

An aerial photograph of a city skyline at dusk. The sky is a pale, overcast grey. In the foreground, there's a dark, flat rooftop area with some structures and a person in a red shirt. Below that, a street with cars and streetlights is visible. The middle ground is filled with various buildings, some with lit windows. In the background, more skyscrapers rise against the sky. The text is overlaid on the upper half of the image.

Getting a Planning Job with the City or County

**A Guide for MURPS
Updated May 2018**

A Few Things to Keep in Mind

- It's a long and competitive process, taking anywhere from 6-9 mos. from application to hire.
- Don't be discouraged or intimidated!
- Just apply! Even if you're not sure you want to work for local government.
- Apply to both city & county jobs using governmentjobs.com

Don't Procrastinate- Get Application Materials Ready Ahead of Time

- You must complete a **governmentjobs.com** profile with your contact info, work experience, education, and references.
- Have **3-4 references** ready, meaning you have asked and received permission and have current contact information.
- Application **windows are short**, sometimes 2-3 days and are cut off after a certain number of apps - 400 or 500
- **Apply early** so that your application goes to the top of the review pile!

A panoramic view of the Los Angeles city skyline under a clear blue sky. The image features several prominent buildings, including a large, modern, multi-story office building with a grid-like facade in the center, and the iconic Los Angeles City Hall with its distinctive tower on the right. The foreground is filled with lush green trees, and the overall scene is bright and clear.

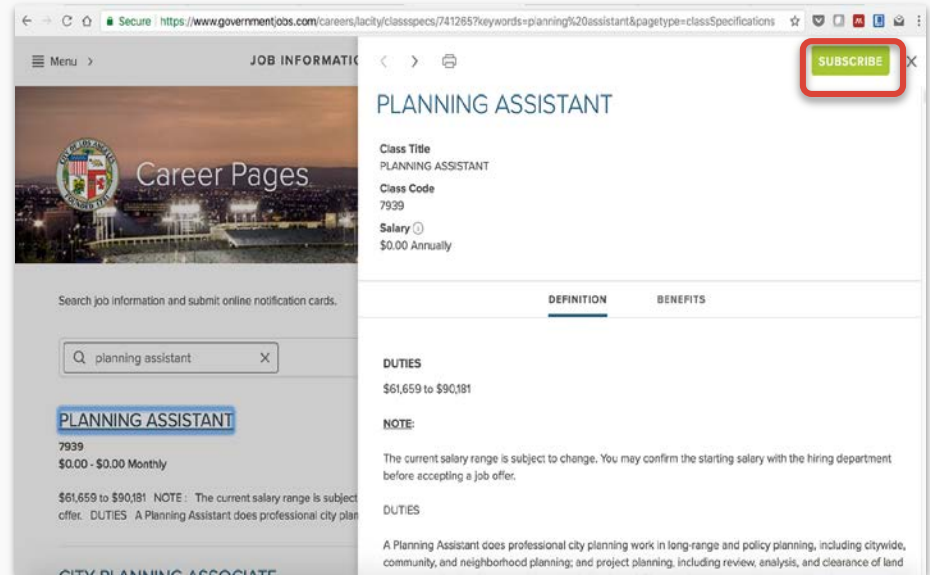
City of Los Angeles Dept. of City Planning - Application Overview

City Planning Hierarchy of Positions

- Planning Assistant (entry-level) → City Planning Associate → City Planner → Senior City Planner → Principal City Planner
- Apply for both Planning Assistant and City Planning Associate positions - especially if you have experience prior to grad school
 - Check out the last planning assistant [posting](#)

Subscribe to City Planning Job Alerts

- Go to <https://www.governmentjobs.com/careers/lacity/classspecs>
- Search for the position, e.g. ‘Planning Assistant’ or ‘City Planning Associate’
- If the job is not open, click subscribe and enter your contact information



The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL <https://www.governmentjobs.com/careers/lacity/classspecs/741285?keywords=planning%20assistant&pagetype=classSpecifications>. The page title is 'JOB INFORMATION'. The main content area features a 'Career Pages' banner with the Los Angeles City Seal. Below the banner is a search bar containing 'planning assistant'. The job listing for 'PLANNING ASSISTANT' is displayed, including the following details:

- Class Title:** PLANNING ASSISTANT
- Class Code:** 7939
- Salary:** \$0.00 Annually

The page has two tabs: 'DEFINITION' (selected) and 'BENEFITS'. Under the 'DEFINITIONS' tab, the following information is visible:

- DUTIES:** \$61,659 to \$90,181
- NOTE:** The current salary range is subject to change. You may confirm the starting salary with the hiring department before accepting a job offer.
- DUTIES:** A Planning Assistant does professional city planning work in long-range and policy planning, including citywide, community, and neighborhood planning; and project planning, including review, analysis, and clearance of land.

