

# PRIVATE PRACTICE PERSPECTIVES

APA

American Planning Association  
Private Practice Division

Making Great Communities Happen

A Publication of the Private Practice Division  
of the American Planning Association

SUMMER 2009

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## FROM MY DESKTOP

*Ramona Mullahey • Private Practice Chair*

Minneapolis was cool, green, walkable, and very friendly. Cold with sometimes wet days were sandwiched between two, sunny, and crystal clear 80-degree days...I guess the warmth were teasers of what could have been extremely, pleasant, and comfortable weather, especially, for this person from Hawaii!

Although a smaller crowd attended this year's conference, the sessions and speakers offered a broad range of expertise and topics, well-presented and well-worth the effort.

At our Business Meeting held on Monday, we celebrated the 20th anniversary of the establishment of the Private Practice Division by recognizing founding member Carol Thomas as the first Division Chair. We continue to value the opportunities to support each other and the invaluable role of private practitioners in the community.

New President Bruce Knight is leading the charge that planners should take the more active role of leadership in the community. His focus during his term will be on leadership. AICP membership has increased due to the CM credential. 70% of AICP members are participating in logging in their credits. Specialty exams in transportation, followed by urban design are the next step for credentialing.

The APA Board has lifted the moratorium on new Divisions and have approved the creation of Sections of Divisions and Interest Groups as the new forms of member participation. To start a new Division a group must establish a Section or Interest Group for at least one year before petitioning for Division status.

In this issue we highlight the two conference sessions sponsored by PPD and a roundtable discussion on sole proprietorship, presentation of tools designed to help you meet any new challenges head-on, and an exciting project shared by member Adele Bacow.

And, as always, please stay connected and be healthy! ■

## Urban Planning Consultants During Lean Times

*By K.K. Gerhart-Fritz, AICP, Vice-Chair Private Practice Division*

This year the Private Practice Division leadership wanted to create sessions for the APA Conference in Minneapolis that responded to the difficult economic times that we are experiencing. One of these sessions was entitled "Using Planning Consultants during Lean Times". We soon found out just how lean the times are, when the entire original panel had to drop out because they couldn't afford to attend the national conference this year! Special thanks go out to PPD members Arnold Cogan, FAICP, Joanne Garnett, FAICP and Ralph Willmer, AICP, who stepped in to join me on the panel. Our message is summarized here:

### When should agencies hire planning consultants?

- When work needs to be started and completed more quickly than staff can do.
- When you need expertise you don't have in-house.
- When political cover for sensitive or difficult assignments is needed; consultants won't have "baggage" that staff may and can also become the "target".
- When you need to introduce a new idea; consultants can be more dispassionate and can site their experiences elsewhere.

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## Lean Times *(cont'd from page 1)*

- When an agency has budgetary constraints and needs to use funds in the most efficient manner.

### Hiring a consultant can save money:

Really? Really! Using consulting assistance for tasks that entail short bursts of activity can be more cost effective than having staff on duty full time. You save benefits costs and don't have an employee on the payroll you no longer need. Also, on some projects economies of scale can be achieved, resulting in savings. An example is the routine processing of permits and rezonings, where a consultant is hired to work for an extended period of time for a certain fee.

### If your budget is in bad shape, how can you afford to hire a consultant?

Find someone else to help pay for consulting services! One example of creative solution for hiring a consultant came from a town faced with a large development proposal. They knew the developer had deep pockets, so they asked him to fund peer review for the town and pay the salary for the town's project manager.

Another model is to adopt the practice commonly used by the federal government on environmental impact statements. The private party pays all consulting costs to prepare the EIS, plus costs incurred by the federal agencies involved.

Explore public/private partnerships as a way to attract funding to public projects. Approach developers, homebuilder and real estate groups, foundations, local DT business groups, chambers of commerce, major industries, state/federal programs and universities.

Take a look at your fee schedule. Determine what it really "costs" to process an application. If your community does not have a policy to subsidize applications, you should be passing the cost of processing applications to the applicant. However, be careful of a big fee jump during the depressed economy.

### How can you get the most "bang for your buck" with consultants?

Due to the depressed economy, you will automatically receive highly competitive proposals. In addition to the basics, invite the consultant to provide a "cafeteria plan" of additional tasks/services as part of their proposal. Other tips include:

- Provide complete information. Unknowns cause delays, which waste money.
- Help find data and contacts. Saving the consultant time will save you money.
- Be honest about potential problems so a proactive strategy can be developed before a project is derailed.
- Write a clear RFP and scope of work.
- Assign one person to be the contact with the consultant, in order to avoid delays and conflicting directions.

- Follow the schedule for the project.
- Pay bills within a reasonable time period. There is no excuse for "forgetting" to process the paperwork.
- Consider consultants to be part of your team -- work with them.
- Compensate for any extra work that is requested.

