

AFC® Experience Guide

Updated February 2024



Hello!

Congratulations on your decision to pursue the Accredited Financial Counselor® (AFC®) certification.

As an NCCA accredited certification, you can be confident that your AFC certification will set you apart and send a message of credibility and trustworthiness to your clients.

To ensure we uphold the highest standards, all AFC candidates must meet an experience requirement in the field of financial counseling or education.

AFC certified professionals work in many different fields, and in many different roles. We love this diversity and want to provide candidates with different ways to earn experience hours and succeed.

We hope this guide will provide answers to your questions about the AFC experience requirement and act as a map as you plan your road to certification.

If you have any questions, you can reach us at certification@afcpe.org or 614-368-1055.

Best of luck and enjoy the experience!

-The AFCPE® Team



What is the AFC?

The Accredited Financial Counselor designation is a specialty credential for professionals interested in expanding accessibility to high-quality financial counseling, coaching, and education. The AFC helps professionals better understand how diverse backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences impact individuals' money behavior.

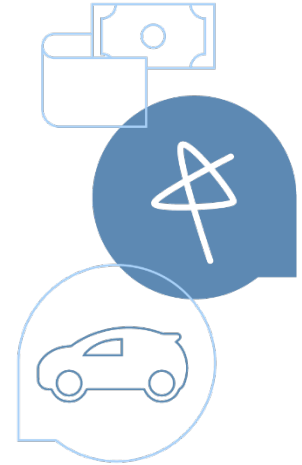
What does an AFC do?

- Educate clients in sound financial principles
- Support clients through financial challenges and opportunities
- Help clients identify and modify ineffective money behaviors
- Guide clients in successful strategies to achieve their goals

Where does an AFC work?

AFC certified professionals work across the United States and on military bases around the world as researchers, educators, University Extension staff, and financial counselors and coaches. Some are self-employed private practitioners providing a variety of services to clients. Others work in financial planning firms, law firms, credit and debt repayment agencies, banks and credit unions, government agencies, and many other organizations committed to improving the financial capability of individuals and families.

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The Experience Requirement

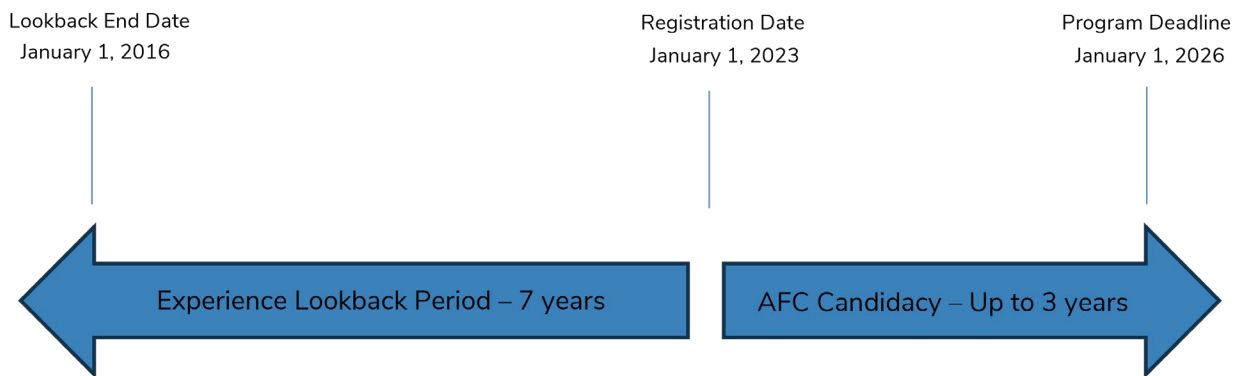
The Accredited Financial Counselor (AFC®) certification requires successful completion of education, an exam, experience, and ethics.

Candidates must obtain 1,000* hours of experience and submit requisite [Experience Verification Form\(s\)](#) to satisfy the experience requirement.

