

Urban Planner

Job Description

Urban planners, sometimes also called city and regional planners, help a community solve problems such as inadequate housing, traffic congestion, and the location of new schools and parks. Good planning enables communities to develop good choices for where and how people live, work, and play.

Federal, state, and local governments employ the majority of urban and regional planners. They create long-term and short-term plans guiding the use of land for the growth and revitalization of urban, suburban, and rural communities. In the planning process, they involve different public organizations and private groups in a community and then develop a new vision to help officials make decisions concerning social, economic, and environmental problems. Sometimes planners are called upon to mediate opposing points of view about land use.

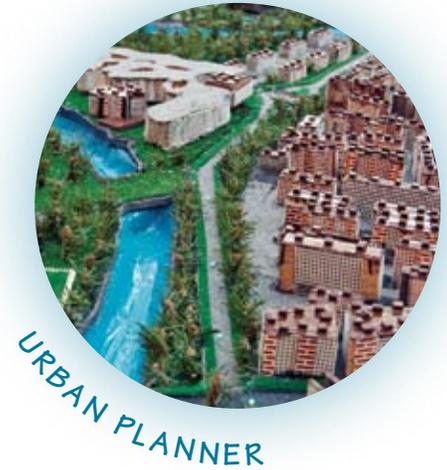
Many planners specialize in areas such as community development, urban design, housing, transportation, land use and enforcement of zoning codes, historic preservation, and environmental and natural resources planning. During their careers most planners will move among these specialties or have positions that combine them.

Salary

According to the American Planning Association, the median annual salary of urban and regional planners was \$60,000 in 2004. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$40,000, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$100,000. Salaries vary considerably by region.

Education

Most entry-level jobs in Federal, state, and local government agencies require a master's degree from an accredited program in urban or regional planning or a master's degree in a related field, such as urban design or geography. A bachelor's degree from an accredited planning program, coupled with a master's degree in architecture, landscape architecture, or civil engineering, is good preparation for entry-level planning jobs in various areas, including urban design, transportation, and the environment. A master's degree from an accredited planning program provides the best training for a wide range of planning fields.



Courses in related disciplines, such as architecture, law, earth sciences, demography, economics, finance, health administration, geographic information systems, and management, are highly recommended. Because familiarity with computer models and statistical techniques is important, courses in statistics and computer science also are recommended.



Skills and Abilities

Planners must have a thorough understanding of the way cities and communities work. They should be able to think in terms of spatial relationships and visualize the effects of their plans and designs. Because they involve a wide range of people in making decisions, they should be flexible and be able to reconcile different viewpoints. Planners frequently advise government bodies and so need to be able to make constructive policy recommendations. The ability to communicate effectively, both orally and in writing, is necessary for anyone interested in this field.

Job Opportunities

More than 35,000 people work as urban and regional planners in the U.S. Federal, state and local governments employ 2 out of 3 urban and regional planners. Another 1 out of 4 work in private firms. Most entry-level jobs require a master's degree; bachelor's degree holders may find some entry-level positions, but advancement opportunities are limited.

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that through 2014 employment of urban planners will grow about as fast as average (9-17%) for all occupations. Most new jobs will arise in affluent, rapidly growing urban and suburban communities. Indeed, in 2004 62% of planners reported that their jobs were in cities, while 23% held positions in suburban areas.

Helpful High School Courses

- ▶ Computer-assisted drafting
- ▶ Drafting/technical drawing
- ▶ Earth sciences
- ▶ Economics
- ▶ Geology
- ▶ Math

Resources

The two best sources of information about urban and regional planning are:

► American Planning Association

122 South Michigan Avenue, Suite 1600, Chicago, IL 60603-6107

Website: <http://www.planning.org> – The APA website contains a wealth of education resources for students and teachers (look for the “resourceszine” under the education and youth/teachers tab) and an interactive site designed specially for young people called “Kids and Community.” Information on careers, salaries, and certification in urban and regional planning can be obtained from the APA and also is found on its website.

► Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning

6311 Mallard Trace, Tallahassee, FL 32312

Website: <http://www.acsp.org> – Provides a descriptive list of accredited urban and regional planning programs.

This Fact Sheet, with some additions and modifications, is taken from the National Building Museum’s *Building Blocks: Design Apprenticeship Program* curriculum.

