



Candidate Handbook

Sponsored by
The SPARK Institute, Inc.
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<http://sparkeducationcenter.netdimensions.com>

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Welcome

This Handbook is designed to provide information you will need to apply for, earn and maintain the Accredited Retirement Plan Consultant (ARPC) designation. The information in this Handbook was developed by the SPARK ARPC ARPS Certification Committee to serve as a reference to candidates for certification. Candidates are strongly encouraged to become familiar with the contents of this Handbook.

Purpose of the ARPC Program

The purpose of the ARPC certification program is to recognize individual proficiency in the retirement plan industry. The ARPC designation is earned by industry professionals who help employers establish and maintain plans that enable employees to effectively save and plan for retirement.

Benefits of Certification

The ARPC designation:

- ▶ Verifies your knowledge
- ▶ Demonstrates professionalism
- ▶ Enhances credibility
- ▶ Demonstrates proficiency

Requirements for Certification

Individuals interested in earning the ARPC designation must be able to:

- ▶ Document 1 year of full-time experience in the retirement plan industry
- ▶ Provide a letter of recommendation from a current work supervisor
- ▶ Pass the ARPC exam

The Certification Committee

The SPARK ARPC ARPS Certification Committee oversees the ARPC certification program. It functions as an independent body within The SPARK Institute and is responsible for the development, evaluation, and administration of all certification program policies, procedures, and activities.

Contact Information

For questions or additional information, please visit <http://www.sparkinstitute.org/Education-Center-Welcome.php>

or contact The SPARK Institute, Inc. at rachael@sparkinstitute.org

Eligibility

To earn the ARPC credential, applicants must meet all of the following criteria.

Eligibility Requirements

In order to sit for the ARPC Exam applicants must:

- ▶ Complete and submit candidate application (see page 17)
- ▶ Document 1 year of full-time experience in the retirement plan industry (see definition below)
- ▶ Provide a recommendation from a current work supervisor. The letter must include verification of both the length of time of employment and the type of work experience(s). Letters from previous supervisors may also be included.

OR

- ▶ Be a student currently enrolled in a college or university
 - ▶ Complete relative coursework (see definition below)
 - ▶ Provide recommendation from department head or faculty
- Interested students should contact rachael@sparkinstitute.org for student specific information and forms, further instructions and information can be found on page 16.*

Service Definition

One year of full-time experience is defined as at least 2,000 hours of experience in financial services, during which at least 25% of the employee's time is spent on retirement products. Qualifying work experience includes sales of retirement products, providing customer service related to retirement products, marketing, and providing participant servicing (for example: enrollment professionals).

Relative Coursework

Students must complete coursework relative to retirement plans, specifically qualified plans, which cover the topics detailed in the ARPC Exam Outline (see Appendix). Coursework requirement may be fulfilled by either the SPARK ARPC training program or college or university programs approved by the SPARK Certification Committee.

Application and Exam Fee

Candidates are responsible for submitting an accurate application form with payment of the application fee. Incomplete applications and/or applications without payment in full will be returned to the applicant without consideration.

Candidates will be notified after their application has been reviewed and accepted. To maintain the integrity of the certification process the certification program reserves the right to verify information supplied by each candidate.

An application and fee schedule are available in the Appendix of this Handbook.

Candidacy Period

Candidates will have 12 months to schedule and successfully complete the exam. The candidacy period will begin on the date of the approved application notice and end 12 months later. Upon expiration of the candidacy period, the applicant may re-apply.

Designation Award

The ARPC designation will be awarded to individuals who have successfully passed the exam and have documented 1 year of full-time experience in the retirement plan industry.

Students will receive supporting documentation of successful completion of the exam and will need to satisfy the year of service requirement before being awarded the designation. For these individuals the year of service may be satisfied by:

- Completing an internship working with a provider of employer sponsored retirement plans and/or a SPARK member company and providing a recommendation from the internship company which documents the student's experience with retirement plans

OR

- Documenting 1 year of full-time work experience in the retirement plan industry. Students will be allowed a 5 year period following graduation to satisfy this requirement but must satisfy continuing education requirements annually.

Eligibility Appeals

An appeals process is available to individuals found to be NOT eligible to take the exam. See the Appeals policy on page 11 of this Handbook for information on how to file an appeal.

Scheduling the Exam

The ARPC exam is a computer based exam administered by Comira, a Division of Computer Assisted Testing Service, Inc. The exam is scheduled by appointment only on a first come, first served basis at Comira testing centers throughout the United States.

