

# CFP<sup>®</sup> CERTI FICA TION

## THE PROFESSIONAL ADVANTAGES OF CFP<sup>®</sup> CERTIFICATION

A CFP Board Guide on  
Why and How to Become a  
CERTIFIED FINANCIAL PLANNER<sup>™</sup>  
PROFESSIONAL



**CERTIFIED  
FINANCIAL  
PLANNER<sup>™</sup>**

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# YOUR TIMING COULD NOT BE BETTER.

**You are reading this Guide  
because you have expressed  
interest in becoming a  
CERTIFIED FINANCIAL  
PLANNER™ professional.**

Career opportunities in the financial planning field are expected to grow more than 15% over the next decade, according to the U.S. Labor Department, and *U.S. News & World Report* ranks Financial Advisor as #9 in Best Business Jobs for 2019. Baby boomers are approaching or reaching retirement age, and millions of Generation Xers are raising families while trying to save for their later years. Many will require professional guidance to succeed in reaching their financial goals. As a CFP® professional, you can get personal satisfaction from helping your clients secure their futures while simultaneously building your career in a dynamic and growing field.

Earning your CFP® certification requires a commitment to learning and a solid grounding in financial planning. Those who have become CFP® professionals will tell you that the work is worth

the effort. In fact, according to a recent survey of CFP® professionals, 91% of respondents are very satisfied with their career in financial planning and 9 out of 10 would recommend CFP® certification to other financial professionals. In addition, 83% of CFP® professionals say they have a “competitive edge” over financial planners who do not hold the credential. The knowledge you gain from achieving your CFP® certification will help you give better advice to your clients, earn more income, and gain greater trust from your clients and your employer.

The value of the CFP® certification is greater today than ever before. Potential clients are looking for a financial advisor they can trust, and CFP® certification helps you stand out from your competition as a competent and ethical advisor.

## ADVANTAGES OF CFP® CERTIFICATION

When clients select a financial advisor, they place their trust in someone they believe is knowledgeable, experienced, capable and committed to serving their best interests.

**As of October 2019, CFP® professionals will be the only financial planners in the industry who are required to put their client first in every interaction.**

CFP® certification is quickly becoming the essential certification for personal financial planners. Consumers understand that CFP® professionals are the most qualified and trustworthy financial planners they can hire. In addition, major financial planning firms are increasingly incorporating CFP® certification as a key element of their firm strategy. As a CFP® professional committed to working in your clients' best interests at all times, you will stand out in the field and potential clients will know you are their best choice.



### WITH YOUR CFP® CERTIFICATION, YOU'LL HAVE TWO DISTINCT ADVANTAGES:

- You will have the knowledge and skills that enable you to provide excellent advice to your clients, elevate your practice to the highest level and set yourself apart from other financial planners.
- Your CFP® certification will assure clients and potential clients that they can trust you with their finances, because (unlike many others in your field) you will always work in their best interests.

This guide is intended to help anyone seeking CFP® certification gain a thorough understanding of the process and the steps it takes to become a CFP® professional. This is your guide to the opportunities for personal and career growth that will become available when you earn CFP® certification.

# FOUR STEPS TO CERTIFICATION



The process of earning CFP® certification consists of four steps intended to make sure that those who obtain certification have met the competency and ethical standards necessary to use the CFP® certification marks.

1. Complete the education requirement
2. Pass the CFP® exam
3. Meet the experience requirement
4. Pass fitness standards and background check

## STEP 1 COMPLETE THE EDUCATION REQUIREMENT

Before you sit for the CFP® exam, you will need to satisfy the education coursework requirement that makes certain you have a firm understanding of financial planning fundamentals. There are two ways to fulfill the necessary education requirement.

First, complete the required coursework. You can do this through any of the more than 300 CFP Board Registered Programs at colleges and universities across the country. These may be credit or non-credit certificate programs as well as undergraduate or graduate degree programs. You can find a CFP Board Registered Program to fit your needs at [CFP.net/programs](https://www.cfp.net/programs).

Second, if you hold one of the following credentials, you can accelerate your path to CFP® certification:

- Certified Public Accountant (CPA) (Inactive license acceptable)
- Chartered Financial Consultant (ChFC)
- Licensed attorney (Inactive license acceptable)
- Ph.D. in business or economics
- Chartered Financial Analyst® (CFA®)
- Chartered Life Underwriter (CLU)
- Doctor of Business Administration (D.B.A.)
- CFP certification from the Financial Planning Standards Board Ltd. (FPSB) Affiliate located in a territory of residence outside the U.S.

Those candidates who qualify for the accelerated path only need to take a financial plan development Capstone course or meet the Capstone alternative requirement. Learn more at [CFP.net/challenge](https://www.cfp.net/challenge).

A bachelor's degree or higher in any discipline from a regionally-accredited college or university is a requirement for initial certification; it is not a requirement to sit for the CFP® exam.

