

Hotel Business Review

Best practices, insights & trends

CMP – What is it? Why Should You have it?

The inside story on the value of obtaining this prestigious designation

By Lynn McCullough, Executive Director, ACOM

Achieving a higher level of education and industry awareness opens many doors for a career. The meeting industry is no exception to this rule. To that end, the CMP designation says a lot to your clients. It reflects a commitment to excellence and demonstrates the CMP designate as someone who is a well-informed partner and resource in the meeting planning process.

The CMP, or Certified Meeting Professional, program symbolizes excellence and academic experience and is the most widely recognized designation in the meetings industry. More and more, members of the Association for Convention Operations Management (ACOM) are obtaining the CMP designation. It validates the important role of continuing education, and reflects positively on the meeting planning discipline while exposing the profile of those practicing it. Currently, over 25 percent of ACOM members hold the CMP designation, and the number is rising rapidly. ACOM is dedicated to advancing the practice of convention services management in the meetings industry, and to preparing CSM professionals for the enormous task of gaining their CMP with the help of educational activities and peer mentoring. Those with a deep dedication to the industry's business practices and tenets are achieving this designation and reaping the benefits throughout the remainder of their career paths.

ACOM members shared with us some of their positive experiences in furthering their education and their decisions to obtain the CMP designation. Denise Suttle, CMP, Assistant Director of Convention Services for Albuquerque Convention & Visitors Bureau, and ACOM Board Member, had a positive mentoring experience with working one-on-one with a fellow meeting planner who was a strong advocate of the CMP program. Her mentor was a firm believer in the value of making a partner of CSMs at all hotels, CVBs and convention centers that she worked with. Suttle said, "When she worked with me on her Albuquerque annual convention, her utterly professional approach to every aspect of meeting planning, her onsite skills with managing staff, thoroughly documented history and precise event planning documents were a revelation to me. She inspired me to learn as much as I could about meeting planning, so that I could be a better resource for the planners I work with in the future."

For more than 15 years, the Convention Industry Council (CIC) has defined new levels of professionalism through its CMP program. The credential was developed out of a

necessity to increase the proficiency of meeting professionals and represent the standard of excellence in today's meeting industry. The CMP designation:

- Identifies an area of knowledge
- Establishes a level of know-how and performance necessary for certification
- Stimulates the advancement of meeting management
- Increases the value of practitioners to their employers
- Raises industry standards, practices and ethics

In order to qualify for the certification application, meeting professionals must meet a threshold of activity in the industry, which includes experience, scope of responsibility and management, continuing education, professional association memberships and leadership roles. Once your application is approved, candidates must pass an extensive examination which is administered twice a year. ACOM members, for example, receive credits for association education events they attend or participate in. ACOM's Lunch & Learns and Webinars which can be accessed without ever leaving the office, are a good illustration of how to achieve credits.

Dirk Bohns, CMP, Technical Services Manager of the Fairmont Queen Elizabeth Hotel went through the CMP process three years ago. "In 2004 the Fairmont Director of Banquets suggested to internal staff that more individuals should attempt the CMP certification. This made its way to my Sales Manager at AVW-TELAV, Maureen Kelly, and she approached me and asked me to attempt the exam based on my past experiences in the area. She saw it as a great way to strengthen AVW-TELAV's relationship with the Fairmont Hotel." Bohns continues to say, "Studying for the CMP examination can be a challenging and stressful process but having a good support team of family and co-workers behind you can make the preparation easier to accomplish. One also has to get accustomed to studying whenever and where ever they can, I used to study on the train in the morning as I commuted to work. Once I received my CMP I started to realize that everything I learned from my fellow CMP professionals, I was beginning to teach to the younger and future CMP professionals of the staff, something that I take great joy in doing."

The CMP community now numbers in the thousands, with representatives from every sector of the industry, including corporations and associations, as well as a myriad of suppliers supporting the industry, such as destination sales and service managers. Together with the education obtained a CMP designation provides a very visible presence to those that earn it. Utilization of the initials following your name on business cards, stationery, and any other promotional material tells your clients and other business associates that you have demonstrated the discipline that goes into the successful sale and servicing of customers. This is vital to helping organizations with the important task of conducting quality meetings world-wide. Indeed, the CMP designation reflects further proof that you and your organization consider the discipline of meeting planning one that requires a professional approach and dedication.

CMP recipients also receive a certificate attesting to their achievement and complimentary subscriptions to the informative CMP newsletters. A natural added benefit is also gained through an increased knowledge of all aspects of meeting management during preparation for the CMP examination. They are also allowed the opportunity to network with other CMP recipients and gain entrée into a select group of professionals that share this designation. Planners give added weight to sales managers and CSMs who have obtained their CMP because it instills an extra layer of confidence knowing these managers have achieved a level of expertise evidenced by this designation.

David Dvorak, CMP, Vice President of Catering & Convention Services for Starwood Hotels & Resorts shared his views on the important role the CMP plays in coordinating standard industry practices. "Having your CMP is essential to CSMs at Starwood, as it provides them with a clear understanding of the meeting professional's processes and needs." Dvorak continues to say, "It also shows the respect we have for the meeting planning profession and better prepares our CSMs to exceed a planner's expectations during the entire planning process through the knowledge they have gained obtaining their CMP."

Now that you know more about the CMP and have heard about various first-hand experiences, what are you waiting for? This is your chance to gain the CMP designation and become not only a rising star, but one worthy of all the light that will shine upon you when you earn it.

Lynn McCullough is Executive Director of the Association for Convention Operations Management (ACOM), where she is involved with the direction and management of the association, as well as membership recruitment and retention. She provides substantial direction on strategy and tactical issues, with responsibilities that include Board of Director relations, strategic development, and event planning and management including promotion, set-up and follow-up. Lynn earned her Bachelor of Journalism degree from the University of Missouri School of Journalism. Ms. McCullough can be contacted at 609-799-3712 or lmccullough@cmasolutions.com