it added complexity and stress to the PA Program experience, and also created some conflicts and constraints. If taking a detail would interfere in any way with a PA's ability to perform at the highest levels, they should consider finding a different time to accept a detail position as significant resources have already been committed on their behalf.

Is the Planning Associates 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 into two different courses (DC 1 and DC 2) that have different curriculums: 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 PAs 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 PAs are expected to complete all required courses across the two years.

PA Application Process

Are applications routed electronically through the system to the District/MS?

Yes. In the past, MSCs would send their approvals via email to the PA Program Manager for compilation with applicants' packages. Now, nominees are responsible for obtaining the approvals and signatures package and then completing the application process by uploading the commander memo and the rest of their package into the system.

What Planning Core Curriculum (PCC) courses need to be completed before applying to the PA program?

Completing PCC courses 1 (Civil Works Project Development Process), 2 (Planning Essentials), and 3 (Plan Formulation and Evaluation Capstone) is a pre-requisite for the PA program (if it was taken before the transition to the three core curriculum series, PCC 6: Plan Formulation, may serve as a substitute for the Plan Formulation and Evaluation Capstone). However, an applicant can be working on completing a PCC course and still apply. To prove their current enrollment, applicants should include the USACE Learning Center form that shows they are scheduled to take the course in their application package.

How flexible are the qualifications for program eligibility (i.e., number of years of planning experience)?

With the exception of the PCC prerequisites, Program qualifications are generalizations. If applicants feel that they possess most but not all qualifications, they should discuss the Program with their supervisor and are still encouraged to apply.

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 the District Commander's 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 of time after completing the program?

PAs 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 PAs moving to another District after applying to or completing the program.

Commonalities and Differences Across the Programs and Application Processes

What is the difference between the WRCP and PA Programs?

They differ in their end goals and the general level of experience at the onset of applying. The PA Program delivers a comprehensive overview of Planning work across business lines, offering planners ways to build and sharpen their skill sets. In comparison, the WRCP Program formally recognizes a planner's role as an expert in the Civil Works arena and considers a holistic approach to a candidate's experience, with an emphasis on soft skills such as leadership. Completing the PA Program is not a prerequisite for being recognized as a WRCP.

An Overview of the Water Resources Certified Planner Program and the Planning Associates Program
Q&A Summary

Do candidates receive feedback on how to strengthen their applications if they are not selected for WRCP certification or the current PA Program cohort?

The application processes for both programs are designed to avoid multiple unsuccessful applications. If not selected, the respective program manager will work with the candidate's MSC Planning Chief to provide clarity on scoring and specific categories for improvement. Both program managers and Susan Werning, the HQ PCoP Deputy, also offer meetings to discuss personalized feedback to candidates who weren't selected.