### How do you get proposals for your projects?

You can develop either a Request for Proposals (RFP) or a Request for Qualifications (RFQ). The RFQ is a less detailed submission and can be used to create a short list for interviews and selection. This will lengthen the process. Elements of the RFP include:

- Project description
- Schedule
- Scope of services
- General conditions
- Technical (non-price) and price proposals
- Evaluation criteria
- Budget
- Due date and time

### What do consultants want from RFP/RFQ?

Our panel agreed that there are some basics that need to be covered. First, the scope of the project is important to establish. You need to clearly state what you want. Probably the biggest frustration consultants have is the client keeping the budget for a project a secret. For the project to work, the scope needs to match the available budget. Meetings are often a source of confusion. Be clear about how many you want and understand that they aren't free. When you issue an RFP or RFQ, allow a reasonable response time, with page limits and a reasonable deadline (not first thing in the morning or overnight delivery causes problems). Be very clear about expected deliverables and please designate a contact person to answer questions.

### How do you choose a consultant?

When you are reviewing proposals, try the following:

- Establish a review committee
- Make sure the consultant is qualified
- Review the proposed approach and scope
- Use comparative evaluation criteria to rate proposals
- Create a short list of top proposals
- Interview the short list
- Check references

### How do you know if you are getting a good consultant?

It is up to you to make sure you are getting a good consultant. Check the consultant's track record with that type of project. Interaction of company officers and project managers with

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## Lean Times (cont'd from page 2)

the committee is important, but you also need to ask who will actually be doing the work. Ask for the qualifications of the project manager -- have they successfully done this before? Make sure you check references. Finally, don't be blinded by price -- if it seems too good to be true, it probably is.

### What is the best type of contract?

The best type of contract will depend on the type of project. Contracts are sometimes generated by the consultant or the client, but should always contain an "escape clause". Depending on the project, the contract may be hourly or lump sum, but both should consider reimbursable expenses. Kick-off meetings are important for negotiating terms. The contract should be clear about expected deliverables and identify responsibilities for each party.

### Where should I look for consultant services?

The best way to find consultant services is by word of mouth. Ask your peers to recommend consultants they have been happy with. Look to APA, including Chapters and Divisions. Take advantage of organization networking and conference sessions and exhibits to meet consultants, especially before you have a project to shop. Look at ads in planning publications and research award winners for consultants to contact.

Recession gives you time to plan and consultants can help:

Now is a great time to catch up on the big stuff. Update your comprehensive plan and ordinances by adding Smart Growth elements and making them "green" and sustainable. Follow up on your comprehensive plan recommendations and complete other needed studies and plans. Make sure that you sync your ordinances with your comprehensive plan. Consultants can help you get ready for a rebounding economy.

### What are some "lean times" strategies for consultants?

Finally, here are some ideas for planning consultants who are struggling during lean times:

- Research client "to do" and wish lists, and propose a way to get it done.
- Develop an expertise (i.e., green and sustainable techniques).
- Network, network, network...
- Look beyond the normal planning consulting work (e.g. tourism plans, affordable housing plans, etc.) ■

## Becoming a Sole Proprietor

By K.K. Gerhart-Fritz, AICP

*APA added a sole proprietor roundtable to the APA National Conference and asked three experienced sole proprietors to facilitate: Graham Billingsley, AICP, Past-President, AICP Commission; Cynthia Hoyle, AICP, Past Chair, Private Practice Division and K.K. Gerhart-Fritz, AICP, Vice-Chair of the Private Practice Division. The following is based on a discussion held with a packed room of interested planners.*

### Understanding the Current Market

Because of the current state of the economy, this is not a good time to become a sole proprietor. Competition is enormous; large firms and out-of-state firms are now competing for work that they would not normally pursue in a healthy economy, including smaller jobs and jobs with lower profit margins that would have once gone to sole proprietors. It is very difficult to compete with larger sophisticated firms that have large deep pools of expertise to draw from (i.e., attorneys on staff, sophisticated graphic software, etc.). Many of these firms are taking jobs that they know they will not make a profit on, simply to have work.

At the same time that there is more competition for work, there is less planning consulting work available. This is due to many things, including the fact that local governments are increasingly "broke", universities are increasingly acting as consultants and the federal government appears to be phasing out the use of planning consultants in favor of hiring permanent staff. Even a signed contract may not be honored in this market, due to less funding being available than anticipated. There could not be a worse time to consider setting up shop as a planning consultant.

With that being said, it is because of the current economy that many planners are being forced to consider this option. Planners in both the public and private sectors are being downsized. Very few planning staff positions are currently available (only 12 jobs were posted at APA's Job Mart this year), so planners are forced to try their hand at being a sole proprietor.