Making Your Exam Appointment

After you have received written approval of your candidacy for the ARPC program, you can schedule your exam date and test site location by calling the Comira Candidate Services Call Center (CSCC) at 800-947-4228. The Call Center is open from 9:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. (ET) Monday through Friday and from 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 pm (ET) on Saturday.

You must call to schedule your exam at least 3 business days in advance of your preferred test date. You will be asked to supply the ID number provided on your candidacy approval notice.

Special Accommodations

If you have been approved for special accommodations for a disability, you must call the CSCC to schedule your exam at least 30 days in advance of your preferred test date.

Site Locations

Test site locations are scheduled by calling the CSCC, but you may review the available locations at <http://www.comiratesting.com/>

Changing Your Exam Appointment

To change or cancel an exam appointment, call the CSCC at 800-947-4228 at least 3 business days in advance of the scheduled exam date. Any change to an appointment must be made and confirmed directly by a CSCC representative. A voicemail message is not sufficient to confirm a change.

Missed Appointments

Missed appointments occur when a candidate:

- ▶ Changes or cancels a scheduled exam within 3 business days of the scheduled appointment,
- ▶ Fails to appear for an exam, or
- ▶ Arrives more than 15 minutes after the scheduled exam start time and is refused entry to the exam.

Any candidate with a missed appointment will be charged a reschedule fee which must be paid before scheduling another appointment. A fee schedule is found in the Appendix of this Handbook.

Preparing to Take the Exam

Exam Format

The ARPC exam is a 100 question multiple-choice exam. Candidates are given 2 hours to complete the exam. Each question contains four answer options, only one of which is the correct or best answer.

The exam questions cover the topics listed in the Exam Outline located in the Appendix.

Exam Study Guide

The Exam Outline is provided as a study guide.

Retirement plan conferences, training courses and written materials covering the topics in the Exam Outline are available in the industry to help you develop or refresh your knowledge of the material covered in the exam.

Strategies for Taking Multiple Choice Exams

As you prepare to take the exam, we recommend that you keep the following tips in mind:

- ▶ Plan your time. You will have 2 hours to complete 100 questions.
- ▶ Read each question carefully and read all of the options before choosing an answer.
- ▶ Do not “over think” or try to “read into” a question. Exam questions are not intended to be tricky or deceptive.
- ▶ Answer easy questions first. Skip questions that are difficult and come back to them later.
- ▶ If you must guess at an answer, first eliminate any options that you would not select.
- ▶ Don’t look for patterns. The order of responses is randomly generated.
- ▶ Plan time at the end of the exam session to review difficult questions or to complete any questions that you skipped.

Taking the Exam

The ARPC exam is a computer based exam, but computer or typing skills are not required.

Arrival Time

On the day of the exam, plan to arrive at the test center *at least* 15 minutes prior to your scheduled exam time.

Identification Requirements

To take the test you will be required to show a government-issued photo identification such as a valid driver's license, current passport or travel card or a state ID card. Failure to provide proper identification will be considered a missed appointment. You will also be asked to supply the ID number provided on your candidacy approval notice.

Copyrights

All exam questions are the copyrighted property of The SPARK Institute.

Individuals are prohibited from copying, reproducing, recording, distributing, or displaying any exam questions by any means, in whole or in part, or to prepare any derivative work based on them. Doing so may subject the candidate to severe civil and criminal penalties.

Test Site Security

To ensure that all candidates receive the same opportunity to complete the exam in standardized conditions, Comira enforces the following security standards at all exam locations:

- ▶ Exam sites are monitored by trained proctors at all times.
- ▶ Candidates who exit the exam at any point will be considered finished.
- ▶ Candidates who exit before they are finished cannot restart the exam.
- ▶ Cameras, tape recorders, PDAs, cell phones, or any other device that can be used for recording or that has memory capabilities are not allowed in the exam area.
- ▶ Programmable calculators are not permitted.
- ▶ Only authorized exam candidates are permitted in the exam area.
- ▶ Candidates must operate the testing equipment with reasonable care.

Misconduct

Candidates may be dismissed from an examination session and their scores may be withheld as a result of misconduct during the exam. Examples of misconduct are provided on page 13.

