Appendix B

Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR)

Portfolio Development Guide

INTRODUCTION

The certification standards provide for a Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) process as an alternative route towards certification as a professional planner.

This guide has been developed to assist those interested in pursuing candidate status and participate in the certification process to become a professional planner.

PLAR affords individuals an opportunity to achieve credit toward certification based on past experience, professional development and education. The PLAR route requires the following:

1. Applicants for candidate status must have a minimum of five years of responsible planning experience.
2. Successfully demonstrate the equivalencies to the competency standards through presentation of a PLAR Portfolio and be accepted as a candidate member. This will include a listing of post secondary and other qualifications, e.g. university degrees and professional qualifications and matching academic courses and work experiences to the required competencies
3. Successfully complete the Ethics and Professionalism course.
4. Engage a mentor and sponsor, as required based on approved certification policies.
5. Obtain one year of responsible planning experience while a candidate member.
6. Successfully complete the Professional Exam.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ON PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT

What is a Portfolio?

A portfolio is a record of your learning from educational, work and personal experience. It is developed by you to support your claim of competence and credit toward being accepted as a candidate member.

What is PLAR Portfolio Assessment?

Upon receipt, the Professional Standards Board shall assign two (2) qualified and unbiased assessors to determine if your portfolio demonstrates the equivalent experience and education required to meet the required Competency Standards for acceptance as a candidate.

What should my PLAR Portfolio contain?
More detail follows in the sections that follow, however, a brief overview of items your portfolio must contain includes:

- A letter of introduction that briefly introduces you
- The completed evidence grid for each of the competencies you are seeking advanced standing for
- Evidence to prove the competencies you are applying for, such as: descriptions of the activities you have undertaken at your place of employment; any courses, professional development, or self-directed study which you have taken; evidence from supervisors, clients, colleagues and others about your skills and abilities related to the competency for the advanced standing you are applying for.
- A resume that demonstrates the five years of responsible professional planning experience.
- Evidence of related education.

Portfolio assessments will be based on submitted materials only. Assessors will not consider portfolios which direct them to websites or public documents in order to access materials.

What if I have a foreign university degree?

Applicants with foreign university degrees must have their credentials verified by the Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials, International Qualifications Assessment Service or a similar organization recognized by the Institute. Results of the verification must be included with the portfolio along with a photocopy of the degree and original university transcripts.

Who are the assessors?

Assessors are experienced planning professionals with a sound awareness of the competency standards and training in the assessment of portfolios. The assessors follow a guide and evaluate each submission according to the national competency standards.

What fees are required to submit a portfolio?

Your portfolio submission must be accompanied by a completed Request for Portfolio Assessment application form and payment by cheque, money order, Visa or MasterCard payable to the Professional Standards Board in the amount of $750.00 plus GST/HST.

How will I find out the results of my portfolio submission?

The results of your portfolio assessment will be communicated to you in writing once your portfolio has been reviewed. Portfolios are assessed once per month. Where competency deficiencies are noted, you will be required to obtain equivalent experience and/or education. Upon meeting the noted requirements you can resubmit your application and revised portfolio.

What can I do if I am unsatisfied with the decision made by the assessors?

Your portfolio is reviewed by two assessors. If the assessors disagree, it is sent to a third assessor for a final decision. If you are unsatisfied with the decision made by the assessors it is up to you to obtain the necessary evidence and resubmit your portfolio.

How many times can I make a submission?

Applicants pursuing PLAR will be allowed up to three portfolio submission

PORTFOLIO PREPARATION

Self-evaluation

All applicants who apply for PLAR must have a minimum of five years of responsible professional planning experience which can be properly documented.

Preparing a portfolio takes a significant amount of time and effort. It stands to reason, then, that your first step should be a self-evaluation of your competencies against those required for certification. Doing so may result in your finding that the PLAR approach to certification is not appropriate in your case. To do so, complete the Competency Self-Assessment and Evidence Grid and follow the instructions to complete your self-evaluation.

Portfolio Approach

Determining what to include in your portfolio may seem daunting. We suggest you might best approach the task in the following manner:

- Take a look at your completed competency self-assessment and evidence grid to familiarize yourself with the competencies and knowledge you need to demonstrate to those who will assess your portfolio
- Identify the appropriate sources of evidence (transcripts, correspondence, certificates, work projects, etc.) you need to support your demonstrated competencies
- Gather the evidence
- Review your portfolio with a professional planner – a second set of eyes is often prudent

Tips for building a Portfolio

- Approach building your portfolio as you would a resume and/or preparing for a comprehensive job application.
- Make it look professional and organized. A well organized portfolio will demonstrate your competencies more effectively.
- Be thorough and accurate by providing the necessary background information.
- Give numbers, show results, give facts; not opinions or impressions.
- Be succinct, yet descriptive. Remember you must demonstrate your mastery of the competencies.
- Avoid information that does not add to your claim.
- In general, quality is better than quantity.

- Show your mastery of the competencies – read the competencies to make sure your evidence demonstrates your mastery of them.
- Try not to duplicate information unless it is necessary.
- Use the Competency Self-Assessment and Evidence Grid as a tool to refer to supporting documentation which applies to more than one competency.
- We recommend no more than three pages of evidence for each competency sub domain.
- To keep your submission manageable and within the page limitations, you may want to provide a summary list, with a brief point form description for work related reports and projects that support your claim instead of including full documents – the Assessors will request more detail as necessary.
- Providing evidence for education or professional development can be more concrete. For example, course descriptions, transcripts and program outlines can be useful as evidence.
- Providing evidence for professional experience will require additional details to demonstrate your competence such as report summaries, job descriptions, a summary of special projects, letters of reference and performance appraisals for example.

