How to Successfully Become an AAP

What does it mean to be an AAP?

An Accredited ACH Professional (AAP) is an individual who has a comprehensive knowledge of all areas of ACH, including a deep understanding and experience in at least one area of ACH. They possess a broad knowledge of concepts that relate to the ACH payments systems, as well as concepts associated with other payments systems in how they correlate to ACH. An AAP is a professional designation awarded by Nacha, to individuals who are experts in electronic payments. AAPs are especially versed in managing ACH operations, interpreting ACH Rules and regulations, developing ACH products, selling ACH products and services and more. Financial institution examiners and other users of the ACH Network accept the AAP certification as a mark identifying individuals who are dedicated to and serious about their profession, and who has gone the extra mile to become an expert in the field.

I’m considering taking the AAP exam, what do I need to know?

The exam is sponsored and administered by Nacha (National Automated Clearing House Association). You are given three hours to take the exam, which consists of 120 questions, including 20 pilot questions. The results of the exam will be revealed to you as you leave the testing site.

The exam is comprised of six different categories:

- Operational Process & Flow
- Rules and Regulations
- Risk Management
- General Payments Overview
- Technical Standards
- Marketing & Products

The weight of these categories may change slightly yearly, as well as the registration fees and key dates. Please see Nacha’s AAP FAQ’s for details on this year’s exam.
Who is the ideal candidate for the AAP Program?

Passing the AAP exam indicates that you are a Subject Matter Expert in the area of ACH. With that being said, it is not an easy exam to pass. There are three main things that are needed to pass the AAP exam:

1. **Experience**
   - As a general rule, it is strongly recommended you have **2+ years of experience** working with ACH payments. If you are relatively new to the field, give yourself **no less than 2 years of payments-related experience** before you attempt to take the AAP exam, as it is quite challenging. We are talking about scenario-based questions that require a deep understanding of the ACH Network and its related rules & regulations.
   
   - It will be advantageous for you to have worked in different areas of ACH before taking the exam. Building your experience level will help to shape your knowledge of the ACH Rules, ACH processing and applications, Risk Management, Electronic Payment Services Management and Laws & Regulations. All of which are crucial to achieving success on the exam.

2. **Time**
   - Successful candidates spend on average, **10+ dedicated hours a week** studying for the exam. Hold yourself accountable. You must show a strong focus and dedication to keep moving towards your goals and use this to spur you on towards success.
   
   - Begin by creating a study schedule and be resolved to stick to it. Plan out the time for a study schedule that works for you. This will allow you to realistically make time for the work that matters to achieve your goals.
   
   - Interact and participate in each class and form Study Groups to help solidify and clarify course discussions. The Study Group can reinforce skills that are relevant to your studies, but they can also help to fill in any learning gaps.

3. **Knowledge**
   - The AAP exam is written in such a way that you’ll be answering questions that show your understanding in how to apply the different rules and regulations that affect ACH. A thorough understanding of the ACH Rules, as of September of the year you’re taking the exam, is critical to being successful on the exam. You should know how ACH processing works and the different types of applications, including the various processes and requirements for such things as returns, NOCs, the different SEC codes, as well as the authorization requirements that go along with them. You should also understand the different risks associated with ACH processing and how to mitigate them as well as be familiar with other policies associated with them, such as the FFIEC Guidance. You will also have to have a high-level understanding of how other regulations and laws impact ACH.
processing, including Regulation E, Title 31 CFR 210, Regulation CC, UCC 4A, Regulation D and others.

- Enroll in TCH’s AAP Prep program. The program has been specifically designed to guide you through the preparation process, providing knowledge checks along the way.

- Invest in study materials. Everyone learns differently, so make sure you are consuming information in a way that benefits you the most. This may include Flashcards, Nacha Operating Rules & Guidelines, and other related publications.

If I asked a TCHPA instructor for their recommendations in studying for the exam, what would they say?

- Create a study schedule. Not only the days/times of the week you have set aside to study, but what you want to cover during that time. There’s a lot of information to cover, and if not careful, it’s easy to get lost or get behind.

- Study with a group. Whether that’s with one other person or five. For this exam especially, it’s important to be able to have a sounding board when you’re taking in new information. Study groups help you retain information better, and help you look at the information you’re learning from different perspectives. If you have the ability to do so, consider hosting a study group. You don’t have to be an expert, but many people may benefit, even if you’re just facilitating a date and time for people to meet and discuss ACH.

- Understand the basics of all the payment rails. This will help you to be able to relate what you see in the different payment rails to ACH and know how they differ.

- Periodically, do an honest self-assessment of your knowledge. It’s important for you to be able to assess your strengths and weaknesses and know where you need to spend some extra time studying.

- Be actively engaged in the AAP Prep Webinar Series. These sessions prove to be the most beneficial when you can focus your attention on the sessions as they are being presented. This gives you a chance to ask questions and make sure you’re understanding what you’re learning in your individual study sessions.

- If asked where you should focus your attention, we would say to make sure you understand the legal framework of ACH. Make sure that you can make real-life applications to the rules, regulations, and exceptions of ACH.