Candidates do not need to pass the exam to begin obtaining or submitting experience hours. There is a ten-year window for calculating experience hours: candidates may include hours from seven years preceding their AFC enrollment and have up to three years from enrollment to complete their certification*. For more details on certification requirements, please see the [AFC Candidate Handbook](#).

Experience can be paid or unpaid, but all experience hours must relate to one or more of the [AFC Core Competencies](#). Candidates do not need experience in each of the competency categories.

Sample experience timeline:



*FINRA Foundation Fellows' experience assignment and timeline may differ. Prior experience is considered in the experience assignment.

Getting Started

Don't complicate it.

The experience requirement for AFC certification is an important component in preparing you to be an AFC. Experience gives context to personal finance concepts, helps us build confidence, and fosters deeper learning.

While experience is a vital component of becoming a great financial counselor, it doesn't need to be complicated. Here are some tips to consider as you think about a plan for your experience requirement.



1. **Read this guide.** You don't have to read it cover to cover but familiarize yourself with the guidelines and the categories that are relevant to you (you do not need experience hours in every category).
2. **Make a plan.** Before you start submitting hours, plan for how you will earn and report your hours. Planning will prevent you from falling short and can make reporting more efficient.
3. **Report existing hours.** Candidates may report experience hours from seven years preceding their enrollment date. It's possible that you have already met the experience requirement.
4. **Don't complicate it.** If you spend most of your time working with clients, you may not need to report webinars, trainings, and book reviews to meet the experience requirement.
5. **Consolidate submissions.** We don't expect you to submit an experience form for each workshop you teach or client you sit with. In fact, many candidates can submit all 1000 hours on a single form. Even things like webinars can be consolidated into fewer submissions. Save yourself time and plan for how you will submit your hours.
6. **Reach out.** If you're unsure if something qualifies as experience or you don't know the best way to submit something, send us an email or give us a call—we're happy to help!

Experience Hour Categories



AFC certified professionals work in many different roles in many different fields. We want to be sure that our experience hour guidelines reflect this diversity. We understand that financial counseling and education comes in all shapes and sizes, and we strive to meet our candidates where they are.

In the next few pages, you will see the experience categories for AFC certification with a detailed description of each. Please use this information while planning your experience opportunities and reporting your hours at my.afcpe.org.

Candidates do not need to earn experience in every category, nor do they need experience that covers all AFC Core Competencies. Some categories have a cap, or ceiling, on the number of hours a candidate can earn.

Counseling & Coaching**Max Hours: 100%**

Financial counseling, coaching, and education can take place in-person, virtually, or on the phone. We understand that an appointment involves preparation, research, and follow-up. Candidates should give themselves credit for all these activities—not just face-to-face time. Similarly, tax preparation and creating financial plans for clients can be reported in this category. Administrative tasks such as scheduling and grant reporting cannot be included.



Financial counseling/coaching/education, research and follow-up for clients, preparing analysis/reports/plans for clients, tax preparation, financial aid counseling, education by personal bankers, etc.



Data entry, scheduling, administrative tasks, marketing, grant reporting, general employee training, etc.

Example- You meet with a client for 60 minutes to discuss a new job opportunity. After the session, you spend 15 minutes doing research and 15 minutes putting together a benefit comparison for the client. You and the client speak on the phone for 30 minutes as a follow up appointment. You then spend 30 minutes logging information for a grant report.

Approved

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| Counseling Session | 60 mins |
| Research | 15 mins |
| Benefit Comp | 15 mins |
| Follow-up | 30 mins |

Total Experience 2 hours

Unapproved

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| Grant Reporting | 30 mins |
|-----------------|---------|

Supporting Documents: Supervisor name and contact information will generally be adequate. Candidates may include a log of counseling hours (please refrain from including client names for confidentiality). Self-employed/pro-bono submissions without a supervisor must provide a log or summary of hours. AFCPE reserves the right to request documentation for any submission.

Submission Tip: Hours do not need to be submitted by appointment or per client; candidates may submit their hours all at once or on a quarterly or monthly basis.

