

A Career Guide for the Immigrant Professional

BECOMING AN ACCOUNTANT & AUDITOR in Pennsylvania



Welcoming
Center *for*
NEW PENNSYLVANIANS

*Connecting immigrants, employers,
and communities*

This Career Guide for the Immigrant Professional includes a job description, job prospects, salary ranges, potential employers, types of jobs, and information about the qualifications needed to enter the accounting and auditing profession.

The guide also outlines the five steps to earning the Certified Public Accounting (CPA) credential in Pennsylvania should you be interested in becoming a public accountant.

In addition to reading this guide for logistical information, you may want to seek a mentor for advice on the specific career path you wish to pursue within this profession. Even if you have worked as an accountant or auditor in your home country, you will probably need to obtain certain credentials, take specialized computer courses, learn U.S. accounting and tax practices, or gain work experience in order to work as an accountant in Pennsylvania.

Please be aware that the licensing process for certified public accountants is lengthy. If that is your intention, it may be helpful to find a survival-level job or an internship within the field of accounting that will earn you valuable work experience in the meantime.

A

JOB DESCRIPTION

What do accountants and auditors do in the US?

Accountants and auditors work with financial data. They produce accounting records and statements and also verify that those records and statements are correct. Accountants and auditors help organizations such as businesses and government entities make better business decisions by providing an accurate picture of their financial situations.

An accountant should be very comfortable working with computers, particularly with spreadsheets, and have an aptitude for mathematics. He or she should be able to analyze and interpret information. Job responsibilities will change depending on the position that an accountant or auditor holds and in what environment s/he may work. For example, public accountants or accountants working in a company's tax department should have a thorough understanding of U.S. tax laws.

Accountants and auditors perform a variety of services, including:

- Maintaining records and bookkeeping
- Preparing financial reports and statements
- Budgeting and cost management
- Auditing records
- Assurance and information integrity
- Forensic accounting
- Tax advising
- Management consulting

Accountants typically work in an office environment and work a 40-hour work week. Self-employed accountants may work additional hours. Public accountants, who tend to provide more tax advice, often find that their workload increases during tax season in the late winter and early spring.

Accountants can work for large or small accounting firms, businesses, schools and universities, nonprofit organizations, or government entities, or can be self-employed. Large organizations will often have entire accounting departments made up of many accountants performing a variety of tasks in a variety of areas of the business, such as in payroll or accounts payable.

The four main fields of accounting and auditing in the United States are: public accounting, management accounting, government accounting, and internal auditing.¹

1 "Accountants and Auditors." Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2008-09 Edition. U.S. Department of Labor. <http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos001.htm#nature>

Public Accountants

Public accountants perform a variety of accounting services for a range of clients including corporations, governments, non-profit organizations, and individuals. Some public accountants will be involved in tax matters, including advising their clients about the tax implications of business decisions they might make. They also can be involved in the preparation of income tax returns for individuals or companies. Others may become external auditors and prepare and report on financial statements for investors, banks, or governmental authorities. Public accountants are generally required to become Certified Public Accountants (or CPAs) and are either self-employed or work for public accounting firms. **For more information about becoming a CPA, please refer to the Appendix at the end of this guide.**

Management Accountants

Management accountants (sometimes called private or industry accountants) are typically private accountants that work for businesses and are responsible for recording the transactions of the business and accounting for its assets and liabilities. Management accountants also assist the businesses that they work for by analyzing their corporate financial information. They perform various financial duties for their employers and can be responsible for budgets, cost management, financial records and reports, performance evaluation, and strategic planning. Some management accountants are CPAs, but many companies do not require this certification.

Government Accountants and Auditors

Government accountants deal with financial records and reports for public sector entities such as governmental agencies or private corporations and individuals that are federally regulated. Government accountants can work on revenues and expenditures, examine financial institutions, analyze budgets, or become Internal Revenue Service agents.

Internal Auditors

Internal auditors are hired by organizations to maintain, examine and evaluate internal controls including financial and information systems, management and company operations, corporate and governmental compliance, and record accuracy.