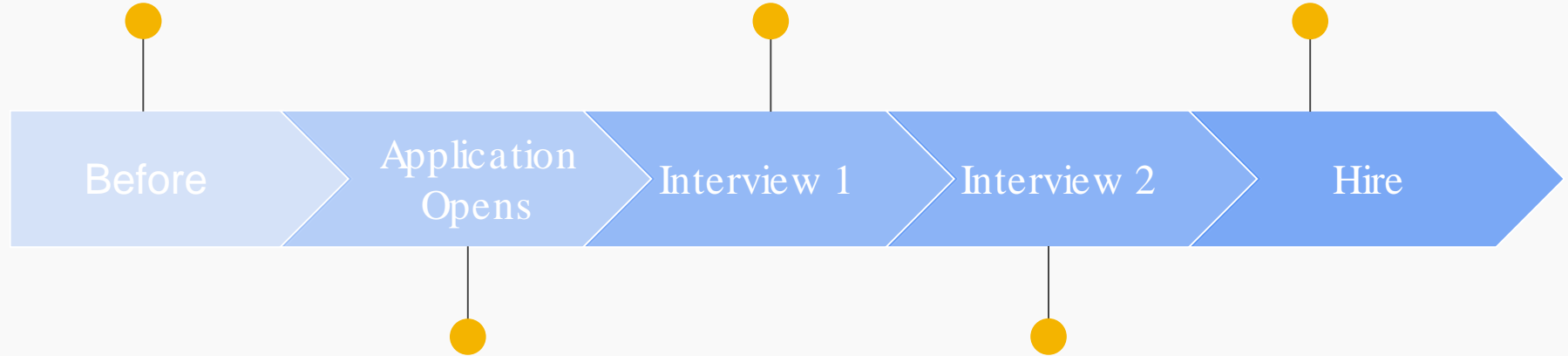
A red rectangular box highlights the 'SUBSCRIBE' button in the top right corner of the page.

Overview - City Application Process

Secure references. Fill out governmentjobs.com profile. Subscribe to be alerted when the application period opens

Scored interview that usually takes place 12 or so weeks after submitting application. This is treated as your civil service exam

Anywhere from 6 months to over a year from date of application

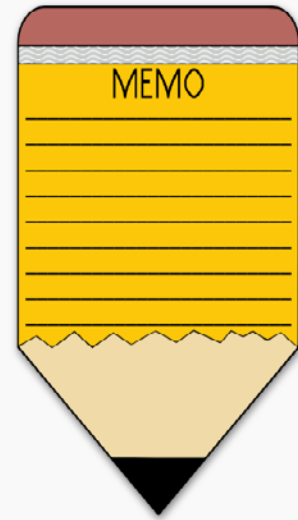


Submit early! Sometimes this window is only a few days
Complete any supplemental application materials required

This can be anywhere from 6 months to a year after your first interview. In recent years the city has been fast-tracking hiring, so Interview 2 was only 2-3 mos later

Application - Writing Portion

- Your initial application also includes a writing prompt!
- This portion is unscored, but important
- Prompt will ask you to analyze a situation and give recommendations
- Write a memo of **2-3 pages max**
- Think to include planning best practices, as applicable to whatever situation given



Memo Writing Tips

- Remember the memos you wrote in Paavo's class!
- Write coherently with a logical structure
- Spelling and grammar ~~is~~ are important
- Use **appropriate tone** for a public sector memo
- Summarize complex issues, identify facts given, provide solutions
- Don't be afraid to write that you need more information or research - it's OK!

