

APA's National Centers for Planning engage in policy-relevant research, and education involving community health, natural and man-made hazards, and green communities.

Outcomes

The centers provide our nation's urban, suburban, regional, and rural planners with the knowledge they need to effectively guide policymakers who turn to them for advice about communities' built and natural environments. The centers are dedicated to helping planners create communities of lasting value: safe, healthy, and sustainable places that respect the values of their citizens.

Perspectives

The centers focus on best practices, innovative solutions, and leading-edge approaches. They operate with the unique perspective of urban planning: a comprehensive viewpoint, a spatial component, a long-range outlook, and serious attention to community engagement. Their approaches recognize that communities and the environments in which they are located vary widely.

Resources

APA maintains a highly qualified research and policy staff. APA's Merriam Center Library is known as one of the finest collections of materials on planning practice in the United States. APA maintains active and productive relationships with many private and public practitioners, academic institutions, and research institutes throughout the world. The centers draw upon in-house resources, research fellows, and a collaborative network of partner institutions.

Conduits

The centers disseminate findings to the heads of public planning agencies and their staffs, planners in private practice, appointed and elected officials, educators and students, and professionals in allied fields via numerous vehicles. These include nine serial publications, a full-featured web site, research monographs, on-the-ground and virtual technical assistance, and in-person and distance learning opportunities.

APA is the premier nonprofit education and research organization devoted to urban, suburban, regional, and rural planning. With more than 44,000 members and established productive relationships with numerous academic, nonprofit, and public institutions, APA is connected to the innovative thinking and practical realities of the planning profession.



Why Planners?

The APA National Centers for Planning engage in research, education, and policy development helpful to urban, suburban, regional, and rural planners working in planning departments and as planning consultants across America. This work also has significant implications for the many multidisciplinary partners outside of planning that planners collaborate with regularly. Why are planners strategically well-positioned to affect positive societal change?

Planners are often the professional go-to people elected and appointed officials turn to to solve tough community problems. Mayors, city managers, council members, and appointed officials will often contact the planning office for help on issues with a spatial, long-range, multidisciplinary, or technical component.

Planners have a skill set particularly useful for analyzing complex public policy problems and opportunities and for developing strategies that address them.

- Planners have a **comprehensive perspective**. The planner’s mantra: “Everything is related to everything else.” Planners routinely address challenges in the areas of housing, economic development, the environment, energy and climate change, land use and growth management, transportation, human services, community health, and hazard mitigation. They speak the language of many disciplines.
- Planners have a **long-range outlook**. They are trained to look at changing conditions and quality of life over 20 years or more—challenges that affect generations not yet born, as well as the impacts of investment decisions that last for centuries, not years.
- Planning is one of the few professions that focuses on **place-based** problems and opportunities affecting health, safety, and general welfare. Planners ability to deal with the community-wide spatial component of quality-of-life issues sets them apart.
- Planners are trained to spot and deal with **unintended consequences** and long-term **cumulative impacts**.
- Planners have special expertise in **community engagement and consensus building**. They often act as conveners of stakeholders: those in the community affected by change as well as those who control the resources that can affect change. Knowing whom to engage and how to engage them is familiar territory for planners.

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Opportunities to effect change.

At what stages in the community development process do planners have the best opportunity to influence outcomes? The National Centers for Planning focus on five strategic points of intervention.

- **Long-range community visioning and goal setting.** Planners frequently conduct visioning exercises that result in broad goals and objectives that guide the future of communities. This is often the first best chance to identify a new problem or opportunity and to make it a priority.
- **Plan making.** Planning departments prepare plans of all kinds. Comprehensive plans cover the entire community and address all subjects. Strategic plans focus on high-priority problems or opportunities. Sub-area plans address part of a community—a downtown, a corridor, a neighborhood. Functional plans deal with a particular subject—sewers and water, community health, open space and recreation, housing, transit. Plans recommend actions involving infrastructure and facilities, land-use patterns, open space, jobs and prosperity, transportation options, housing choice and affordability, and much more.
- **Standards, policies, and incentives.** Planners conceive, write, and amend standards, policy, and incentives that have an important influence on what, where, and how things get built, and what, where, and how land and buildings get preserved. Zoning, subdivision regulations, design guidelines, landscaping and street tree standards, signage regulations, transit-oriented development ordinances, street and sidewalk standards, tax policies, and inclusionary housing regulations are but a few examples of the “carrots and sticks” that can be used effectively to build cities of lasting value.
- **Development work.** Planners often have an opportunity to influence the outcomes of development projects. Planners serve as leading team members on public-private partnerships that result in mixed use developments, redevelopment, neighborhood revitalization, brownfields development, affordable housing, and transit-oriented development. They also prepare staff reviews of private development projects and have an opportunity to negotiate positive changes to project plans during the review process.
- **Public investment.** Towns, cities, and counties undertake major investments in infrastructure and community facilities that support private development and the quality of life of a community. In many ways this is the most important tool for planners. Their influence over the location and design of sewer and water facilities, transit, streets, sidewalks, bikeways, schools, libraries, police and fire facilities, and other publicly funded investments is substantial.

Policymakers seek out planners because they offer a unique perspective and skill set for solving tough community problems. APA's National Centers for Planning disseminate research to these influential professionals.





