

THE AMERICAN PLANNING ASSOCIATION PRIVATE PRACTICE DIVISION

WHAT YOUNG PROFESSIONALS SHOULD
CONSIDER ABOUT A POSITION IN THE
PRIVATE SECTOR

APA Private Practice Division (PPD) is dedicated to meeting the needs of private planning consultants. We also seek to increase the recognition of the value that private sector planners offer to the profession. Members can interact with other private sector planners to hear about best practices in forming or managing a firm, business trends, and pursuing work. PPD offers networking opportunities through conversations, forums, webinars, and more.

Member Benefits:

Access to our PPD members only networking platform and directory

Copies of the updated PPD handbook, an indispensable guide to setting up and running a successful practice

Educational sessions in a range of formats that encourage the exchange of ideas and information with other practitioners

Networking events and discussion forums at the annual National Planning Conference and virtual meetings

Opportunities to promote the private sector practice, build relationships, and gain exposure and visibility within PPD and APA

See member benefits through the APA Resources page for a full list.

For more information contact us at info_private@planning.org

American Planning Association
Headquarters Address:
205 N. Michigan Avenue
Suite 1200
Chicago, IL 60601

APA
Private
Practice

There are some typical distinctions between positions in the private, public, or non-profit realms. Each type of position has its pros and cons. This handout contrasts some of these factors.

A professional planner's satisfaction depends on a number of factors, including:

1. Your personal interests
2. The organization's leadership and who you work with
3. Size of the organization
4. The pace of work
5. Level of mentorship and support
6. Whether they like to work in one place or work in many places

Expertise.

Private sector work is varied and multi-dimensional. You are often asked to be an expert across a wide range of topics. This makes for a dynamic workflow, but also means you need to become an expert on many topics.

Innovation.

Communities often look to the Private Sector to provide innovation and creativity.

Variety.

In the Private Sector, you often get the opportunity to work on a variety of projects with different communities or agencies. You can also work with a diversity of professionals.

Touching Many Communities.

Working in many types of communities allows you to make a broader impact than working for just one community.

Shipbuilding vs. ship sailing.

While you can help create a Plan, you rarely get to see the implementation through. In the private sector however, many planning consultants stay involved on an on-going basis.

Public Engagement.

Public agencies often turn to the private sector to lead effective public engagement processes. Public sector planners need to answer to their community; private sector planners need to answer to their client, and also need to help build public trust in the planning process.

It's Competitive.

A public sector planner typically works on what the City Council or Planning Commission or City Manager asks you to do. In the private sector you, or someone you work with, has to win the work.

Autonomy.

A Private sector planner has the ability to pursue work and build teams from colleagues of their choosing. They may be able to avoid the politics that may arise with a public position.

Winning Projects can be Challenging.

Going after projects can be intense. While you might feel that your firm has the perfect experience for a job, the client might select another firm based on a variety of factors. This process can be time-consuming and may end in disappointment. However, a win is very rewarding!

Skills Training & Continuing Education.

Private sector planners tend to have more access to educational and professional resources day-to-day by having the latest software, top of the line computer systems, and perks of their firm's business memberships. But training is more "on the job" learning and takes place primarily in the office setting. Public sector planners typically have an easier time getting approval for outside conferences and training.

Compensation.

Like any job many factors contribute to a compensation package, including: location of business, company-size, project type, and individual project role. Salaries for Private sector planners may be incentive based, depending on how well you and the firm perform, and time off (both paid and unpaid) has flexibility dependent on the project's staffing needs. Generally, Public sector planners tend to have better benefits and paid time off, but there may be limits on raises