Additional Application Tips

- No need to take an exam when applying for entry level (Planning Assistant) position
- If applying to Planning Associate or City Planner, you will have to take a formal exam (timed, Scantron test)
- If you're within 6 months of required experience thresholds, still apply because the process takes about that long
- Don't be afraid to use buzzwords! The panel follows a matrix and checks off when an applicant addresses certain points
- There are different panels between the 1st and 2nd interviews, so in interview 2 you may have to reiterate a few things about work ethic and customer service that you talked about in interview 1

Additional Application Tips

- The title of your reference doesn't matter - it doesn't have to be the E.D. - what matters is that your references can give you a glowing review
- Secure official copies of your college transcript, electronic and paper

Interview Process



Preparing for the Interview



- **Practice your pitch !** Figure out your narrative and how to convey it
- Communication is key, show them you are a competent, coherent human-being
- Know how to relate your work experiences to job tasks & competencies

Job Tasks and Competencies

- Government personnel agencies provide job analyses that quantify the skills they're looking for
- Use them to review job tasks and competencies for various positions. View tasks and competencies for the Planning Assistant position [here](#)
- Competencies are the most valuable - many are soft skills - look at the example of what people do and craft a story using your experiences to show how you meet these competencies

TASK LIST – PLANNING ASSISTANT

1. Takes photographs, refers to maps, and/or records facts and findings such as prevailing design conditions and densities, current property uses, property dimensions, assessment of existing conditions of structures, and comparisons of proposed plans to existing structures in order to conduct and document field survey reports.
2. Gathers data from sources such as the general plan, existing maps, land records, census information, building permits, prior cases, local ordinances, and special reports prepared by the research unit, other City departments or jurisdictions in order to determine whether a proposed development is consistent with lot ownership, is in conformance with plans, zoning codes, and ordinances, and the impact of any proposed or pending code changes.

COMPETENCY MODEL FOR

PLANNING ASSISTANT CLASS CODE 7939

The following competencies have been identified as those that best separate superior from satisfactory job performance in the class of **PLANNING ASSISTANT**. (Numbers refer to the order of competencies in the Competency Bank.)

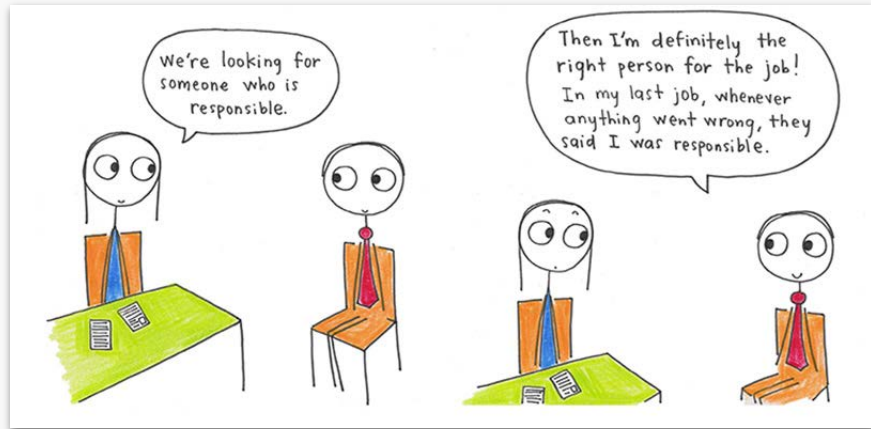
1. Reading Comprehension
4. Analytical Ability
12. Conscientiousness
29. Fact Finding
34. Customer Service
36. Emotional Maturity
45. Oral Communication
47. Written Communication

Interview 1 Tips

- Focuses on finding out about your **emotional intelligence** - questions about workplace behavior, providing customer service, work ethic, etc.
- Conducted by a panel of 3-4 people, including planners and personnel staff
- **Customer service** has been stressed in the last few years, as city works to change image of public sector
- Approximately 20-40 minutes and scored
- People with higher scores move along in process quicker
- You're scheduled in shifts over the weekends because the department is interviewing 100s of people
- Don't be intimidated by all the people interviewing and don't let it psych you out



After the 1st Interview



- After your first interview, you'll be given a **score out of 100** which puts you on the "eligible list"
- Scores received via mail or email within a few weeks
- It usually take 2-3 months, but can take 6+ before going to the second round of interviews

Interview 2 Tips

- Getting to the second interview is major!
- Focuses more on **practical skills** -- experiences analyzing zoning or using Zimas, knowing the concept of a CEQA process, environmental clearances, Joan's classes (if you took them), etc.
- Conducted by a **different panel of 2 -3 planners** from divisions they're hiring for, or those with experience in the position
- Unscored



- Often asked questions to find out where you'd like to be placed & what planning issues you find most interesting
 - Convey flexibility, but be honest and advocate for yourself.