TIP:

When searching job listings, be aware that the title “Auditor” is also used for entry-level jobs in unrelated industries, such as warehouse positions that include counting and inspecting products.

B JOB PROSPECTS²

What are my job prospects as an accountant and auditor in Pennsylvania?

According to Pennsylvania state projections, employment of accountants and auditors in Pennsylvania is expected to grow from approximately 38,320 in 2004 to approximately 42,080 in 2014. The number of annual job openings per year in 2014 will be approximately 1,100.³ A candidate generally needs a bachelor's degree to qualify for entry-level positions in the field of accountancy and audit. Accountants and auditors who have earned professional recognition through certification like the CPA examination or licensure will have the best possibility of finding a job in Pennsylvania. Accountants and auditors compete for jobs in the most prestigious firms.

C SALARY RANGE⁴

What kind of annual salary can an accountant and auditor expect?

Pennsylvania Entry-Level Salary	\$35,150
Pennsylvania Average Salary	\$60,760
United States Average Salary	\$58,020

D TYPES OF ACCOUNTING JOBS⁵

There are many options available to individuals who are interested in entering the field of accounting. The following table provides a list of such positions with their salary ranges, responsibilities involved, and the minimum qualifications required:

Position	Salary Range	Responsibilities	Minimum Qualifications
Banking Teller, Loan Officer, Administrator	\$21,000 - \$82,000	Safeguards money and valuables and provides loans, credit, and payment services, such as checking accounts, money orders, and cashier's checks. May offer investment and insurance products.	High school diploma (or GED); at least 1 year of experience handling U.S. currency (e.g. as a cashier)
Bill & Account Collector	\$20,080 - \$29,860	Locates and notifies customers when accounts are overdue and payments need to be made.	High school diploma (or GED); strong telephone communication skills
Bookkeeper, Auditing Clerk	\$22,000 - \$44,000	Updates accounting records, including records which tabulate expenditures, receipts, accounts payable and receivable, and profit and loss.	High school diploma (or GED) and computer literacy including strong familiarity with spreadsheets. Experience with accounting software also helpful.

² "Accountants and Auditors." Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2006 Edition. PA Department of Labor & Industry. http://www.paworkstats.state.pa.us/paoooh/6_account_audit.pdf

³ Ibid.

⁴ Pennsylvania Career Guide 2007-2008. PA Department of Labor & Industry. http://www.paworkstats.state.pa.us/carguide/CG_07-08_Part_2.pdf (pg. 31)

⁵ You can find additional related occupations at <http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos001.htm#related>.

Position	Salary Range	Responsibilities	Minimum Qualifications
Payroll and Timekeeping Clerk	\$24,000 - \$37,000	Reviews employee work charts, time sheets, and time cards to ensure employees are paid on time and that their paychecks are accurate.	High school diploma (or GED) and computer literacy including strong familiarity with spreadsheets. Experience with accounting software also helpful.
Budget Analyst	\$45,000 - \$87,000	Develops, analyzes, and executes budgets used to allocate current resources and estimate future financial requirements. Should have an aptitude for numbers and strong analytical skills.	Bachelor's degree and strong computer skills including extensive experience with spreadsheets.
Financial Analyst and Personal Financial Advisor	\$47,000 - \$113,000	Analyzes and guides businesses and individuals in helping to make investment decisions.	Bachelor's degree and strong computer, interpersonal and English skills
Financial Manager	\$59,000 - \$130,000	A general position that can act as a controller, treasurer, finance officer, credit manager, and cash manager, as well as an insurance and risk manager. Financial managers often plan the financial activities of a corporation.	Bachelor's degree and strong computer, interpersonal and English skills
Public Accountant	\$41,500 - \$129,250 (add 10% for a graduate degree or CPA) ⁶	Provides accounting and auditing advice and services to clients including businesses and/or individuals. Can also provide tax advice.	Bachelor's degree; but for best prospects, it is necessary to become a licensed CPA or have a graduate degree (see below information on how to become a certified public accountant)

E POTENTIAL EMPLOYERS

Who employs accountants and auditors?

