



2026 Program Plan

The Southwest Section's 2026 Program will include educational opportunities, social events, the Southwest Section Mentorship Program, the Southwest Section Stew, and ongoing efforts to improve membership outreach and communication.

- **Educational Opportunities:** Southwest Section will be partnering with Local Government Academy (LGA) to provide several educational opportunities throughout 2026. Four webinars will be developed as part of a "Planning 101" series. This series will aim to discuss the role of planning commissions and how to work with commissioners to fully realize planning goals; the true role and responsibilities of zoning hearing boards; the development review process; and strategic planning and how to motivate change when people are set in their ways. Certification maintenance (CM) credits will be provided for those who attend these webinars "live." The webinars will also be recorded and made available online through LGA. During the 2026-2027 CM period, the Section will also work with LGA to provide the four required credit areas- Law, Ethics, Equity, and Sustainability & Resilience- with the goal of providing two of these credits in 2026 and the other two in 2027. The required credit opportunities may be in-person or online, depending on the specific context and material. Online opportunities may be enhanced through in-person webinar watch parties and select locations throughout the Section's area providing members an additional opportunity to engage and network.
- **Social Events:** In 2026, the Section will host a minimum of two social events. Our first will be the Mentorship Mixer, serving as the culmination of the 2025-2026 session of the Mentorship Program, as well as an opportunity for students and professionals, whether they participated in the Program or not, to network. This event will be held in April, on or near the Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP) campus. Events later in the year may include a group bike ride in the summer or early fall and/or a happy hour event at the annual conference.
- **Southwest Section Mentorship Program:** The Southwest Section Mentorship Program, previously known as Mentor Telemachus, will continue in 2026. The 2025-2026 session will wrap up in April, and the 2026-2027 session will kick-off in October. In 2026, the Section will administer and award the second instance of the Alex Yerkey Memorial Scholarship to a student participant in the Mentorship Program.
- **Southwest Section Stew:** The Section will continue to host "Southwest Section Stew," a quarterly, virtual news and idea sharing session, held over the lunch hour. These sessions are intended to give members an opportunity to connect, discuss current events, current projects and recent successes, and innovative solutions for common problems.
- **Membership Outreach and Communication:** Southwest Section Council continues to be committed to expanding opportunities for participation, enhancing communication, and increasing active membership. Based on the results of our 2025 Membership Survey, in 2026 we will continue to work on improving avenues for communication- updating contact lists and pursuing new communication methods. We will continue to provide regular website and email updates to share participation opportunities.