After the Exam

The passing score for the ARPC exam was selected based on a systematic standard setting study that uses the expert judgment of subject matter experts. To establish the passing point, experts use a widely recognized, psychometrically sound and accepted standard-setting methodology. Using this technique, subject matter experts evaluate the exam questions to determine a score that best differentiates competent candidates from those who have not demonstrated sufficient knowledge.

Passing the exam is determined by the amount of knowledge you display in relation to the passing point, and not on other candidates taking the exam. All candidates must demonstrate the same amount of knowledge to pass the exam.

Score Report

You will receive your exam results immediately following the exam. Your score report will indicate if you have passed or failed the exam and will also include information on your performance for each of the major exam content areas.

Understanding Your Score

The exam is designed only to distinguish individuals who have the basic level of knowledge determined for competence from those who do not. Receiving a very high score on the exam is not evidence that an individual will perform better on the job than someone who scored slightly above the passing point.

Retesting

Candidates who do not receive a passing score on the exam may retake the exam. The score report performance information, which identifies areas of strength and weakness, can be useful when preparing for a retest. Candidates have two opportunities to retake the exam within their candidacy period:

- ▶ First retake: At least 30 days from the initial exam date
- ▶ Second retake: At least 90 days from the first retake (120 days from the initial exam date)

Candidates who do not receive a passing score by the second retake may re-apply upon the expiration of the 1-year candidacy period.

Appealing Score Results

An appeals process is available for individuals who fail the exam and believe their exam was scored improperly. For more information on appeals, see page 11 of this Handbook.

Maintaining Your Certification

ARPC certification status is granted on a calendar year basis. Certification renewal is due at the end of each calendar year following the year in which you earn your initial certification. The 1-year renewal period was established based on the high frequency of changes in the rules and regulations in the retirement industry.

The annual renewal requirement was developed to ensure that individuals holding the ARPC designation remain up-to-date with current industry rules and regulations and continually expand their knowledge of industry issues and practices. By requiring a minimum of 10 continuing education credits each year, individuals who hold the ARPC designation are continually exposed to current information directly related to advanced topics in the retirement planning industry.

Continuing Education Requirements

To renew, individuals must earn credit for at least 10 hours of continuing education as an attendee or a presenter each calendar year. CE credit will be accepted for:

- ▶ Successful completion of a course, seminar, or workshop that is related to retirement plans and covers advanced topics. Courses may be taken online or in person. Examples of acceptable courses include: plan design, developing plan investment strategies, and enrollment programs.
- ▶ Attendance at a national or regional industry conference directly related to retirement plans. Examples of organizations that host acceptable conferences include: SPARK, ASPPA, CFDD, and NIPA.
- ▶ Participation in employer retirement plan educational sessions. CE credit for employer sessions is limited to a maximum of 5 hours.

Annual Renewal Fee

The annual renewal cost is provided in the fee schedule located in the Appendix.

Verification of Documentation

To ensure the integrity of the ARPC certification program, all renewal applications must be submitted with proof of attendance for each CE event. The SPARK Institute, Inc. reserves the right to request additional documentation of any continuing education credits claimed on the renewal form. Failure to adequately document CE credits may result in loss or suspension of the designation. Acceptable proof of attendance includes an attendance certificate, a signed letter from the presenter or event sponsor, and a seminar outline or agenda with a supervisor's verification of attendance.

Expired Certification

Individuals who allow their certification to expire may recertify within 1 year of their expiration date if they submit a renewal form documenting at least 10 CE credits per year and pay both the renewal and reinstatement fees. Individuals whose certification has been expired for more than 1 year must re-apply, meet all of the eligibility requirements in place at the time of re-application, retake the exam and pay the exam and application fees.

Policies

ARPC Directory

The SPARK Institute publishes a directory of individuals who have earned the ARPC designation. The directory is available online at the SPARK website: <http://www.sparkinstitute.org/Education-Center-Welcome.php>

The directory includes the name, designation and employer of each certificant who has provided written authorization to publish that information.

Appeals Process

Candidates and/or certificants may appeal adverse decisions made by the Certification Manager and/or Certification Committee. These decisions may include, but are not limited to, denial of eligibility, denial of certification renewal, denial of certification, or disciplinary actions.

The Certification Committee may appoint an Appeals Committee to review appeals. When an appeal is received the Certification Committee Chair will appoint a three person committee to conduct the appeals process.

The individual filing an appeal must comply with the following procedure.