## STEP 2 PASS THE CFP® EXAM

Once you have completed the education coursework requirement, you can then register to take the CFP® exam. The exam measures your critical thinking and problem solving skills.

The CFP® exam is a 6-hour, pass/fail exam that is administered three times a year in March, July and November at more than 265 Prometric test sites nationwide. The exam registration pricing ranges from \$625 to \$825, with best pricing by the Early

Bird deadline 6 weeks ahead of the exam. You can complete your application for the exam online at [CFP.net/exam](https://www.cfp.net/exam).

Though not required, many candidates for CFP® certification find review courses are helpful in preparing for the exam. Information about review courses is available at [previewcourses.net](https://www.previewcourses.net) or through education providers.

# FOUR STEPS TO CERTIFICATION

## STEP 3 MEET THE EXPERIENCE REQUIREMENT

CFP® certification indicates to the public your ability to provide financial planning unsupervised, and CFP Board requires you to have 6,000 hours of professional experience related to the financial planning process, or 4,000 hours of apprenticeship experience that meets additional requirements.

CFP Board recognizes the variety of situations and circumstances in which people participate in the financial planning process and has developed an experience requirement to recognize the depth and breadth of the profession.

Whether you engage with clients directly, supervise or support the financial planning process, teach financial planning-related courses, or participate in internships or the FPA Residency Program, there are many paths to completing the experience requirement.

Experience can be reported to CFP Board at any time, including before you complete education or sit for the exam, through the Experience Reporting Profile available in your CFP Board online account by clicking on the Experience section of the Certification Tracker. You will also be able to review previously submitted entries, refresh hours for your current position and add new experience.

Note that you can sit for the CFP® exam before you have completed the experience requirement for certification.

Additional details about the experience requirement are available at [CFP.net/experience](https://www.cfp.net/experience).

## STEP 4 PASS FITNESS STANDARDS AND BACKGROUND CHECK

You will be asked to disclose your background information as part of the certification process. CFP Board established specific character and fitness standards for candidates for CFP® certification to ensure that an individual's prior conduct would not reflect adversely upon the profession. Any civil or

criminal conviction, revocation of a professional license, or governmental or self-regulatory agency proceeding or inquiry may disqualify you from CFP® professional eligibility.

## CANDIDATE RESOURCES

### CFP BOARD CANDIDATE FORUM

Those interested in certification or preparing for the CFP® exam can join the online Candidate Forum to connect with other candidates for CFP® certification. Join the conversation at [candidateforum.cfp.net](https://candidateforum.cfp.net).

### CFP BOARD PRACTICE EXAM

CFP Board offers a practice exam. You can get instant access online to real exam questions that have been retired from the CFP® exam, with results and feedback available immediately. Learn more at [CFP.net/practiceexam](https://www.cfp.net/practiceexam).

### CFP BOARD MENTOR PROGRAM

Connect with a current CFP® professional who can share their knowledge and experience, and help you on your path to certification. Learn more and find a mentor at [CFP.net/mentor](https://www.cfp.net/mentor).

## FINAL STEPS

### PAY CERTIFICATION FEES

When you have successfully completed the first four steps, fees will apply as follows:

- A one-time, nonrefundable certification application fee of \$125.
- A nonrefundable annual certification fee of \$355 is prorated based on the initial certification cycle. This fee goes toward administering and upholding the CFP® certification standards and marks.

### RECEIVE YOUR AUTHORIZATION TO USE THE CFP® CERTIFICATION MARKS

Once you have fully satisfied CFP Board's certification requirements, you are authorized to use the CFP® certification marks. These include CFP®, CERTIFIED FINANCIAL PLANNER™, CFP® flame design and CFP® plaque design.



These marks are used by CFP Board in the United States and are protected by trademark law. Only those who have completed the steps to certification are authorized to use the marks.

### THE MISSION

CFP Board benefits the public by granting the CFP® certification and upholding it as the recognized standard of excellence for competent and ethical personal financial planning.

# CFP BOARD SUPPORT

As you work to achieve your certification, CFP Board wants to give you all the support you need. Prospective CFP® professionals are offered a secure, online account with CFP Board. You can also call a Support Specialist at any time if you have questions about the certification process.



### GET THE CFP® CERTIFICATION ADVANTAGE

CFP® certification is earned by knowledgeable, capable and responsible professionals who have proven themselves through an education, experience and examination process that ensures their competence.

CFP® professionals are uniquely qualified to help their clients develop and implement plans to achieve their financial goals. Plus, the CFP® designation sets you apart from others in your field and lets your clients know that they can trust you to always work in their best interests.

**Give** better advice. **Earn** more income. **Gain** greater trust. For all those interested in advancing their career in financial planning or financial services, attaining CFP® certification is the most effective way to achieve success in their career.

For more information on how to get started on the path to CFP® certification, contact CFP Board's Support Specialist team at 800-487-1497 or [getcertified@cfpboard.org](mailto:getcertified@cfpboard.org).



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