### The Pros of Being a Sole Proprietor

The idea of being the master of yourself and your work is an attractive one. Being able to determine when you work, who you do work for, how much you charge and the amount of time you need to put in on a project (as opposed to the number of hours a budget determines) are all positive arguments for becoming a sole proprietor. Flexibility of schedule and budget, and satisfaction with their final product are high for planners who work on their own. It also doesn't take much to set up a planning consulting business. Most of us already have a computer and a cell phone, and it is very doable to carve out a home office space, so the start-up costs are very minimal.

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## The Cons of Being a Sole Proprietor

One of the biggest drawbacks of being a sole proprietor is the lack of regular income and a benefits package. Unless you are one of the sole proprietors who are fortunate enough to land an on-going contract, you will not be able to count on a consistent stream of income. Your workload will vary wildly; in fact, it is often a feast or famine situation. Added to that, clients can not be counted on to pay on time, especially in this economy. For a variety of reasons, including politics, poor management and lack of funding, some of your invoices may not be paid until months after the due date. Beware the impact this can have on your personal finances and credit history. There is a fine line on how aggressive to be on the past-due collections, because it may impact how willing that client (and others) is to work with you again.

Many people look for full-time employment because of a benefits package. Health insurance costs continue to rise, and the price for individual insurance is steep. If you can rely on a partner's family health insurance coverage, that will reduce some of the stress of being on your own. As a sole proprietor, the only retirement plan you have will be what you contribute, and the extra money for this is hard to find, especially for those just starting out.

Other negatives include what you may also consider a positive – there is only you. There is no one else to fall back on when the workload is heavy or a client is difficult. You don't have cheap labor to do the grunt work or a marketing department to pull proposals together. You must be willing to do everything. One other frustration that sole proprietors may encounter is that your colleagues in other firms and your clients may not take you seriously. Because your firm is not growing larger, they may see your efforts as a hobby or inferior.

## Marketing Your Services

The best thing a sole proprietor can do for their business is to network, network, network. Be active in your APA

Chapter and Divisions. Be visible at conferences; being a speaker will help give you a reputation as an expert in that area. The more contacts you have, the more likely you are to find work or a larger firm to work with. Working as a sub is often a good option for sole proprietors. Finding a niche or specialty is often helpful in building your business, but as a sole proprietor you will also need to be flexible about what work you do if you want to remain busy. Consider looking at non-traditional markets (i.e., tourism planning) and apply for MBE/WBE certification if you are eligible. Many projects require this participation because of their funding, and this can make you more attractive as a sub.

Work hard at making your clients happy. Find out what is on a potential client's "wish list" and figure out how you can make it happen. This initiative never fails to impress a potential client. Make your existing clients happy so that they will become repeat clients. Looking for work is a very labor intensive and time consuming effort, so keeping a client has many benefits.

## Tips for Sole Proprietors

If you are thinking of starting your planning consulting business while you are still employed elsewhere, beware of violating the AICPA Code of Ethics. Moonlighting should only be done with your employers blessing and using your own equipment, time, etc. Make sure that you have a solid and thorough contract with a client that protects you before signing. It is a good idea to turn to other experts for legal, business and financial advice. Be very careful of your tax situation; you do not want to tangle with the IRS. Even though most planners agree that our profession does not need liability insurance, you may be required to purchase it by a client or a prime. If so, shop around because the rates will vary greatly.

The rewards of becoming a planning consultant/sole proprietor are many, but success will not be easy or quick, especially in our current economy. If you are ready to take this step, be prepared to work hard and stick with it. ■

# Creating the Highlands Center at Cape Cod National Seashore- Seeking Program Partners for a Unique Venture

*By Adele Fleet Bacow*

*Adele Fleet Bacow, President of Community Partners Consultants, Inc., a urban planning firm specializing in community cultural development, program development, and the arts, has worked with the Cape Cod National Seashore (CCNS) on numerous planning aspects of the Highlands Center.*

*We are seeking program partners to become part of this unique enterprise. We welcome your ideas on attracting partners and other resources for non-profit development in challenging times. Give us your thoughts to include in a subsequent issue of this newsletter: [afbacow@community-partners.net](mailto:afbacow@community-partners.net) or [Lauren\\_mckean@nps.gov](mailto:Lauren_mckean@nps.gov)*

Imagine a location overlooking the Atlantic Ocean within the National Park Service's beautiful Cape Cod National Seashore, an award-winning plan, extensive studies conducted by a team of professionals, and the encouragement and support of the public agency seeking reuse. The site offers features hard to find— majestic views overlooking the ocean, open space, buildings available for use (but in extensive need of repair), a dedicated owner in the CCNS seeking environmentally sustainable reuse of the land. Now imagine non-profit

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## Highlands Center *(cont'd from page 4)*

program partners all seeking resources for renovation of the existing buildings in the economic climate of today.