- ▶ Appeals must be received within 60 days of notification of the adverse decision being appealed. Appeals must be submitted in writing to the Certification Manager and must include: the individual's name, statement of facts giving rise to the appeal, identification of any violation of applicable policies, and any applicable documentation.
- ▶ Appeals may be made on the basis that the certification program has:
 - Failed to follow its established certification eligibility requirements
 - Failed to follow its established policies and procedures
 - Failed to consider relevant documentation as presented
- ▶ Appeals will be reviewed within 90 days of receipt. The appellant may be invited to appear at a meeting of the Appeals Committee; however, an in-person meeting is not required.
- ▶ The appellant will be notified of the final decision of the Appeals Committee within 45 days of review. Notification will be made in writing via certified mail.

The decision of the Appeals Committee is final.

Cancellations and Refunds

Certification application and recertification fees are generally nonrefundable except as allowed by the exam cancellation/rescheduling policy. A processing fee may be applied to any refunds made.

Change of Contact Information

You are responsible for notifying The SPARK Institute of any change of address or other contact information. Failure to keep your information up-to-date may prevent recertification reminders and other notifications from reaching you.

Confidentiality

The ARPC certification program protects the confidential information of candidates/applicants and certificants. In addition to personal information submitted in the application, exam results are also considered confidential. Except as required by law, confidential information will only be released to the individual candidate/certificant unless a signed statement requesting the information release is provided. The SPARK Institute will verify the certification status of any individual upon request.

The name, employer, and state of residence of individuals who hold the ARPC designation are not considered confidential and may be published by The SPARK Institute with authorization from the certificant. Certificants are required to read and sign a confidentiality agreement as part of the designation process. The confidentiality agreement allows the certificant to specify whether or not their name is published as a certificant.

Aggregate exam statistics (including the number of candidates, pass/fail rates, and total number of certificants) will be published periodically.

Complaints and Disciplinary Action

Written complaints related to the conduct of an ARPC certificant may be submitted, in writing, to the Certification Manager for review by the SPARK ARPC Certification Committee. Written complaints should identify the alleged conduct in sufficient detail and should include any available and appropriate documentation. The name and contact information for the individual filing the complaint should be included. Complaints may also be initiated by the Certification Manager or members of the Certification Committee. The Certification Committee may revoke or suspend certification, or take other disciplinary action, in the following circumstances:

- ▶ Ineligibility for certification
- ▶ Violation of exam administration and/or security requirements
- ▶ Any instance of exam cheating, including improper use or distribution of exam items
- ▶ Fraud or significant misrepresentation
- ▶ Gross or repeated negligence in the conduct of the individual's work
- ▶ Conviction of a felony or misdemeanor
- ▶ Failure to comply with ARPC policies and requirements

Sanctions may include one or more of the following:

- ▶ Denial or suspension of eligibility
- ▶ Revocation or suspension of certification
- ▶ Non-renewal of certification
- ▶ Reprimand
- ▶ Required corrective action

The Certification Committee will review all complaints and disciplinary matters.

Within 60 days of receipt of a complaint, the Certification Committee will determine if good cause exists to further investigate the complaint.

- ▶ If the Certification Committee determines that no good cause exists in relation to the complaint, no adverse action will be taken.
- ▶ If good cause is determined to exist, the individual who is the subject of the complaint (hereafter referred to as applicant/certificant) will be notified of the complaint by certified mail, return receipt requested. The notification will include the allegations made in the complaint, but will not include the identity of the individual filing the complaint.

The Certification Committee will initiate an appropriate investigation. At the discretion of the Certification Committee, the applicant/certificant may be invited to attend a hearing at the next scheduled meeting of the Certification Committee. This hearing may be conducted in person, via teleconference, or by any method that allows all participants to hear each other.

The applicant/certificant will be notified of the Certification Committee's decision within 120 days of the receipt of the original complaint. In the case of an adverse decision, the notice will include notification of the individual's right to appeal.

Examples of Misconduct

Examples of test misconduct discussed on page 8 include, but are not limited to, the following:

- ▶ Failure to follow the exam administrator's/proctor's directions
- ▶ Creating a disturbance during the exam session
- ▶ Giving or receiving assistance during an exam
- ▶ Attempting to take the exam for someone else
- ▶ Leaving the test area without permission
- ▶ Use of unauthorized electronic equipment (cell phones, PDAs, etc.)
- ▶ Attempting to record exam questions in any manner
- ▶ Removing, or attempting to remove, items from the test center
- ▶ Use of any unauthorized aids or reference materials
- ▶ Tampering with the computer

Nondiscrimination

The ARPC certification program does not discriminate on the basis of age, gender, race, religion, national origin or disability.