Below are examples of employers that hire accountants and auditors. These examples are only some of the many employers that exist in Pennsylvania.

Government - including the federal government, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, counties, and local municipalities

Large Corporations - including industries such as financial services, pharmaceuticals, services companies and so forth. Some examples are JP Morgan Chase, Bank of America, Prudential, ARAMARK, Merck, Johnson & Johnson, Exelon and Comcast

Accounting Firms - such as PricewaterhouseCoopers, Deloitte & Touche, Ernst & Young, and KPMG

Taxation Specialists - such as H&R Block, Intuit Inc., and Jackson Hewitt Tax Service

Non-Profit Organizations and Institutions - such as universities (Temple University, University of Pennsylvania), hospitals (Jefferson Hospital, Children's Hospital of Philadelphia), and the United Way

⁶ "Accounting Salaries." The American Institute of Certified Public Accountants.
<http://www.aicpa.org/Becoming+a+CPA/CPA+Candidates+and+Students/Landing+a+Job/Accounting+Salaries.htm>

Real Estate and Development Firms - such as Prudential and Toll Brothers

Self-Employed - many accountants work for themselves by opening their own practices

Law Firms - such as Morgan, Lewis & Bockius LLP, Dechert LLP, and Pepper Hamilton LLP

Small Businesses - such as restaurants, dry cleaners, and landscapers

F EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

What are the educational requirements to become an accountant or auditor?

As you can see from the chart in Section D, the minimum qualifications to become an accountant or auditor vary, depending on the type of job you wish to pursue. Employers generally look for college graduates who have a degree in accounting or a related field, and have some level of computer literacy. If you do not have the educational qualifications needed for your desired accounting position, consider working in one of the other positions listed in order to gain valuable experience in the field of accounting. Individuals who have master's degrees, have become certified or licensed, or have learned how to use computer accounting and auditing software will have the best job possibilities.⁷

G CREDENTIAL EVALUATION

If you received your degree from a university outside the United States, you may need to have a credential evaluation organization determine the equivalent degree in the United States. Many companies who hire accountants and auditors will need to know if your degree matches their requirements. If you decide to get an evaluation, World Education Services is a reputable organization that provides this service.

Note: WES is a valuable service to transfer your credentials, however, you cannot use WES as a credential evaluation service to take the CPA exam. See page 9 for more information.

World Education Services

Bowling Green Station

P.O. Box 5087

New York, NY 10274-5087

PHONE: 212-966-6311

FAX: 212-739-6100

WEB: <http://www.wes.org>

NOTE:

Proficiency in using spreadsheet software, such as Microsoft Excel, is essential for finding a job as an accountant in the United States.

Experience with widely-used accounting software, such as QuickBooks or Peachtree, can be very helpful as well.

Good credit and a clean criminal background check are required for jobs in the accounting field.

⁷ "Accountants and Auditors." Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2008-2009 Edition. U.S. Department of Labor. <http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos001.htm#nature>

H WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS IN GETTING A JOB?

In addition to this guide, the Welcoming Center has published *How to Succeed in the Workplace*, a general guide to conducting a successful job search in the United States. This guide is located at: www.welcomingcenter.org/documents/HowToSucceed.pdf.

The Welcoming Center has many years of experience working with immigrant professionals who are trying to rebuild their careers here in the United States. We have discovered that rebuilding your career requires accumulating social capital. Much like starting a business, where you must collect and save financial capital and resources, transferring your career to a new country requires collecting and building *social* capital. Social capital includes your knowledge of American business culture, your network of professional contacts, and similar resources.

Whether you are looking for a job as a certified public accountant or another position within the field of accounting, it will be useful to find a career mentor who can help guide you through the process. In addition, you should look for opportunities where you can network with others in the accounting field such as career fairs, professional accounting societies, public lectures, conferences, or any other event which might bring together accountants and auditors.

The Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians helps work-authorized immigrants with job placement regardless of your educational background and skill level. Please contact us at:

Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians

1617 John F. Kennedy Boulevard, 13th Floor
Philadelphia, PA 19103

PHONE: 215-557-2626

EMAIL: info@welcomingcenter.org

WEB: www.welcomingcenter.org

OTHER USEFUL LINKS

American Institute of Certified Public Accountants: <http://www.aicpa.org>

Association of Government Accountants: <http://www.agacgfm.org>

National Society of Accountants: <http://www.nsacct.org/foundation.asp>

Pennsylvania Institute of Certified Public Accountants: <http://www.picpa.org>

Sources

We have drawn on a variety of sources for our research, but are most indebted to the Pennsylvania State Board of Accountancy, the National Association of State Boards of Accountancy and the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry for their invaluable information.

HOW TO BECOME A CERTIFIED PUBLIC ACCOUNTANT

The Certified Public Accountant (CPA) credential is a license issued by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania that provides accountants with a professional recognition that will be beneficial to their job search as well as certify them to practice as a Public Accountant in Pennsylvania. Please note that this certification is a lengthy process that has costs, educational and work experience requirements associated with it. Before you decide to pursue certification, you may want to consider speaking with a mentor or other professionals in the accounting field to decide whether the CPA certification will be necessary or useful for the type of accounting job that you wish to find.

Who certifies accountants?

The Pennsylvania State Board of Accountancy regulates the licensure of certified public accountants within the Commonwealth. You can work as an accountant without being certified, but certified public accountants tend to have the best job possibilities.

THE CONTACT INFORMATION FOR THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE BOARD OF ACCOUNTANCY IS:

State Board of Accountancy
P.O. Box 2649
Harrisburg, PA 17105-2649
PHONE: 717-783-1404
FAX: 717-705-5540
E-MAIL: st-accountancy@state.pa.us
WEB: www.dos.state.pa.us/account

BECOMING A CERTIFIED PUBLIC ACCOUNTANT in Pennsylvania⁸

To earn a CPA license, you must meet four categories of requirements: Residency Requirements, Educational Requirements, Licensing Examination Requirements, and Experiential Requirements.

1 RESIDENCY

First-time candidates must be a resident of Pennsylvania; or, employed full-time in Pennsylvania under the supervision of a CPA; or, have graduated from a college or university in Pennsylvania. The applicant must also be age 18 or older.

2 EDUCATION

Candidates may qualify under one of the three following requirements:

- A) Baccalaureate degree from a college or university approved at the time of graduation by the Pennsylvania Department of Education, to include 24 semester hours in accounting and auditing, business law, finance, or tax subjects. OR
- B) Master's degree or other post-graduate degree, from a college or university approved at the time of graduation by the Pennsylvania Department of Education, to include 24 semester hours in accounting and auditing, business law, finance, or tax subjects. OR
- C) Baccalaureate or higher degree, from a college or university approved at the time of graduation by the Pennsylvania Department of Education, and completed a total of 150 semester credits of post-secondary education to include 24 semester hours in accounting and auditing, business law, finance, or tax subjects. An additional 12 semester credits in accounting, auditing, and tax subjects are also required.

International Educational Credentials

If you were educated outside the U.S., you must have your degree evaluated by a professional credential evaluation organization. The fee is \$125 + \$15 for a second copy. The organization will send its evaluation report directly to the State Board of Accountancy and will send the second copy to you.

⁸ National Association of State Boards of Accountancy (NASBA) <http://www.nasba.org/nasbaweb/NASBAWeb.nsf/wpecer?openform&stateabbrev=PA>

Be aware! There are many evaluation services, but only three that you are allowed to use for this purpose. The Pennsylvania State Board of Accountancy recognizes the following three organizations:

Educational Credential Evaluators

PHONE: (414) 289-3400

WEB: www.ece.org

Foreign Academic Credentials Service

PHONE: (618) 656-5291

WEB: www.facsusa.com

Josef Silny & Associates, Inc.