The Cape Cod National Seashore received an award by Massachusetts Chapter of the American Planning Association for its 1998 General Management Plan, which included conversion of the former North Truro Air Force Station into the Highlands Center. This plan and its subsequent phased implementation are based on extensive community outreach and planning. Initial planning occurred in partnership with incredibly dedicated work of the Lower Cape Cod Community Development Corporation. The National Park Service (NPS) sponsored extensive site design, engineering, planning, feasibility and financial studies, and a site plan in preparation for reuse of this former military base as the “Highlands Center”, a unique setting for scientific, cultural, and educational activities located in Truro, near Provincetown, Massachusetts. This work led to creation of a non-profit organization, Highlands Center, Incorporated, to aid in implementing this project in concert with CCNS that sponsored an implementation plan and marketing materials.

The requirements of the National Park Service (NPS) include the intent that the ultimate reuse be done by non-profit partners whose activities meet community needs, occur on a year-round basis as opposed to just the peak summer tourist season, and are respectful of the Cape Cod National Seashore environment. The planning approach is to identify non-profit organizations, scientific, arts, cultural and educational institutions, and other such groups that would enter into long-term leases with NPS as “program partners”, rehabilitate the buildings, and carry out their activities either in independently or in future collaboration with other partners. Program partners would be required to renovate the space in which they locate or could do so in collaboration with other partners. The vision of the Highlands Center is to become a place where artists, scientists and cultural organizations interact with one another, create and present their work, and transcend the boundaries between science and the arts.

“The Highlands Center venue is a place to draw from educational retreats and transformative work in the arts, and explore natural science research into issues of climate change, land and marine ecology, and habitat restoration,” says George Price, CCNS Superintendent. “We imagine that a national park setting provides a unique and inspirational environment to enrich the work of organizations and the lives of participants.”

A Request for Proposals for program partners resulted in identification of several program partners who are either on site now or are seeking funding to renovate the buildings for their use. Currently on site and conducting physical and biological research are the NPS North Atlantic Coastal Laboratory and Atlantic Research Center. Truro Center for the Arts recently installed a wood burning kiln in concert with Highlands Center, Inc. Other arts and cultural organizations are seeking funding for an arts residency program and a performing arts center. Temporary cultural programming and events occur periodically throughout the year, especially at the seasonal Payomet Performing Arts Center tent. In addition, Barnstable County AmeriCorps Cape Cod is seeking funding to convert a building for housing their volunteers and related programs. A request for expression of interest to be issued by NPS seeking additional program partners is currently being prepared. If you would like to receive this request or have suggestions of potential partners, please let us know!

The stark reality remains, however, that in times of economic uncertainty, the difficulty for the non-profit program partners to obtain resources for needed building renovation increases dramatically. Not every partner previously selected to become part of this project may be successful. The current slowdown in market conditions offers time for rallying support, site improvements, and search for additional program partners needed to complete the array of potential collaborators for the Highlands Center.



### HIGHLANDS CENTER AT A GLANCE

- Highlands Center mission is to foster the unique cultural and natural heritage of Cape Cod through scientific, arts, and educational programs.
- Site offers 110 acres at the site of the former North Truro Air Force Station overlooking the Atlantic Ocean on the Cape Cod National Seashore.
- Up to 33 buildings are available for lease and renovation, in addition to 12 buildings to be used by the National Park Service (NPS) and several park partners, for a total of approximately 115,000 square feet of space at full occupancy.
- The Highlands Center is intended to be a regional model of environmental sustainability
- More information available at the Highlands Center web site at: <http://www.nps.gov/caco/planyourvisit/highlands-center-at-cape-cod-national-seashore.htm>
- **Do you know of a program partner for the Highlands Center?**  
Please contact Lauren McKean, NPS Highlands Center Project Manager, at [Lauren\\_mckean@nps.gov](mailto:Lauren_mckean@nps.gov) or (508) 771-2144 ext. 0731

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## TIPS FOR PLANNING IN TIME OF ECONOMIC UNCERTAINTY

- Use this time to think and plan more thoughtfully to be prepared for busier times ahead.
- Keep communication with potential partners and identify other like-minded prospects whose mission fit with goals of the overall project.
- Solidify steps for implementation for time when market rebounds. In case of the Highlands Center, polish the “Request for Expression of Interest for Potential Program Partners”, the NPS document used to solicit interested tenants for Highlands Center project.
- For projects that require fundraising, prepare proposal materials, have background meetings with potential funders, conduct site tours, and complete other related tasks. Keep potential funders and partners involved of all pertinent activities and progress.
- Update extensive listing of organizations to receive the solicitation document and relevant contact information.
- Confirm strategy and materials needed for launching of new phase of project when market conditions indicate.
- Take advantage of time for analyzing wind and solar potential, modest landscape improvements and native plantings, offering time for site improvements and to aid in marketing.
- Continue community use of the site for public programming, lectures, and special events to keep public attention to Highlands Center project.
- Take advantage of this time to restore energy levels, focus, purpose of the endeavor, and team commitment to the outcome.