SPARK Membership and Training

Membership in SPARK or completion of any SPARK courses is not a requirement for earning the ARPC designation.

Special Accommodations

The ARPC Certification Program is committed to equal access for all certification candidates and complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Reasonable examination accommodations will be made at no extra charge to individuals with documented disabilities. Documentation must be submitted by candidates from a qualified professional and must include a written list of the requested exam accommodations. Should you require special accommodations, please contact The SPARK Institute at rachael@sparkinstitute.org.

Certification Verification

The SPARK Institute obtains authorization from certificants before listing their names on the SPARK website. Information on the current certification status of an individual will be provided upon request. Verification includes only the certification status of the individual. To verify a designation, contact rachael@sparkinstitute.org.

Use of the ARPC Logo

The ARPC certification logo may only be used as long as certification is valid and the certificant remains in good standing. Authorized use of the designation includes the right to publish the designation on business cards, stationery and other professional documents.

Individuals may not use the ARPC designation until they have received notification that they have met all eligibility requirements and successfully passed the exam. To continue use of the designations, individuals must comply with all recertification requirements.

Appendix

The SPARK Institute and Bryant University

The SPARK Institute is proud to partner with Bryant University in offering the ARPC designation program. The partnership was formed to align the global business focus of Bryant University's staff with the extensive industry experience of SPARK Members. Bryant holds a seat on the ARPC ARPS Certification Committee, providing additional support and oversight to the programs.



The SPARK Institute helps to shape national retirement policy by providing research, education, testimony and comments on pending legislative and regulatory issues to members of Congress and relevant government agency officials. Our members play a key role in identifying our priorities and in developing the positions we take on critical issues. The SPARK Institute Government Relations Committee ("GRC") and its various task forces provide opportunities for our members to become actively involved in developing and promoting regulatory and legislative policies that support their business goals and benefit the entire industry. Among our important goals is to develop practical solutions and industry standards for the efficient delivery of retirement benefits through the workplace. We meet regularly with representatives from regulatory agencies such as the Department of Labor, Internal Revenue Service and Securities and Exchange Commission, and have established ourselves as a credible source for practical and real world industry information.



Bryant University was founded in 1863 and for more than 150 years has met the business education needs of generations of students. Bryant's business program is among the top 10 in the US, according to College Factual, and is ranked 2nd on a list of "up-and-coming" universities by U.S. News & World Report. It is a private New England university with a tradition of innovation and a global vision for success.

Designation Exam Development

SPARK formed the SPARK ARPC Certification Committee in 2009 to enhance, administer and oversee the ARPC designation program. The ARPC examination is designed to measure the knowledge and skills required for competent and effective performance in the retirement plan industry.

The exam was developed through a collaborative effort between the ARPC Certification Committee, subject matter experts, and expert testing consultants. The content of the ARPC exam is based on a job analysis study performed in 2008. The job analysis study was conducted to identify the practice, tasks performed, and knowledge required for effective performance of retirement plan consultants on the job. A diverse group of subject matter experts participated in developing a job analysis survey that identified a list of knowledge required for the competent and effective performance of tasks carried out by retirement plan consultants. The survey was then distributed to a group of ARPCs that represented various geographical locations, organizations, and experience levels for validation. The outcome of this process was the development of a set of exam specifications that has been used to develop the questions on the ARPC exam. This job analysis and exam specifications development process will be repeated periodically to ensure exam content remains relevant.

Once the exam content outline was finalized, a diverse group of subject matter experts participated in writing and reviewing exam questions. Each exam question was reviewed for accuracy, clarity and bias. The final exam was reviewed and approved by the SPARK ARPC ARPS Certification Committee.

In 2016 a comprehensive revision of the ARPC was conducted. Again, the process started with a job analysis study, continued with the steps mentioned above and concluded with the review and approval of the new form of the ARPC Exam.

Student Instructions

Complete Required Coursework

Students must successfully complete either the SPARK ARPC courses or college level program approved by the SPARK Certification Committee.

To request student enrollment materials, student order forms and student applications contact Rachael@sparkinstitute.org

ARPC Exam

After completing the coursework, students will be permitted to sit for the ARPC exam. Students must submit an exam application along with the exam fee. The fee allows students one opportunity to take the exam. Should a student need a second opportunity they will need to submit an additional application along with exam fee. Students may schedule their exam at their convenience at a testing facility near them. Instructions for scheduling exams will be provided upon receipt of application.

