CIAO ADVANCED DESIGNATIONS HANDBOOK

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ILLINOIS PROPERTY ASSESSMENT INSTITUTE

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1. PURPOSE OF THE ADVANCED DESIGNATION PROGRAM

The advanced designation program promotes a culture of continuous improvement in the Illinois assessment community.

It provides CIAOs a pathway for their professional development and gives them an opportunity to demonstrate their excellence in property assessment.

By advancing their skills, competence, and leadership, our advanced designation holders have shown a dedication to their profession to better serve our local communities.

1.1 CIAO-Intermediate Advanced Designation

The Certified Illinois Assessing Officer-Intermediate (CIAO-I) advanced designation reflects a professional who has progressed beyond foundational knowledge and demonstrates consistent growth in expertise, leadership, and application of principles.

Key attributes include:
- **Experience:** Operates with the proficiency expected of seasoned professionals, having accumulated substantial industry experience.
- **Education:** Applies concepts and methodologies with confidence, moving beyond basic understanding to integrate advancing practices into daily work.
- **Leadership:** Exhibits emerging leadership qualities by guiding peers and contributing to the greater Illinois assessment community.

1.2 CIAO-Master Advanced Designation

The Certified Illinois Assessing Officer-Master (CIAO-M) advanced designation represents the pinnacle of professional achievement, reserved for individuals who demonstrate exceptional mastery across the Illinois assessment community. This designation confirms not only technical proficiency but also the ability to lead, innovate, and elevate the profession.

Key attributes include:
- **Experience**: Operates with the proficiency expected of seasoned professionals, reflecting years of advanced practice in property assessment.
- **Education**: Shows a deep mastery of advanced educational concepts and methodologies, applying this expertise to elevate daily professional practice.
- **Leadership**: Exhibits strategic guidance and strong leadership by shaping and mentoring the Illinois assessment community.

2. ADVANCED DESIGNATION TESTING REQUIREMENTS

All advanced designation applicants must have an active Certified Illinois Assessing Officer (CIAO) designation.

	CIAO-I	CIAO-M	Notes
Experience	5 years in an assessment office (township, county, or state).	10 years in an assessment office (township, county, or state).	
Education	150 hours Must take Ethics (either 002-404 or 002-310)	300 hours Must take Ethics (either 002-404 or 002-310)	• Hours only count from IPAI, IDOR, or IAAO courses. No repeat classes. • No category requirement. Applicants are responsible for obtaining the necessary education to successfully complete the exam, which covers multiple domains.
Leadership	Earn 25 leadership points, showing growing involvement.	Earn 100 leadership points, demonstrating strong leadership. Two professional letters of recommendation attesting to the candidate's expertise in property assessment and strong commitment to leadership within the Illinois assessment community.	• Letters must be written from someone outside of the education committee. • Letters must be written by someone in either the property assessment industry or an adjacent industry. • Letters should preferably be from two unique perspectives demonstrating the leadership of the applicant. • Education committee approves if applicant meets the CIAO-M leadership requirements to proceed.

Tier 1: 40 Points   Instructing
Research publication
Statewide committee / board leadership
Primary course author

Tier 2: 30 Points   Primary presenter
Project leadership: statewide
Statewide committee / board membership

Tier 3: 25 Points   Presenting to other professionals
Magazine publication
Mentor in a formal mentorship program
Course development team member

Tier 4: 20 Points   Project leadership inter-jurisdictional
Project participation statewide
Local county assessor association executive board

Tier 5: 15 Points   Secondary presenter or panelist
Presenting to local community groups
Newsletter article

Tier 6: 10 Points   Project leadership in-office
Project participation inter-jurisdictional
Peer-to-peer mentorship (informal mentoring)
Course reviewer

Applicants do not need to test in sequence. If the Applicant meets the requirements for the CIAO-M, they may test for the CIAO-M without having previously earned the CIAO-I.

3. ADVANCED DESIGNATION APPLICATIONS

Applicants will submit their application using a designated online form. The Advanced Designation Fee of $150 will be paid at the time of the application. Applicants will need to provide supporting documentation for each requirement.

a) Experience: Examples of supporting documentation include letter from Applicant's supervisor, letter from county board chairperson or township clerk, news article detailing election results, election results from local election authority, meeting minutes showing date of appointment.
b) Education: Applicants should look in the IPAI Student Portal to see if the education required is reflected in their learning history. If the portal does not show that this requirement is met, Applicants must submit a copy of their transcript from the Illinois Department of Revenue.
c) Leadership: Documentation for any leadership roles outside of the IPAI is required. Examples of supporting documentation include program book or website/app screenshot for presentations; PDFs of articles written; meeting minutes showing date of appointment to boards and committees; letter from project leaders, program coordinators, and/or mentees describing participation.
d) Letters of Recommendation: Recommenders should not send their letters to the CIAO-M Applicant but instead must email their letters directly to learning@ipaieducation.org.