NPS Highlands Center Project Manager Lauren McKean reports that “Initial kernels of scientific and arts activity have begun to bring new life to the site, however, we are seeing the effects of a slowing economy that calls for adjusting timeframes and approaches. The vision still resonates, and we believe that the site will fulfill its potential.”

We are eager to hear from you if you know of potential non profit organizations, educational institutions, or groups working in the arts, sciences, or environmental arenas who would benefit from locating their work at the Highlands Center and become a tenant. In addition, if you have suggestions on strategies for obtaining resources in difficult times, please share your experience with others. The editor of the Private Practice Division of the APA newsletter may share your insight in future editions of this newsletter. You may contact Ramona Mullahey, Editor, directly at [ramonamullahey@hawaiiantel.net](mailto:ramonamullahey@hawaiiantel.net) or send your ideas to Adele Fleet Bacow or Lauren McKean, Highlands Center Project Manager, at the e-mail addresses listed on the previous page. ■

# Tips on Getting That New Job

By Marie Kumabe, Principal, Remedy Intelligent Staffing

If you are currently unemployed or underemployed, do not let the reports of a “bad economy” and a “difficult employment market” discourage you from seeking your ideal position. Focus your energy on finding the job you want in the organization you want to work for. While it is good to be somewhat flexible, employers may be reluctant to hire someone who is obviously overqualified for a position. They may fear you will take any job to pay the bills, but will leave as soon as a better opportunity arises. Remember, you and your future employer are both looking to survive and thrive in this lean economy.

In addition to looking through the classified ads and websites like CareerBuilder, Craig’s List, Monster, and company Websites, spend time reviewing business periodicals. These should give you an overview of the business climate. Familiarize yourself with the types of positions that are available in certain companies and industries. Determine if this type of work is something you see yourself doing and if it is, for how long. If you are overqualified or have moved around frequently, companies may be hesitant to hire you because the investment in training is costly and time-consuming and will impact their costs if you leave for another position.

If the position is something that you see yourself doing for a long period of time, then do more research on the company and the position. Using this information, tailor your resume to fit what they are looking for --without compromising who you are. In other words, highlight the qualities, education and experience you possess that are in alignment with what they are seeking.

After these adjustments are made, you are ready to apply for this position. Write a cover letter specifically for this position at this company, including why the position interests you. However, pay close attention to their application process. Employers are being bombarded with applications and appreciate it when you follow directions.

Another area that you should delve into is social networking. It will benefit you to share with your family, friends, peers, and acquaintances the places that you are interested in working for or even to solicit their recommendations. They may be able to put in a good word for you with the right people or at the very least, they may know someone who knows someone who can put in the recommendation for you.

Either way, sharing the news is a win-win situation; think of it as free advertising---for you. The other part of social networking is to build a professional profile on sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter. These networks are great avenues of connecting with people in different professions, companies, and industries. By creating a professional profile and plugging into different interest groups on these sites, you are opening the door to multiple opportunities for meeting new people and reconnecting with familiar faces.

Additionally, companies are using these Websites for free advertising and connecting with professionals in a non-traditional way. By expanding the resources available to you in your job search, you have provided yourself with the a multitude of possibilities, all leading to the next key step---

**The job interview.** Once you secure the interview, here are some tips that will separate you from the masses:

- **Prepare.** Since you already did your research on the company, look over its Website and check the business news to ensure that you are up-to-date on what is happening.
- **Practice.** Practice your answers. If possible, have someone ask you possible interview questions. Remember: Practice = self-confidence.
- **Be able to express your ability** to do the job and why you would fit with the company.
- **Dress professionally.** Casual attire may not be appropriate for the company you are interviewing with. You can always dress down once you get the job, but you only get one chance to make a first impression.

**The last few tips** – Employers are commonly using behavioral-based interview questions. Behavioral based interview questions probe for answers that tell what candidates have done in the past to predict future behaviors. In order to recognize these types of questions, a few examples are “tell me about a time” and “describe a situation.” These types of questions have you describe the situation or problem and provide the action you took in order to resolve it. It illustrates how you behave in a particular situation and describes your personality, thought processes, emotions, work ethic, problem-solving skills, time management skills, organizational skills, and many other facets.

While it is great to follow-up with the interviewer if you haven’t heard back from them in a week, don’t overdo it. Also, be polite and friendly to everyone when you are in the office and on the phone; these people may be your future co-workers and you want to get off to a great start.

**Remember:** that you will make the right impression if you are prepared, confident, and willing to be yourself. If you don’t get selected, do not get discouraged. The right job is out there and if you diligently apply yourself, you have an excellent chance of finding it. ■

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*Marie Kumabe is the co-founder of Remedy Intelligent Staffing, a Hawaii-owned placement service. Her expertise in and knowledge of human resources enables her to provide invaluable career mentoring to professionals to develop their skills and potential in the job marketplace and customized services for employers so both may prosper and grow. You may address questions to her via the Private Practice Division listserv at: APA-PPD@yahoogroups.com.*

# The Planning Consultant's Home Office - Part 1

## aka ... A Consultant's Dream or Worst Nightmare

By Connie B. Cooper, FAICP

Ah...the dream of being your own boss! Operating your planning consulting practice from the comfort of home sweet home! Waking up at eight just in time to catch Matt Lauer and Ann Curry welcoming you from Rockefeller Center. Working in gym shorts, no makeup (or unshaven), setting your own schedule...heaven on earth! Not exactly!