Once a student passes the exam, SPARK will provide a certificate of completion.

ARPC Designation

The ARPC designation will be awarded after successful completion of the exam AND service requirement. Once an individual has provided documentation of 1 year of full-time experience or comparable internship, SPARK will award the ARPC designation. Students must complete the service requirement within 5 years from the date of exam completion. Students must also satisfy continuing education requirements on an annual basis.

Application Completion Instructions

A completed application must be submitted to apply for approval as a candidate for the SPARK Accredited Retirement Plan Consultant (ARPC) designation. The application must include the following forms which have been completed, signed and dated:

- Candidate Application
- Candidate Order Form

Important:

To demonstrate that you have completed the eligibility requirements, you must define your eligibility period (1 year of full-time experience in the financial services industry with at least 2,000 hours of which 25% of your time was spent on retirement plan products and services) and attach a recommendation from each of your supervisors during that period.

Incomplete and illegible applications will be returned to the applicant without consideration.

Complete applications will be reviewed for approval. Notification of approval/disapproval of the application will be provided by email within 10 business days of the receipt of the application.

Notification of approval of your candidacy will include instructions on how to schedule the ARPC exam.

Fee Schedule

Nonrefundable Exam Fee	\$150
Application Fee (waived with purchase of SPARK ARPC training courses)	\$350
Retest Fee	\$150
Annual Renewal Fee*	\$150
*\$100 with purchase of 1 SPARK continuing education course; waived with purchase of 2 SPARK continuing education courses	
Reinstatement Fee	\$ 50
Optional Training Fees*	
Online ARPC training courses including electronic ARPC Manual	\$850
Online SPARK continuing education courses (5hr courses)	\$150
Online course reset fee	\$ 25

*For information regarding volume discounts, contact rachael@sparkinstitute.org.

Special Accommodations

The ARPC designation program is committed to equal access for all certification candidates and complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Reasonable examination accommodations will be made at no extra charge to individuals with documented disabilities. Documentation must be submitted by candidates from a qualified professional and must include a written list of the requested exam accommodations. Should you require special accommodations, please contact r.ryan@profdevsolutions.com

Return your completed application and order form to:

The SPARK Institute, Inc.

Email: rachael@sparkinstitute.org or Fax: 401-429-6135



Candidate Application

Applicant Contact Information (Note: this application is not for use by student applicants)

First Name	MI	Last Name
Company Name		
Position Title	Mailing Address	
City	State	Zip
Phone Number	Email Address	

Applicant Eligibility Information and Certification

I have completed 1 year of full-time experience in the financial services industry (at least 2,000 hours, of which 25% of my time was spent on retirement plan products and services) during the following period:

Eligibility Period: _____

Start Date	Completion Date
------------	-----------------

I certify that all information provided in this application is accurate and complete, authorize verification of this information and apply for acceptance as a candidate for the SPARK Accredited Retirement Plan Consultant (ARPC) designation.

Applicant Signature	Date
---------------------	------

Supervisor Contact Information

First Name	MI	Last Name
Position title	Mailing Address	
City	State	Zip
Phone Number	Email Address	

Supervisor Certification and Recommendation

I certify that I am/was the applicant's supervisor, and while reporting to me, the candidate had, in the positions identified above _____ years of full-time experience in financial services, with at least _____% of that time spent working on retirement plan products and services. (I understand that 1 year of full-time experience is defined for these purposes as at least 2,000 hours, and that qualifying work experience includes sales of retirement products, providing customer service related to retirement products, marketing, and providing participant servicing.)

I recommend this applicant for acceptance as a candidate for the SPARK Accredited Retirement Plan Consultant designation, and certify that all information provided on this form is accurate and complete to the best of my knowledge. I am willing to be contacted by SPARK for verification of this information.

Signature	Date
-----------	------

Return this completed application and attached order form to:

The SPARK Institute, Inc.