4. CIAO-INTERMEDIATE APPLICATION APPROVAL PROCESS

IPAI staff will review the application and supporting documents to determine if the CIAO-I Applicant has met the experience, education, and leadership requirements. Staff will reach out to the Applicant if further documentation is needed. If any one of these three requirements is deficient, the Applicant will be denied, and they will need to restart the application process when they have met the requirement(s).

5. CIAO-MASTER APPLICATION APPROVAL PROCESS

IPAI staff will review the application and supporting documents to determine if the CIAO-M Applicant has met the experience, education, and leadership requirements. Staff will reach out to the Applicant if further documentation is needed. If any one of these three requirements is deficient, the Applicant will be denied, and they will need to restart the application process when they have met the requirement(s).

The IPAI Education Committee will review the overall application and letters of recommendation in order to approve or deny the application.

5.1 Timelines

During the first quarter of 2026, application reviews will take place monthly. Starting the second quarter of 2026, application reviews will take place quarterly.

IPAI staff will send the Education Committee the application packets and recommendation letters for each Applicant and will give the committee a specified deadline to complete their review.

5.2 Process

After reviewing the applications, IPAI Education Committee members will use a designated online form to vote if the Applicant is ready to move forward with the Advanced Designation process. Voting options will include "Yes" and "Needs Discussion."

If all members issue "Yes" votes, the application has been approved.

If there has been at least one vote for "Needs Discussion," the Education Committee will convene to discuss the application further. A quorum of the committee must be present for this discussion. This discussion may result in three outcomes:

a) The application is approved.
b) The application is marked incomplete for insufficient information or documentation, in which case the Applicant will be allowed to resubmit the application.
c) The application is denied. The Applicant will have the opportunity to appeal this decision to the IPAI Board of Directors.

5.3 Appeals

All Applicants have the right to appeal applications denied by the Education Committee. Appeals must be made in writing to the IPAI office within 30 days of the denial by the Education Committee. If no request for an appeal is made within 30 days, the decision as issued by the Education Committee will become final. The IPAI Board of Directors shall review the appeal within 60 days of receipt. Appeals shall include a signed statement of no more than 1,000 words from the Applicant outlining the reasons and justification for approval of their application.

The Board shall review the Applicant's written appeal statement, the Education Committee's decision, and application at the next regular meeting of the Board. The Board may affirm, modify, or reserve the decision of the Education Committee. The decision on appeal is final and binding. Notice of the Board's decision and a brief explanation shall be sent in writing to the Applicant within 14 days of its issuance.

5.4 Re-Application

If an application or appeal are denied, the Applicant is eligible to reinitiate the application process no sooner than 12 months following the date of denial.

6. CIAO-INTERMEDIATE EXAMINATION

6.1 Format

The examination contains 80 questions. Question formats include:
- Multiple-choice: one answer is correct.
- Multiple-response: more than one answer may be correct. The question must be answered completely correctly to earn the point for the question. All correct options must be chosen, and no incorrect options can be chosen to earn the point.

The pass score is 80%. Applicants have three hours to take the exam and get one exam attempt.

6.2 Content

The content of the exam is based on the CIAO Competency Model. The weighting of each of the core competencies and the statements within them was determined by a domain survey which was taken by advanced designation holders and other key stakeholders in the Illinois assessment community. The examination is divided into 10 core competencies, and the percentage next to each competency below reflects the percentage of questions associated with that area.

1. Legal Framework: 11%
2. Discover and List 9%
3. Mapping: 5%
4. Land: 7%
5. Residential: 14%
6. Commercial: 15%
7. Preferential Assessments: 6%
8. Math and Statistics: 5%*
9. Manage and Communicate: 17%
10. Complaints and Appeals: 11%

*Although math and statistics account for 5% of the exam, several other core competencies also incorporate these concepts. As a result, the actual number of math-related questions will exceed 5%.

The following detailed outline covers topics that may appear on the exam. As the exam utilizes a question bank, not every subtopic will be covered on each individual exam.

Legal Framework

- Read and interpret the law given a specific Article in the Illinois Property Tax Code.
  - During the exam, you'll receive a website link to the specific Article. You must use this resource exclusively for answering the related set of questions.
- Definitions within the property tax code
- Most commonly cited case law
- Homestead exemptions
  - Roles and responsibilities of administration
  - Eligibility
  - Impact on individual tax bills

Discover and List

- Planning for data collection
  - Develop data collection components for typical properties
  - Working with permits
  - Creating a data collection schedule
- Discover property information
- List and maintain property information
  - List changes in assessor books / tax administration software
  - Set and perform data backups
  - Ensure the accuracy and integrity of data

Mapping

- Work with legal descriptions
  - Explain where legal descriptions can be found
  - Read legal description information from deeds
  - Interpret platted subdivisions
  - Find the property on a map from a common legal description
- Use maps in an assessment office
  - Locate the sources of mapping information
  - Combining parcels
  - Define township and county boundaries
- Metes and bounds
  - Specify the components of a metes and bounds legal description
  - Read a metes and bounds legal description