Three of APA's "Wonder Women" planning consultants shared their home-based planning experiences with a large group of participants this past Spring at the National APA conference in Minneapolis. Carol Thomas, FAICP (Boston, MA), Cynthia Hoyle, AICP (Champaign-Urbana, IL), and Connie Cooper, FAICP (Dallas, TX) provided a lively discussion on home-based planning practices sponsored by APA's Private Practice Division and the American Society of Consulting Planners.



deciding to telecommute, these professionals should consider many of the issues that apply to full-time home based offices.

### Advantages and Disadvantages of Working at Home

Many individuals are enticed by the flexibility of a home office. They see it as an opportunity to set their own schedule and perhaps have more free time. But what the uninitiated don't realize is that even working from home there are many things that have the possibility of claiming part of your

work day --- your spouse, your children, your neighbors, home chores, errands, etc.

The home office does, however, offer the advantage of reduced costs. There is no additional rent or utility bills to pay, work commute is reduced to zero, you'll enjoy some reduction in wardrobe costs, and you may choose to take advantage of the home office tax benefits. But you may miss the companionship, company gossip, and the intellectual stimulation of working in close proximity to other planning professionals.

One of the big downsides of working from home is that you'll often find yourself working 24/7. You'll find your eating habits may erode and eating at the computer becomes the norm rather than the exception.

Working from home with young children has its own unique challenges. Cynthia Hoyle recalls the time she was on a conference call and her youngest threw a major tantrum. She ended up locking the office door then retreating to a closet to finish the business discussion! Then, there is the issue that as a home office you'll usually have the best computer equipment in the home. Everyone wants to know "when will you be finished" so they can play their high speed video games on your 21-inch computer screen.

### The Original Home Office

Carol Thomas opened the program with an introduction of the "original" home office...50 years ago the home-based planning consultant had a telephone, electric typewriter, mimeograph machine, drawing board, prismacolors, press on letters, lots and lots of zipatone, and typing and drafting services were mandatory! Today the home-based planning consultant has high-powered personal computers, the Internet, smart phones, blogs, Twitter, web pages, Google Earth, remote conferencing, and the ability to communicate around the world 24/7.

### Who's working from home?

Going solo as a private consultant has piqued the interest of many people. By some estimates, 26 million people in the United States work from a home office. There are many reasons planning professionals choose to work from home or find themselves at home and deciding to start up a planning practice from home.

Some are retiring from public service and still have an interest in working. Others find themselves tired of working for others and wanting to try their hand at working independently. Still others have relocated due to a spouse's job and find working out of their home a soft way to get into the market place. Women, particularly, find the flexibility of working at home well-suited to being Mom and Boss. One large group is those who have been laid off or fired and find themselves with few choices and choose to start up a planning practice from home.

There is one group of planning professionals which often works from home but is not considered a full-time home-based practice. These are the part-time telecommuters ... individuals who split their time between a traditional office and a home-based office. These individuals may be sole proprietorships, have a staff, or are staff members in a larger firm. Before

### Assess your credentials

Before you make the jump to a home office or any privately-operated venture in which you are going it alone, be sure you have a specific skill set. Being a planning professional may be your background, but your success rate is greatly increased if you excel in:

- Public presentations and plan preparation;
- Code writing – zoning ordinances, subdivision regulations;
- Analytical methods – impact fees, market analyst, transportation impacts; or,
- Design – illustrations, graphics or computer animation.

It is also important that you have a "hook"; a particular body of planning knowledge that sets you apart from the herd of planning consultants (sorry but I'm from Texas). For example,

*(cont'd on page 9)*

# How to Make Your Résumé Shine

By Lily Whiteman.

Reprinted with permission from *Federal Times*.

I am frequently asked, “What is the most common mistake that job-seekers make on their résumés and application essays?”

My answer: Virtually all of the thousands of job applications that I have reviewed — no matter how much expertise is offered by the job-seekers they represent — are dominated by unimpressive statements from job descriptions instead of specific, achievement-oriented descriptions of successes. They fail to convey the importance of the job-seeker’s accomplishments. Therefore, they fail to show how the job seeker could improve his target employer’s operations.

I was recently consulted by the communications director of one of the most powerful members of the Senate because his job search wasn’t producing pay dirt. A quick scan of his résumé identified the likely cause: Reading it was about as impressive as reading a stranger’s ho-hum “to do” list. If I hadn’t already known what a skilled, productive and creative power-broker he is, I never would have known it from his résumé.