Email: rachael@sparkinstitute.org or Fax: 401-429-6135

ARPC Exam Outline

(25%) I - Fact Finding

- A. OBTAIN BASIC EMPLOYER INFORMATION (e.g., INDUSTRY, TYPE OF ORGANIZATION, SIZE, PROFITABILITY, CORPORATE CULTURE, EMPLOYEE DEMOGRAPHICS, IDENTIFICATION OF THE DECISION MAKERS).**

The competent and responsible performance of this task requires knowledge of:

- ▶ Retirement plan selection factors
- ▶ Information sources (e.g., RFP, website, filings)

- B. OBTAIN INFORMATION ABOUT EMPLOYER'S NEEDS AND THE STATUS OF ANY CURRENT RETIREMENT PLAN (e.g., RETIREMENT PLAN OBJECTIVES, RETIREMENT READINESS, INVESTMENT GOALS, EXISTING PLAN PERFORMANCE AND PARTICIPATION).**

The competent and responsible performance of this task requires knowledge of:

- ▶ Retirement plan selection factors
- ▶ Information sources (e.g., RFP, website, filings)
- ▶ Retirement plan types
- ▶ Retirement plan features
- ▶ Investment options and features
- ▶ Plan documents
- ▶ Plan reports and filings
- ▶ Compliance requirements, including nondiscrimination testing

- C. OBTAIN INFORMATION ABOUT THE EFFECTIVENESS OF AND EMPLOYER SATISFACTION WITH THE CURRENT RETIREMENT PLAN (e.g., SERVICE LEVELS, COMPLIANCE, INVESTMENTS, FEES, FIDUCIARY COMPLIANCE, INVESTMENT POLICY STATEMENT (IPS) EDUCATION TECHNOLOGY, PLAN PARTICIPATION).**

The competent and responsible performance of this task requires knowledge of:

- ▶ Retirement plan selection factors
- ▶ Information sources (e.g., RFP, website, filings)
- ▶ Retirement plan types
- ▶ Retirement plan features
- ▶ Investment options and features
- ▶ Plan documents
- ▶ Plan reports and filings
- ▶ Compliance requirements, including nondiscrimination testing
- ▶ Service levels (e.g., call center metrics, accuracy and timeliness of deliverables)
- ▶ Industry benchmarks and best practices
- ▶ Fiduciary requirements (e.g., 404(c), QDIA, prohibited transactions)

- ▶ Employee communications, education and investment advice programs

(22%) II – Analysis

D. DETERMINE EMPLOYER’S RETIREMENT PLAN NEEDS (e.g., MATCHING EMPLOYER SPECIFIC INFORMATION WITH AVAILABLE PLANS, PLAN FEATURES AND COSTS, AND VENDOR CHARACTERISTICS AND CAPABILITIES).

The competent and responsible performance of this task requires knowledge of:

- ▶ Retirement plan selection factors
- ▶ Information sources (e.g., RFP, website, filings)
- ▶ Retirement plan types
- ▶ Retirement plan features
- ▶ Investment options and features
- ▶ Plan documents
- ▶ Plan reports and filings
- ▶ Compliance requirements including nondiscrimination testing
- ▶ Service levels (e.g., call center metrics, accuracy and timeliness of deliverables)
- ▶ Industry benchmarks and best practices
- ▶ Fiduciary requirements (e.g., 404(c), QDIA, prohibited transactions)
- ▶ Employee communications, education and investment advice programs

E. BENCHMARK WHAT THE COMPANY IS TO THE INDUSTRY AND WHAT THEIR RETIREMENT PLAN IS TO THE INDUSTRY (E.G. FEES, PRACTICES, PERFORMANCE AGAINST THE MARKET, WHAT OTHER COMPANIES ARE DOING IN TERMS OF MATCHING, INDUSTRY, AND GEOGRAPHY).

The competent and responsible performance of this task requires knowledge of:

- ▶ Industry benchmarks and best practices
- ▶ Competitive landscape

F. FORMULATE A RETIREMENT PLAN SOLUTION BASED ON FACT-FINDING, BENCHMARKING RESULTS, AND THE NEEDS OF THE EMPLOYER.

The competent and responsible performance of this task requires knowledge of:

- ▶ Retirement plan selection factors
- ▶ Information sources (e.g., RFP, website, filings)
- ▶ Retirement plan types
- ▶ Retirement plan features
- ▶ Investment options and features
- ▶ Plan documents
- ▶ Plan reports and filings
- ▶ Compliance requirements, including nondiscrimination testing
- ▶ Service levels (e.g., call center metrics, accuracy and timeliness of deliverables)
- ▶ Industry benchmarks and best practices

- ▶ Fiduciary requirements (e.g., 404(c), QDIA, prohibited transactions)
- ▶ Employee communications, education and investment advice programs
- ▶ Provider characteristics, capabilities and pricing
- ▶ Competitive landscape

(15%) III - Proposal Preparation and Presentation

G. INTRODUCE THE TEAM, THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES AND THE TOOLS THAT THEY WOULD HAVE ACCESS TO ON AN ONGOING BASIS (E.G. APPS, WEBSITE, SUPPORT TOOLS).