Planning for sustainable communities

Global climate change, polluted waters, and lack of open space are just a few of the issues facing our communities today. Community planners—tasked with seeing the big picture and thinking about the long term—are integral to addressing both economic competitiveness and environmental issues in our cities, towns, and neighborhoods. Through education, plan making, tax policies, capital investments, development review, and other planning actions, planners have opportunities to help create green communities by reducing the impact of development on the natural environment and improving environmental quality for residents.

Working with a global network of research fellows and partner institutions, our staff undertakes research related to green community planning, such as climate change, energy, land conservation, urban forestry, sustainable economic development, green infrastructure, and watershed protection. Our approach is multidisciplinary and collaborative, involving experts from several fields.

Our work advances green communities through:

- Research on best practices in planning for green communities
- Training and technical assistance for planners and allied professionals
- Outreach efforts that increase awareness of issues related to green communities
- Information that affects planning and public policy at the local, state, and national levels
- Guidance on planning practices and strategies to create green communities

APA's Green Communities Research Center has the expertise and influence to help planners and citizens create greener, more sustainable communities. To learn how APA's Green Communities Research Center can help you or to discuss opportunities for research partnerships, contact APA at greencommunities@planning.org or visit www.planning.org/nationalcenters.

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Priority Areas

- Climate change
- Clean energy sources
- Energy efficiency
- Green building
- Green jobs
- Sustainable design
- Green roofs
- Urban parks
- Greenways
- Urban forestry
- Street trees
- Riparian corridors
- Natural stormwater systems
- Wetlands
- Source water protection
- Watershed management
- Land conservation
- Habitat protection
- Biodiversity
- Farmland preservation
- Clean air strategies
- Infrastructure investment
- Transportation alternatives





Planning for safe communities

Floods. Wildfires. Hurricanes. Landslides. Extreme temperature events. Terrorist attacks. Every community is faced with natural and manmade hazards that can best be addressed ahead of time by planners working closely with emergency management personnel to mitigate the threat and prepare for post-disaster recovery. Through original and applied research, APA's Hazards Planning Research Center identifies practices that protect communities from natural and manmade hazards and educates planners and allied professionals about those practices. Our mission is to support the development of safe, resilient communities that can both minimize their losses from disasters and quickly and efficiently marshal their resources afterwards to recover in ways that leave them stronger and better prepared than ever before.

Working with a global network of research fellows and partner institutions, our staff undertakes research on the resources, institutional structures, and knowledge base needed at all levels of government to plan effectively for hazard mitigation and post-disaster recovery. Our approach is multidisciplinary and collaborative, involving experts from a number of fields.

Our work advances safer policies and planning practices through:

- Research on best practices in planning for hazard mitigation
- Research on planning for post-disaster recovery and reconstruction
- Training and technical assistance for planners and allied professionals
- Outreach efforts that increase awareness of issues related to disaster planning
- Information that affects planning and public policy at the local, state, and national levels

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Priority Areas

- Hazard mitigation planning
- Floodplain management
- Addressing hazards in comprehensive plans
- Addressing hazards in capital improvements programs
- Sustainable redevelopment
- Linking planners with other hazards professionals
- Floodplain management
- Community resiliency
- Anticipating impacts of climate change
- Evacuation planning
- Social equity in disaster policy
- Planning for wildfires, floods, earthquakes, landslides, tsunamis, and coastal storms





Planning for healthy communities

Obesity. Food deserts. Accessibility. Transportation alternatives. The way a community is planned—its land development patterns, transportation options, or community design—bears heavily on the health of those living there. By working closely with policymakers, public health professionals, environmental health scientists, transportation engineers, educators, and other community members and experts, planners work to create healthier communities, eliminating adverse conditions and building better places for everyone to live, work, and play. APA's Planning and Community Health Research Center is dedicated to integrating community health issues into local and regional planning practices by advancing a program of policy, relevant research, and education.

Working with a global network of research fellows and partner institutions, our staff conducts collaborative, multidisciplinary research and practical work aimed at addressing today's pressing health issues through city and regional planning, whether it be increasing physical activity and access to healthy food and health services, planning for aging populations and people with disabilities, creating schools that are centers of their communities, promoting environmental justice and social equity, or developing a future workforce with an understanding of health and planning issues.

Our work advances healthier policies and planning practices through:

- Research targeting areas at the intersection of planning and health
- Training and technical assistance for planners and allied professionals
- Information that affects planning and public policy at the local, state, and national levels
- Outreach efforts that increase awareness of health and planning issues
- Guidance for the next generation of planning and public health officials
- Partnerships with organizations and institutions with complementary interests
- Advocacy of public policy that advances planning and community health issues

APA's Planning and Community Health Research Center has the expertise and influence to help planners, health professionals, and citizens create healthier communities, shaping better places for future generations. To learn how APA's Planning and Community Health Research Center can help you or to discuss opportunities for research partnerships, contact APA at healthycommunities@planning.org or visit www.planning.org/nationalcenters.

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Priority Areas

- Transportation alternatives
- Accessible transit services
- Parks and recreation
- Mixed-use development
- Access to healthy food
- Farmland preservation
- Housing choice and affordability
- Accessory dwelling units
- Universal design
- Community-centered schools
- School siting
- Safe routes to school
- Access to health services
- Clean water and air
- Environmental justice
- Social equity
- Health impact assessments
- Brownfield remediation and reuse