Interview 2 Tips cont...

- Might ask more specific questions related to specific positions they are hiring for to see for which you are a good fit
 - E.g. for community planning, they will ask more questions related to events and outreach,
 - E.g. for major projects, they might ask CEQA questions
- Any kind of presentation / outreach experience is great (in class or internship)
- Planners will appreciate basic understanding of CEQA and larger project process
 - This is more important to smaller cities with less resources for training, as opposed to big jurisdictions like City of LA



Additional Interview Tips

- Don't be dismayed by lack of direct experience - the city doesn't stress this as long as you have a **general understanding** of certain things - like zoning codes, GIS maps, etc.
- Focus on the **transferable skills and experiences** you do have!
- There is a list of questions the panel has to ask, that they can't deviate from
- Don't be afraid to **use buzzwords**! The panel follows a matrix and checks off if an applicant addresses certain points.
- There are totally different panels between the 1st and 2nd interviews, so in interview 2 you may have to reiterate a few things about work ethic and customer service that you talked about in interview 1

Eligibility and Certified List

- Ranks everyone who interviewed by their score
- Names are kept on file for 6 months to a few years
- The Department can only hire from people on the list - so it's worth it to apply just so you get on the list!
- You can turn down a placement up to 3 times before being removed from the list



County of Los Angeles Dept of Regional Planning

A similar process, with a few key differences...



Regional Planning Hierarchy of Positions

- Regional Planning Assistant 1 → Regional Planning Assistant 2 → Senior Regional Planning Assistant → Principal Regional Planning Assistant → Regional Planner 1 → Regional Planner II → Supervising Regional Planner → Assistant Administrator, Regional Planning → Deputy Director, Regional Planning
- As a graduating MURP, you will most likely be applying for Regional Planner II position

Subscribe to Regional Planner Job Alerts

- Go to <https://www.governmentjobs.com/careers/lacounty/classspecs>
- Search for the position, e.g. ‘Regional Planner II’
- Click Subscribe and enter your contact information

The screenshot displays the GovernmentJobs.com interface. On the left, a search bar contains the text 'regional planner'. Below it, a list of job titles is shown, with 'REGIONAL PLANNER II' selected. The main content area shows the details for 'REGIONAL PLANNER II', including the class title, code (4440), and salary. A red box highlights the 'SUBSCRIBE' button in the top right corner of the page.

Menu >

WELCOME TO THE

REGIONAL PLANNER II

REGIONAL PLANNER I

SUPERVISING REGIONAL PLANNER

PRINCIPAL REGIONAL PLANNING ASSISTANT

REGIONAL PLANNER II

Class Title
REGIONAL PLANNER II

Class Code
4440

Salary

DEFINITION STANDARDS

DEFINITION:
Under the general supervision of a Division Chief, Regional Planning carries out major research projects of department-wide significance, designs major planning studies, or, in addition to acting as a branch office representative of the Regional Planning Commission, independently provides comprehensive planning services to one or more contract cities.

CLASSIFICATION STANDARDS:
Positions allocable to this class are distinguished from Supervising Regional Planner II by reason that they are either non-supervisory or have a staff smaller than that required of positions which are designated as supervisory.

SUBSCRIBE

Application Overview

- 3 part-examination
 - **Online test** - focuses on emotional intelligence
 - **Written test** - planning basics and trivia - what are the organizations that represent planners, where do you go to find planning info, find a parcel on assessor's map, etc.
 - **Technical writing test** - use pieces of information to prepare a memo -- *tips in slide 9*
- You need a **passing score of 70%** or higher on each part of the examination in order to be placed on the eligible register
- Only **1 interview**

After the Application and Examination



- You'll receive one aggregate **score in the mail** which places you in four groups (1-4)
- If you received a 1 or 2, you will most likely get called for an interview

Additional Application Tips

- Upload your transcript right away! LA County Department of Human Resources (DHR) reviews this
- GIS is a must, although you won't be required to make a map (unless you're on the GIS team)
- If you're within 6 months of required experience thresholds, still apply because the process takes a while
- 3 Teams - advanced/long-range planning, implementation, and regulation
 - Practical classes (Joan's classes, Law class) are helpful if you want to work in implementation