Teach Financial Education Classes/Workshops**Max Hours: 100%**

Workshops and classes can be taught in person or virtually. Candidates may report teaching time as well as time spent researching and writing their presentation. Topics must relate to the AFC Core Competencies. Time spent on design-specific or administrative tasks such as designing slides or copying handouts may not be included.



Presentation time, recording time, Q&A sessions, research, writing content, creating tools/resources, etc.



Presentation design, building handout packets, marketing/promotion, etc.

Example- A counselor volunteers to put together a workshop on credit scores for her church. She spends 8 hours researching the topic, writing the presentation, and finding resources for participants. It takes the counselor 4 hours to put the information into PowerPoint. The counselor delivers the 1-hour workshop 7 times.

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| Research/Writing | 8 hours |
| Teaching | 7 hours |

Unapproved

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| Presentation Design | 4 hours |
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| <u>Total Experience</u> | 15 hours |
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Supporting Documents: Supervisor name and contact information will generally be adequate. Candidates may include a log of workshop hours. Self-employed/pro-bono submissions without a supervisor must provide a log or summary of hours. AFCPE reserves the right to request documentation for any submission.

Submission Tip: Classes/Workshops do not need to be submitted individually; candidates may submit their hours all at once or on a quarterly or monthly basis.

Supervising Financial Counselors or Programs

Max Hours: 100%

Managers, supervisors, or directors of financial counselors or programs may submit experience hours dedicated to these counselors and/or programs. Administrative time and time spent on non-qualifying employees or programs may not be included.



Time training staff on AFC Core Competency related material, developing or maintaining related programming, related meetings, etc.



General supervision/managerial tasks, time not related to applicable programming/staff, unrelated meetings, grant writing, marketing, etc.

Example- A supervisor at a non-profit oversees several programs, including financial literacy, food security, and employment readiness. She estimates that managing the financial literacy program and staff takes up 10% of her time, not including administrative duties. The employment readiness program demands 50% of her time, but only a fraction of the program relates to the AFC Core Competencies—5%. The supervisor works 40 hours a week and has been in the position for 1 year.

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| Approved | | Unapproved | |
| Financial Literacy | 208 hours | Unrelated supervision/ | 1,820 hours |
| Programming | | program time | |
| Employment | 52 hours | | |
| Readiness | | | |
| Programming | | | |
| <u>Total Experience</u> | 260 hours | | |

Supporting Documents: Supervisor name and contact information will generally be adequate. Candidates may include a log of supervisory hours. Self-employed submissions without a supervisor must provide a log or summary of hours. AFCPE reserves the right to request documentation for any submission.

Develop Financial Education Classes/Curriculum/ Educational Content

Max Hours: 70%

Creating or updating classes, curriculum, videos, blogs, podcasts, and other educational content may be reported in this category. Content must be original, providing a review or summary of material(s) created by another individual will not be accepted in this category. AFCPE will make the final determination if submissions meet the definition of educational content.

Experience earned in this category is intended to give candidates credit for their work in researching and writing educational materials. Submissions in this category should be of sufficient quality and depth that the candidate learned from the experience--submissions that do not meet this test may be rejected. Because this experience category covers a wide range of submission types, we use the following guidelines to approve hours to ensure a fair analysis of submissions:

- Written materials will be approved for up to **1 experience hour per 200 words**.
- Video content, workshops, podcasts, etc. will be approved for up to **10 experience hours per 1 hour of content**.
- Candidates may submit one experience form per project. **Multiple submissions for a single project will not be accepted.**
- A **maximum of 50 hours** will be awarded for any single project. Substantial or complex projects may be considered for additional hours.
- Submissions reporting hours that are not commensurate with the content will be rejected.



Research, writing content, recording, updating existing content, etc.



Creating material without an intended audience, editing video or audio, design-specific work, etc.