## Here are questions to ask yourself, to help you define your achievements in compelling terms:

- Why is my work important?
- How have I improved my organization’s reputation to internal and external stakeholders?
- How have I saved time or money, or streamlined processes?
- Which of my achievements am I most proud of, worked mightily to accomplish or earned recognition for, such as awards to me or my organization, promotions, bonuses or praise?
- How do I do my work better or differently from peers or more junior professionals? What do I offer that no one else does?
- How would my organization’s services, resources or morale suffer if I had never worked there?
- How have I shown initiative and gone the extra mile?
- How have I wisely used my judgment, discretion or creativity?
- What am I an expert in?
- When have I contributed to high-pressure, high-profile, high-dollar or high-priority projects?

(cont’d on page 10)

## Home Office (cont’d from page 8)

Cynthia Hoyle is an expert and has written extensively on traffic calming; Carol Thomas was one of the first planning consultants with experience in China; and I have become an expert in writing regulations related to regulating adult businesses. Some other “niche” planning areas are:

- Form-based code writing;
- Sustainable/green planning;
- Planning pedestrian-friendly streets/developments; and,
- Growth management planning.

However, before you decide to open up your own shop, you must be sure that you not only have the right skill planning set, but that you:

- Are able to produce on your own;
- Have a substantial resume/portfolio (even if from your former public or private sector employment – but don’t forget to give appropriate credit); and,
- Have a professional network --- but don’t count on your buddies to jump start your business!



## Prepare your Family (and Self)

As a 20-year home office veteran, I know a fulltime home office does impact your family and yourself. The home office is truly “bringing your work home with you.” Your work is always present; you’re physically home but not with your family; and, thus, before you make the decision to work from home, you must make sure that your family is fully supportive of the decision and is aware it is not be just a temporary arrangement until you get a “real job”.

If you’re the primary breadwinner, the idea of working from a home office as a sole proprietor can be particularly unnerving for your family. It does help if your spouse is working at a reasonable income level or you have other income such as retirement income or you’re a trust fund baby.

The bottom line is that the decision to go-it-alone in a home office must be a family decision because it affects everyone, both financially and their personal space. Spend time talking about everyone’s expectations and concerns. Deciding to work from home must be a decision your whole family supports; it cannot and should not be a pronouncement of fact that “starting next Monday, I’ll be starting up a planning practice from home!” Of course if you don’t have a family, it will only be you who suffer from the decision, so make sure you are making the right one!

Stay tuned for Part 2 of “The Planning Consultant’s Home Office... aka, A Consultant’s Dream or Worst Nightmare” which will be in the next issue of *Private Planning Perspectives*. Part 2 will cover setting up and running the home office. ■

Connie B. Cooper, FAICP, is a planning consultant based in Dallas, TX. Email: [cconniecooper@cs.com](mailto:cconniecooper@cs.com).

## Make Your Résumé Shine

(cont'd from page 9)

- Which of my accomplishments warrant superlatives like the first, the only, the best, the fastest, the highest rated, the most or the strongest?

You don't have to be the first climber up Mount Everest to have an important superlative under your belt. Automating a process, creating a new Web site, developing new training, creating a document or completing a project in record time warrant superlatives.

More tips on how to describe your achievements are featured in my book, "How to Land a Top-Paying Federal Job."

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*Lily Whiteman is a public affairs officer at the National Science Foundation and author of "How to Land a Top-Paying Federal Job." Her Web site is <http://IGotTheJob.net>.*

## PRIVATE PRACTICE DIVISION

The Division strives to provide services to meet the needs of private practitioners. The division offers its members access to networking opportunities, resources, timely information and technical support. This includes: addressing standards for private practice professionals; providing an information exchange; examining issues related to consultant selection, contracts, et al: Contributing to the education of future private practice professionals; examining issues related to organizational change, acquisitions, mergers, marketing, merchandising, ethics, contract and other consultant matters; and other issues which contribute knowledge to and promote cooperation among private sector planners and the larger planning community.

The Private Practice Division was established in 1988. We have organized to:

- Promote the quality of private practice.
- Improve the quality of life as a private practitioner.
- Increase the recognition of the value of planning in the private sector.
- Improve the manner in which consultants are used.
- Improve the image of the planner/private practitioner.

We welcome your interest in the special issues of private practice. Please join us in our efforts to promote quality private practice.