The competent and responsible performance of this task requires knowledge of:

- ▶ Segregation of the team's roles and responsibilities (e.g., document analyst, implementation manager, enrollment specialist/retirement counselor, service team) roles and responsibilities
- ▶ The product (e.g. features, website, communications) that is being introduced

H. SET EXPECTATIONS AND WHAT THE EMPLOYER WILL SEE GOING FORWARD.

The competent and responsible performance of this task requires knowledge of:

- ▶ Provider characteristics, capabilities and pricing
- ▶ Details of the conversion process and timeline
- ▶ Participant services, including ongoing education
- ▶ Plan sponsor services, including trend analysis, changes in the marketplace, regulation and compliance services (e.g., 5500, testing)

I. PRESENT THE RETIREMENT PLAN PROPOSAL AND ASSOCIATED RECOMMENDATIONS.

The competent and responsible performance of this task requires knowledge of:

- ▶ Retirement plan selection factors
- ▶ Information sources (e.g., RFP, website, filings)
- ▶ Retirement plan types
- ▶ Retirement plan features
- ▶ Investment options and features
- ▶ Plan documents
- ▶ Plan reports and filings
- ▶ Compliance requirements, including nondiscrimination testing
- ▶ Service levels (e.g., call center metrics, accuracy and timeliness of deliverables)
- ▶ Industry benchmarks and best practices
- ▶ Fiduciary requirements (e.g., 404(c), QDIA, prohibited transactions)
- ▶ Employee communications, education and investment advice programs
- ▶ Provider characteristics, capabilities and pricing
- ▶ Competitive landscape

- ▶ Plan implementation process
- ▶ Plan establishment or conversion responsibilities

(15%) IV - Retirement Plan Implementation

- J. PREPARE THE EMPLOYER FOR AND ASSIST IN NEW PLAN IMPLEMENTATION OR EXISTING PLAN CONVERSION (E.G. SETTING EXPECTATIONS, OBTAINING PLAN DOCUMENTS, SELECTING INVESTMENTS AND EDUCATING PARTICIPANTS, IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINES, BLACKOUT PERIODS, ONBOARDING PROCESS, DISCLOSURES, ROLLOVERS).**

The competent and responsible performance of this task requires knowledge of:

- ▶ Plan documents
- ▶ Plan reports and filings
- ▶ Compliance requirements, including nondiscrimination testing
- ▶ Fiduciary requirements (e.g., 404(c), QDIA, prohibited transactions)
- ▶ Plan implementation process
- ▶ Plan establishment or conversion responsibilities

(23%) V- Service

- K. ASSIST IN MEASURING AND MONITORING THE ACHIEVEMENT OF RETIREMENT PLAN OBJECTIVES AND DELIVERABLES (E.G. INCLUDING EMPLOYEE PARTICIPATION, RETIREMENT READINESS, MONITORING INVESTMENT PERFORMANCE AND INVESTMENT POLICY STATEMENTS (IPS), EMPLOYER ACCOUNTABILITY AND MEETING FIDUCIARY RESPONSIBILITIES, GAP ANALYSIS, RETIREMENT SCORE CARD, CALL REVIEW, MANAGING SERVICE LEVELS AND TEAMS THAT WORK ON THE PLAN TO ENSURE THAT PARTICIPANT NEEDS ARE MET).**

The competent and responsible performance of this task requires knowledge of:

- ▶ Retirement plan selection factors
- ▶ Information sources (e.g., RFP, website, filings)
- ▶ Retirement plan types
- ▶ Retirement plan features
- ▶ Investment options and features
- ▶ Plan documents
- ▶ Plan reports and filings
- ▶ Compliance requirements, including nondiscrimination testing
- ▶ Service levels (e.g., call center metrics, accuracy and timeliness of deliverables)
- ▶ Industry benchmarks and best practices
- ▶ Fiduciary requirements (e.g., 404(c), QDIA, prohibited transactions)
- ▶ Employee communications, education and investment advice programs
- ▶ Competitive landscape
- ▶ Service reviews (e.g., review of plan, investments, education programs, participation rate)
- ▶ Co-fiduciaries, advisory and ancillary services