Example- A candidate creates a PowerPoint presentation to help educate members of her church on credit building. The presentation is estimated to be 1 hour. The candidate spent about 15 hours on the project. Five hours of her time was spent designing marketing materials and finding photos for the slide deck.

| Approved | | Unapproved | |
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| Credit Building Presentation | 10 hours | Marketing materials, design work | 5 hours |
| <u>Total Experience</u> | 10 hours | | |

Supporting Documents: For presentations and curriculum, candidates must submit a copy of the content for review (pdf preferred). For podcasts, videos, and other digital media, a link to the content must be provided. Where possible, experience within the same category should be reported together in a single submission.

Supporting documentation must display:

- 1) How content relates to the AFC Core Competencies,
- 2) The estimated time of completion for the end user OR word count, and
- 3) The intended audience for the content.

AFCPE reserves the right to request documentation for any submission.

Related Coursework**Max Hours: 10%**

Candidates who complete coursework through a college or university that is related to the AFC Core Competencies may include this time towards their experience hours. Coursework must be related to personal finance, financial counseling, and/or debt management. Courses that are centered on business or corporate finance will not be approved for experience hours (many MBA classes do not meet our guidelines for experience hours). Candidates will need to submit a syllabus and transcript showing successful completion of the course. AFCPE will award 20 experience hours for every 1 credit hour.



Coursework on personal income tax, behavioral economics, counseling/coaching, financial planning, etc.



Coursework that is business-specific, corporate finance or accounting, corporate taxation, general leadership, etc.

Example- A candidate is taking two courses over the summer at a local college, Personal Income Tax and Managerial Accounting. Both are 3 credit courses. The candidate completes both courses with a passing grade.

Approved

Personal Income Tax 60 hours

Unapproved

Managerial Accounting 60 hours

Total Experience 60 hours

Supporting Documents: Candidates must include a syllabus or course outline that displays how coursework relates to the AFC Core Competencies and documentation of course completion with a passing grade.

Related Training, Certification or License, Conference, Meeting, or Seminar

Max Hours: 10%

Candidates who earn a certification or license that is related to the AFC Core Competencies may include this in their experience hours. Attending trainings, conferences, and other meetings can be a great way to learn new information and network with fellow professionals. Events must relate to the AFC Core Competencies and candidates must show proof of completion/attendance. Training can be in-person or virtual.



Train-the-trainer opportunities, earning the CFP designation, general training related to personal finance, attending a conference, Series 65 prep class, etc.



General employee/staff meetings, training on employer-specific policies, meeting with fellow candidates for exam prep, listening to podcasts, etc.

Example- A candidate’s employer sends her to a conference on the economics of college costs. It is a 2-day event with 12 hours of content. Additionally, this candidate is a member of a local financial capability network that meets monthly for 2 hours; the group has been meeting for one year. Last month, the candidate participated in a 2-hour customer service training required for everyone at her organization.

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| Approved | | Unapproved | |
| Conference | 12 hours | General Customer Service Training | 2 hours |
| Financial Capability Network | 24 hours | | |
| <u>Total Experience</u> | 36 hours | | |

Supporting Documents: Candidates must include proof of attendance via a roster, certificate, registration confirmation document, materials provided at the training, or letter from the provider. A candidate’s notes from the training may be accepted when other documents are unavailable. Documentation must display the number of training hours.

Related Webinars**Max Hours: 10%**

AFCPE members receive free access to AFCPE webinars, and this can be a valuable resource for learning and earning experience hours. There are also many other opportunities for webinars from other organizations. Webinars do not need to be AFCPE-sponsored but must relate to the AFC Core Competencies. Candidates should maintain a log and be prepared to show verification of participation.



Webinars focused on personal finance, counseling/coaching skills, consumer economics, financial planning, etc.



Employer-specific training, webinars focused on business concepts, promotional or product-specific webinars, etc.

Example- A candidate attends a month-long webinar series on changes in personal income tax law. The series contains a total of 4 hours of content. Also that month, the candidate attended a 1-hour webinar training on new reporting software her organization is implementing.