## Report on Chapter President's Council Survey: Challenges to Professional Practice

*By Cynthia Hoyle, AICP, Past Chair, Private Practice Division.  
Presented at Private Practice Division Annual Business Meeting, Minneapolis, MN, April 27, 2009*

*An electronic survey was sent to the Chapter President's Council (CPC) in March of 2008 for review with a request that it be sent to the APA Chapter Presidents. In August, 2008, the survey was sent by email to all Chapter Presidents asking them if their chapter members had experienced any challenges to their ability as planners to engage in the professional practice of planning. Responses were received from sixteen chapters including: Maryland, Florida, Massachusetts, Ohio, Idaho, Illinois, Mississippi, Alaska, South Carolina, Tennessee, Oregon, Northern New England, Georgia, Kansas, Utah, and Pennsylvania.*

The questions posed to the chapters are as follow with the responses included in italics:

1. Has there been an effort at the state or local level to restrict or redefine planning practice in a way that impeded planners from traditional planning practice? \_\_\_YES \_\_\_NO \_\_\_DON'T KNOW

**Six chapters had had issues come up and 11 chapters had not.**

2. If you answered YES, please briefly describe the events:

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**Responses ranged from 8 years ago to last year a challenge came up at the state level. The challenges came from Landscape Architects, lawyers, and registered surveyors. Landscape architects often appear to be attempting to define their practice doing so in a way so broadly as to exclude planners. In Oregon a legislator introduced a bill to license planners that did not include education in planning, etc. The chapter opposed the bill and it died.**

(cont'd on page 11)

## Report on Chapter President's Council Survey (cont'd from page 10)

3. Did your chapter take action to address the issue?  YES  NO  DON'T KNOW If YES, please describe what actions the chapter undertook and if they were successful or not:

**All six chapters that had experienced issues had addressed it at the chapter level in some fashion. In each case the chapter successfully resolved the situation after negotiation or lobbying efforts were undertaken.**

4. Did your chapter contact APA/AICP to seek assistance with the issue?  YES  NO  DON'T KNOW  
If YES, did you receive assistance and was it helpful?  YES  NO  DON'T KNOW

**No chapters indicated that they had contacted APA or AICP nationally for assistance. In four cases the respondents did not know if any contact had been made probably because of lack of institutional memory.**

5. Would your chapter find a draft of model legislation that legally defines planning practice and planning professionals helpful in addressing the issue in your state/municipality?  YES  NO  DON'T KNOW

**Eleven chapters said they would find model legislation helpful. Interestingly, in several chapters that have experienced challenges the respondents said that the benefit of model legislation would depend on whether the model legislation addressed the particular issue they dealt with and did so in a way suited to their state enabling legislation. Some concern was expressed about how to define the planning profession. Certification Maintenance was mentioned as a step in the right direction. Several chapters mentioned that state licensing has been discussed in their chapter.**

6. Would a packet that would include talking points, strategies and PR information that could be sent to chapters to use with state legislatures and governmental agencies to address the issue be helpful to your chapter?  
 YES  NO  DON'T KNOW

**Seven chapters said that an informational packet would be helpful. Two chapters said they did not know if it would be helpful. Some chapters said that it would depend on what was included in the packet as to whether it would be helpful to their particular situation or not.**

Other comments/suggestions:

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**Responses indicate interest in the subject Responses also bring up the issue of lack of institutional memory due to frequent turnover of volunteer leadership. One chapter expressed concerns about the content of model legislation, but indicated that a coordinated response to address issues when they arise would be helpful. Licensing has been discussed in a few chapters, but no effort to pursue this was indicated.**

### Recommendations:

- Provide a report to the CPC. Ask CPC if they would like to send a joint report to the APA Board.
- If CPC does not want to pursue the issue at this time a brief report can be sent to the Divisions Council with a request that it be forwarded to the APA board.
- The report can be sent to the AICP Commission and include recommendations that had previously been sent to the AICP Commission in 1996 and again in 2005. Those recommendations were:
  - Do a search of current state laws related to planning to identify legislation governing the practice of planning. In 1996, when we first raised this issue, it was suggested that APA could have student interns do a LEXIS search of the available data bases and put together a report.
  - Survey the chapters through the Planning and Law Division and/or the chapter presidents to double check the information obtained through the LEXIS search. Ask each chapter to have a lawyer in the chapter verify the current standing of planners as professionals under state law and under current policies. Further information could be elicited in each chapter regarding any additional problems planners may have had related to their professional status.
  - Develop model legislation that could be used by chapters to facilitate their efforts to legally define professional planners under state law. We believe the chapters would find this very helpful as a starting point in pursuing legal remedies.
  - Develop a packet that would include talking points, strategies and PR information that could be sent to chapters to use with state legislatures and governmental agencies to address the issue.

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American Planning Association  
**Private Practice Division**

*Making Great Communities Happen*

### PRIVATE PLANNING PERSPECTIVES

is the newsletter of the  
Private Practice Division of the APA

[www.planning.org/privatepractice](http://www.planning.org/privatepractice).

Private Practice Perspectives is a benefit of membership in the Division. The newsletter is published quarterly: Winter, Spring, Summer, and Fall.

### CONTRIBUTIONS ARE WELCOME

Submit articles, letters-to-the-editor and announcements two-months before the month of desired publication to the editor.

### SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS

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