PORTFOLIO DEVELOPMENT

Organize your Portfolio

It is important that your portfolio be compiled in a professional and organized manner – this will help us ensure that the assessors are able to assess it promptly, fairly and objectively. Please follow the Portfolio Format Guidelines (see next section) to avoid unnecessary delays in processing your submission. Your goal should be an easy to follow format in which evidence is clearly labelled. And, of course, evidence should be directly mapped to the appropriate competency on the Competency Self-Assessment and Evidence Grid.

Submitting your Portfolio Checklist

- a cover letter – summarize the goal of your submission and your involvement in planning related to your PLAR submission
- request for Portfolio Assessment form
- portfolio with the competency self-assessment and evidence grid and related attachments to demonstrate academic courses and experiences to the competencies
- assessment fee
- resume to support the five years of responsible professional planning experience
- arranging for transcripts to be sent directly to PSB
- evidence of education and authorized verification if presenting a foreign degree
- arranging for a letter of employment in planning to be sent directly to PSB
- detailed and current job description – if applicable
- additional supporting documentation and evidence

Portfolio Format Guidelines

- use a maximum of three pages of evidence per competency sub domain
- limit your portfolio to 60 pages or less
- place your portfolio in a word or PDF file with appropriate sections.

Documents to Submit

- (1) copy of your portfolio and cover letter in word or PDF files
- a Request for Portfolio Assessment and payment of the Assessment Fee of $xxx plus applicable taxes

Supporting Documentation and Evidence

- is relevant to the competency you are requesting credit(s) for
- has met most of the criteria for each credit you are applying
- has not breached confidentiality of any sensitive information
- follows the guidelines of three or less pages of evidence per competency sub domain
- is laid out in a clear and consistent way
- is easy for assessors to understand and follow when assessing your portfolio

EVIDENCE FOR YOUR PORTFOLIO

Competence is being able to perform to the professional standard. Your evidence must demonstrate that you can apply this knowledge. The amount of evidence required will depend on a number of factors. Minimum would be two items of evidence per competency, provided this met the competency criteria outlined within the evidence grid for each competency. A single item of evidence is unlikely to demonstrate your competence in a particular area unless it is a course or a significant project, in these cases provide the course outline or project information. A number of items collected over a period of time may be required.

Is there evidence of knowledge and application?

Knowledge and application are critical to competent performance. You must be able to demonstrate that you have the appropriate supporting knowledge and understanding related to the competencies. The assessors may want to ask you some questions when you submit your portfolio to verify knowledge and understanding relating to the competencies which you are seeking. We will notify you if further information is required.

Authenticity of the evidence in your Portfolio

The assessors must be sure that all of the evidence is your own work. It may be necessary for the assessors to ask questions about the evidence that you have provided or to collect further evidence in order to confirm that the content of your portfolio is authentic. For multi-member project teams it is important to clearly identify the work that was produced by you.

Letter of Competency Verification

In some cases a Letter of Competency Verification would help confirm the authenticity of your evidence. Letters of Competency Verification can provide an indirect, authenticated account of your performance as it relates to the competencies. They may be collected from colleagues, supervisors, managers, customers or suppliers. The Letters of Competency Verification should:

- be specific to the competencies in question

- give a brief description of the circumstances and context of the observation
- give a brief description of the background and
- qualifications of the individual (Verifier) signing your Letter of Competency Verification and relationship of the Verifier to the Candidate
- give a brief background of the observed activity
- identify aspects of the competence demonstrated and how this relates to the competency being requested

Letters of Competency Verification may be used in a variety of ways in attesting to your performance. Sometimes they may simply authenticate a piece of work as having been produced by you. In other cases, they may provide an account of your performance in a project and include comment on it in relation to the competencies. It is important that verifiers are familiar with the competencies being assessed, and are able to comment authoritatively on your performance and competence in those areas.

Sufficient Evidence

Sufficient evidence has been achieved if:

- all of the competencies have been correctly addressed;
- your evidence is authentic;
- your performance is consistent and can be demonstrated over a period of time;
- you can demonstrate that you have the relevant knowledge and understanding and can apply it to planning; and
- you have included evidence for each competency sub domain.

Types of Evidence

The best practice in the assessment of prior learning indicates that diverse sources of evidence should be used to support one's claim of competence.

KNOWLEDGE EVIDENCE	PERFORMANCE EVIDENCE	EVIDENCE OF PRIOR LEARNING
Gathered from any or all of the following sources: - tests, reports, documents - designs - products - projects or assignments - testimonials from employers /teachers	Gathered from any or all of the following sources: - observation in workplace - workplace examples - simulations - skill tests - job description - performance appraisal - testimonials	Gathered from any or all of the following sources: - certificates, diplomas - transcripts - course outlines and descriptions related to planning - workshop and conference outlines or descriptions

The evidence you provide could be categorised into five different areas within the Competency Self-Assessment and Evidence Grid. Examples for each category are provided as a guideline only:

- **Educational:** transcripts, certificates, course descriptions
- **Projects and Reports:** course tests, projects, assignments or strategies
- **Professional Experience:** workplace products or assessments, job descriptions, work history, resume
- **Letters of Verification**
- **Other** (publications, etc.)

Example of Evidence to Competency

Competency	Evidence
Governments and Legislation ▪ Understand the political, legal and institutional contexts of the realm of planning practice. ▪ Understand how legislation and laws influence and requires planning. ▪ Understand the agency and employment relationship of planning to legislation.	**Educational:** Successful completed the U of M course, Planning and Legislation 205. See Appendix one for the course description. **Professional Experience:** Serves as the organizational liaison responsible for monitoring and reporting on legislative issues. See Appendix two for the job description.