Approved

Tax Law Webinar Series 4 hours

Unapproved

Reporting Software Webinar 1 hour

Total Experience 4 hours

Supporting Documents: Candidates must include verification of participation via a roster, certificate, registration confirmation, materials provided at the training, or letter from the provider. A candidate's notes from the training may be accepted when other documents are unavailable. For webinars sponsored by AFCPE, candidates may list AFCPE as the supervisor and may use the completion code as verification of completion.

Submission Tip: You can submit multiple webinars on a single experience form. For AFCPE webinars, you can submit a log with the webinar titles and completion codes—no other documentation needed. For other webinars, consider uploading a log of the webinars and attaching your corresponding documentation.

Book Review**Max Hours: 5%**

Candidates may read books that are related to the AFC Core Competencies and provide a summary review for experience hours. AFCPE will award 5 hours for every 100 pages of content. Candidates must provide the book title and author, number of pages, and a summary of the text including how the learning relates to the AFC Core Competencies.

Texts required by the candidate's education requirement/pathway may not be reviewed for experience hours.



The Financial Diaries, Freakonomics, Happy Money, Crucial Conversations, etc.



Books focused on sales, general leadership, self-improvement, or other unrelated topics. Texts required by your education pathway, etc.

Example- A candidate reads 3 books while studying for her AFC exam and provides a review of each: Freakonomics (~350 pages), Interpersonal Communication (~400 pages), and Guide to Grant Writing (~250 pages).

Approved

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| Freakonomics | 17.5 hours |
| Interpersonal Communication | 20 hours |

Unapproved

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| Guide to Grant Writing | 12.5 hours |
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| <u>Total Experience</u> | 37.5 hours |
|-------------------------|------------|

Supporting Documents: Book reviews must include the following to be accepted: 1) Book title and author, 2) Number of pages, 3) A 250-1000 word summary of text answering the following questions:

1. How does your learning from this text relate to the AFC Core Competencies?
2. How could you use the information that you learned in future work with clients?
3. Why did you choose this book?

For this category, candidates may list AFCPE as the supervisor.

Website Review**Max Hours: 5%**

There is an endless supply of information online that is helpful to financial counselors-- government resources, non-profit education sites, personal finance research, community resources, tools available to clients, and much more. It is important that counselors are familiar with these resources. AFCPE will allow up to 5 hours of experience per website review. The material must relate to the AFC Core Competencies, and candidates must provide a summary of their learning along with the website URL. **Websites required by the candidate's education pathway may not be reviewed for experience hours.**



Tools and resources for clients, continuing education for counselors, consumerfinance.gov, finra.org, youneedabudget.com, healthcare.gov, etc.



grants.gov, census.gov, afcpe.instructure.com, etc.

Example- A counselor is building a resource library for her clients. As she builds the library, she reviews several online resources: FDIC Money Smart for Adults (5 hours), Prosperity NOW (3 hours), and consumer tools available via the IRS (5 hours). The counselor also spends 1 hour researching grants to fund a computer lab for her organization.

Approved

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| Money Smart | 5 hours |
| Prosperity NOW | 3 hours |
| IRS | 5 hours |

Unapproved

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| Grant Research | 1 hour |
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| <u>Total Experience</u> | 13 hours |
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Supporting Documents: Website reviews must include the following to be accepted: 1) Website URL, 2) A 250-1000 word summary of the website answering the following questions:

1. How does your learning from this website relate to the AFC Core Competencies?
2. How could you use the information that you learned in future work with clients?

For this category, candidates may list AFCPE as the supervisor.

AFCPE Symposium

Max Hours: 15/year

Attending AFCPE's annual Symposium can be a great way for candidates to learn, network, and have fun—you can also earn some experience hours while you're at it! Each year, the AFCPE Symposium consists of 15 hours of content.

[Learn more about Symposium!](#)

Pre-symposium events and ancillary trainings may be submitted separately under the Related Training category.

Supporting Documents: Proof of attendance as evidenced by registration confirmation and completion of Symposium survey. For this category, candidates may list AFCPE as the supervisor.