Land

- Land data
  - Gather sales data
  - Acquire lot data
  - Evaluate land data
  - Units of comparison
- Land valuation
  - Sales comparison approach
  - Allocation method
  - Mass appraisal

Residential

- Appraisal principles in relation to residential properties
- Neighborhoods and market areas
- Sales comparison approach
- Cost approach (depreciation)
- Calibrating mass appraisal models
- Working with new construction

Commercial

- Define complex income topics
- Understand lease types and how they impact the capitalization rate
- Highest and best use
- Sales comparison approach
- Cost approach (depreciation)
- Income approach
  - Income and expenses
  - Derive cap rates, including the band of investment technique
  - GIM/GRM

Preferential Assessments

- Interpret preferential assessment components and eligibility using the Illinois Property Tax Code.
  - During the exam, you'll receive a website link to [Article 10. Valuation Procedures for Special Properties](#). You must use this resource exclusively for answering the related set of questions.

Math and Statistics

- Use geometry to calculate building and land sizes
- Use formulas and calculations throughout the valuation process
  - Partial assessments
  - Land to building ratios
  - GRM/GIM/VIF
  - Band of investment
  - Cost factor formula and age-life method
- Conduct a sales ratio study (median sales ratio, COD, PRD)
- Perform equalization
- Display statistical results

Manage and Communicate

- Personnel management
- Mass communication
- Transparency
  - Open Meetings Act
  - Freedom of Information Act
  - Local Records Act
- Interpersonal communication
- Leadership
- Budgeting
  - Plan for your budget
  - Work with your board to get budget approval

Complaints and Appeals

- Conduct an initial review
- Discuss relevant BOR administrative procedures
- Review complainant evidence
- Compile assessor evidence
- Prepare for the hearing date
- Attend the hearing as the assessor and defend the assessment
- Basic PTAB procedures

6.3 Recommended IPAI courses

While the exam covers a broad array of knowledge and concepts, the following IPAI courses explore topics that may be helpful in exam preparation. Applicants are not required to complete all of these courses before applying for the CIAO-I; rather, it is encouraged to undertake coursework that addresses individual areas for development.

- Commercial Complaints at the Local Level
- Homestead Exemptions
- Introduction to Income-Producing Properties
- Land Valuation
- Legal Descriptions for Assessors
- Neighborhood Analysis
- Office Management
- Preferential Assessments
- Residential Complaints at the Local Level
- Residential Data Collection
- RETDs From Township to State

6.4 Practice Exam

All approved Applicants will be provided access to the CIAO-I practice exam. The purpose of the practice exam is to familiarize yourself with the types of questions the exam will ask, the content of those questions, and the technology used for exam administration. The practice exam is only a guide and not a direct representation of the CIAO-I exam. You may take the practice exam twice.

7. CIAO-MASTER EXAMINATION

Under development.

8. TESTING PROCESS

8.1 Access

Once the CIAO-I application has been approved, the Applicant will be provided a link to access both the practice exam and the CIAO-I exam in the IPAI Exam Center. This is separate from the IPAI Student Portal. If this is your first online exam with the IPAI, you will need to first create an account.

8.2 Online Proctoring

The exams use an online proctoring service. To use the online proctoring, you will need a webcam, a microphone, a photo ID, and only one monitor connected. You do not need to choose your exam time in advance.

The IPAI provides a [help video](#) and a sample (trivia) test for individuals who wish to verify their technology setup prior to beginning the exam.

8.3 Resources

The exam is closed book—**no coursebooks, no notes, no cell phones**. You may use a calculator and one sheet of scratch paper. You must show them to the online proctor using your webcam before and after the exam. **You must dispose of the scratch paper as soon as you complete your exam.**

Please review our [Online Proctoring Policy](#) on the IPAI website for more information.

8.4 Exam Deadline

For the CIAO-I, Applicants have six months from the date the application is approved to take the exam. The CIAO-M exam deadline is TBD.

8.5 Retake Policy

Applicants get one attempt to pass the exam. If you score less than 80% on the exam, you may reapply for the program after 12 months from the date of the exam.

9. AWARDING AND MAINTAINING THE ADVANCED DESIGNATION

Upon successful completion of the exam, the advanced designation will be awarded following a review of the exam proctoring session by IPAI staff. An email confirming the advanced designation will be sent after the proctor review is complete, and a certificate will be mailed to the recipient within four weeks.

Recipients of the advanced designation will be recognized in an official press release issued by the IPAI. The press release will be distributed to local media outlets, and it will also be published on the IPAI website and featured in the IPAI E-news. Designees will also be formally recognized at the next State Conference Celebration Banquet.

The advanced designation remains valid provided that the CIAO 60-hour continuing education requirement is met for each cycle.