AFC Supervised Experience

Experience under the supervision of an AFC can be extremely valuable and can be reported as 1.5 hours for every 1 hour of experience. This ratio is permitted in the following categories:

- One-to-one Counseling
- Teach Financial Education Classes/Workshops
- Develop Financial Education Classes/Curriculum/Educational Content

When reporting experience hours under this rule, candidates should enter their total hours using the 1:1.5 ratio. For example, a candidate has 100 clock hours of counseling under the supervision of an AFC. The candidate should report 150 experience hours. The candidate must disclose this in the Description section of the experience submission and must list an active AFC in the supervisor section of the form.

Supporting Documents: Candidates must provide an [Experience Verification Form](#) signed by the supervising AFC.

Submitting Experience Hours



Candidates can submit experience hours at any point after enrollment; you do not need to complete the exam before logging experience hours.

When possible, candidates are encouraged to group their experiences into fewer submissions. For example, candidates should submit their counseling hours monthly, or even once all hours are completed rather than submitting each individual counseling session. **FINRA Foundation Fellows must report experience hours monthly.*

To Submit Experience Hours:

1. Login at my.afcpe.org
2. Click on [Your Certification Dashboard](#).
3. From the experience tile, you can view a summary of previously submitted hours and add new submissions.
4. To add experience hours, click the [Add Experience](#) button from the experience tile.

5. Complete the form:

Registration: Select the certification program you are submitting experience for

Service Type: Select the category that best fits your experience submission

Organization: Where did you complete the experience?

Job Title: What was your role?

Total Hours: How many hours are you requesting for this experience submission?

Verifier Name: Who supervised your work?

- For self-employed/pro-bono experience, candidates will list themselves; supporting documentation will be required
- Candidates may list AFCPE as the supervisor for webinar, book review, and website review categories if they wish

Verifier Email: This is required as submissions are selected, at random, for audit

Verifier Phone: This is required as submissions are selected, at random, for audit

Description: Please provide a description of the experience. See Experience Categories for full requirements by category. *For pre-approved webinars, enter the completion code here.*

Start Date: When did the experience begin? Remember that you may only report hours from seven years prior to your enrollment.

End Date: When did the experience end?

Supporting Documents: If required, please provide support for your experience submission. See Experience Categories for full requirements by category.

6. Your submission will be reviewed within 5 business days. AFCPE may require additional information to process some requests, and candidates will receive notification of the additional information needed.

Tips for submitting Experience Hours:

- Many candidates can satisfy the experience requirement with a single, or very few, experience hour submissions. For example, a candidate working as a financial counselor can wait until they have earned the full 1000 counseling hours and submit them all at once. Where possible, experience within the same category should be reported together in a single submission. Individual counseling sessions do not need to be submitted individually, several webinars may be submitted together, etc.
- Provide a clear description of your work. Submissions with vague descriptions such as “counseling” or “banking” will be rejected.
- Only include hours from the allowable reporting period. Candidates can include hours from seven years prior to enrollment and have up to three years to complete certification. Hours submitted from outside this timeframe will be rejected.
- Please include the total number of hours, not the number of hours worked weekly.
- Typically, financial counselors/educators do not engage in approved activities for a full 40 hours/week. Administration, scheduling, reporting, etc. are not permitted activities for AFC experience. Submissions that assume a full 40 hours/week of approved activities will be rejected.
- Hours may only be submitted once—candidates cannot submit the same hours in multiple categories.
- It is recommended that candidates keep records of their experience hours. AFCPE reserves the right to request documentation for any submission at any time.

Experience Verification Form

As of August 1, 2020, AFCPE no longer requires letters of recommendation for certification. In lieu of recommendation letters, candidates must submit an [Experience Verification Form\(s\)](#). Candidates must provide a separate form for each organization they are reporting experience hours from. Candidates will upload this form after their 1000 experience hours have been approved via my.afpce.org, and after they have passed the exam.

Candidates may upload the Verification form to their my.afpce.org account once they have satisfied the 1000-hour requirement and passed the exam. The form is accessible from the candidate dashboard under [Certification Resources](#).

AFCPE® Verifier Qualification Requirements

The verification must be performed by a qualified independent third party not related to the candidate:

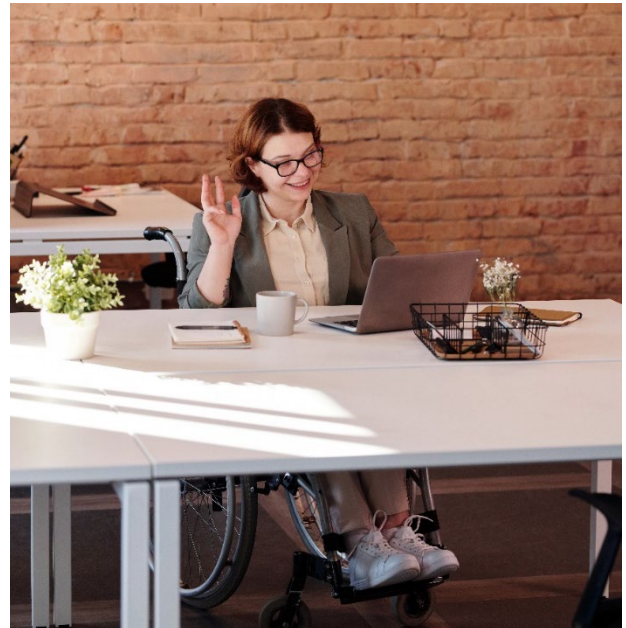
- Verifiers must be authorized by the company listed on the verification form to verify employment or experience.

-OR-

- Verifiers must have appropriate professional experience related to personal finance, financial counseling, financial education, financial planning, or related field, **AND**
- Verifiers must be knowledgeable about the [AFCPE Standards of Practice](#) and [Code of Ethics](#) and agree that, to the best of their knowledge, these standards have been upheld by the candidate during the accumulation of their experience, **AND**
- Verifiers must be knowledgeable about the [AFC Core Competencies](#) and understand that qualified experience must relate to these.

Resources

- [AFC Candidate Handbook](#)
- [AFC Core Competencies](#)
- [Experience is the Best Teacher](#)
- [The Standard Newsletter, Experience](#)
- [Frequently Asked Questions](#)
- [AFCPE Membership](#)



Looking for volunteer opportunities? While most opportunities exist at the local level, here are a few places to get started:

- [Find My United Way](#)
- [Find My Community Action Agency](#)
- [VITA \(Volunteer Income Tax Assistance\) Program](#)
- [Volunteer Match](#)
- [AFCPE Membership Experience Portal](#)

AFCPE® Membership – at a discount!

Certification Supports your **Client**. Membership Supports **YOU!**



AFCPE Membership is the intersection of financial education, research, and practice—and a great resource as you work towards your AFC Certification. As a candidate, you can enjoy all the benefits of Membership at a discount!

Here are a Few Ways Membership Supports AFC Candidates

- **Free (and discounted) professional development webinars** - AFC Candidates can earn up to 10% of their experience hours from webinars. Membership makes this easy by providing **FREE** exclusive content that has been pre-approved for experience hours.
- **JFCP Journal Quizzes** - AFCPE Members get free access to the Journal of Financial Counseling and Planning (JFCP). With each issue, members are provided access to journal quizzes. Candidates can earn 2 experience hours per quiz in the Related Training category.
- **Access the Experience Portal** - A member-only benefit, connect with organizations looking for volunteers or interns for opportunities that have been pre-approved for experience hours.
- **Monthly Networking Opportunities & Access the AFCPE Member Exchange-** Through monthly virtual networking opportunities, and our exclusive online membership community platform, you can connect with other professionals in the field, learn from their experiences, share new ideas and best practices, and more!
- [And More!!](#)

There is something for everyone at AFCPE.
[Become a member today!](#)