PHONE: (305) 273-1616

WEB: www.jsilny.com

When you apply for the CPA exam, you must already be qualified under one of the above education requirements. **You cannot apply for the exam if your education is still in progress. This is strictly enforced.**

3 LICENSING EXAMINATION⁹

You must pass four sections of the Uniform Certified Public Accountant Examination with a score of at least 75 (0 – 99 scale) in each section. The CPA exam is difficult and only a small portion of those who take the exam pass every section on the first try. You do not have to pass all four sections at once. You can be given partial credit for passing two of the four sections and then have a certain time period in which to take and pass the remaining two sections.

Section	Length
Auditing and Attestation (AUD)	4.5 hours
Business Environment and Concepts (BEC)	2.5 hours
Financial Accounting and Reporting (FAR)	4.0 hours
Regulation (REG)	3.0 hours

⁹ “CPA Computer-Based Examination FAQs.” American Institute of Certified Public Accountants. http://www.cpa-exam.org/cpa/computer_faqs_2.html

EXPERIENCE¹⁰

You have two options for meeting this requirement. If you have a baccalaureate (bachelor's) degree, you must have two years (3,200 hours) of public accounting experience, with 800 hours in the attest function. If you have a master's degree, you must have one year (1,600 hours) of public accounting experience with 400 hours in the attest function. The attest function refers to "the activity of a public accountant in performing audit procedures."¹¹ Work experience includes public accounting experience, internal auditing experience, or government auditing experience. Your experience must occur under the supervision of a person currently licensed to practice as a CPA or PA in Pennsylvania or another state. You must have completed the required experience within the 120 months (10 years) preceding the date of your application for a certificate of certified public accountant.

¹⁰ "FAQ – CPA." Pennsylvania Department of State. http://www.dos.state.pa.us/bpoa/lib/bpoa/20/acct_board/f_a_q.pdf

¹¹ "Attest Function Definition." All Business.com. 2008. <http://www.allbusiness.com/glossaries/attest-function/4943027-1.html>

FIVE STEPS TO BECOMING A CERTIFIED PUBLIC ACCOUNTANT

You should review the five steps that you need to take to become a Certified Public Accountant in the Uniform CPA Candidate Bulletin.¹² The Uniform CPA Candidate Bulletin is a 34-page document that contains detailed information on the CPA examination. Please read it carefully. A summary of the five steps is below.

1 APPLY TO TAKE THE EXAMINATION

Complete and submit the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Initial Application for Uniform CPA Examination State Board of Accountancy,¹³ including the Social Security Act Certification page (p.3). You must pay all fees at the time of application and payment must be in U.S. dollars. Certified checks or money orders must be drawn on a U.S. bank and made payable to CPA Examination Services. Submit all application materials, application fees, and examination fees to:

CPA Examination Services

PO Box 440555

Nashville, TN 37244

(Note that application fees are NOT refundable.)

After the Pennsylvania Board of Accountancy has accepted your application and fee, it will then notify the National Association of State Boards of Accountancy (NASBA) as to which sections of the examination you are eligible to take. NASBA will then send you the appropriate payment coupon.

2 RECEIVE YOUR NOTICE TO SCHEDULE

Once your application has been processed, you have been determined to be eligible to take one or more sections of the Uniform CPA Examination and you have paid all fees, you will receive a Notice to Schedule (NTS). One NTS will be sent to you listing the section(s) of the examination that you are approved to take. Once the NTS has been issued, an eligible candidate has six months from the date of the NTS to schedule and take the approved examination section(s). **Please examine this document carefully to make sure the information is accurate.**

¹² You can access the Uniform CPA Examination Candidate Bulletin at <http://www.cpa-exam.org/cpa/bulletin.html>

¹³ Certified Public Accountant – Certification Application. State Board of Accountancy. http://www.dos.state.pa.us/bpoa/lib/bpoa/20/acct_board/appl-cert-0403.pdf

3 SCHEDULE YOUR EXAMINATION

Visit www.prometric.com/cpa on the Internet. This is the easiest and quickest way to schedule an examination appointment. You may also call Prometric's Candidate Services Call Center at 1-800-580-9648. It is recommended that you schedule your exam as soon as possible after you receive your NTS.

4 TAKE YOUR EXAMINATION

You must arrive at the test center at least 30 minutes before the scheduled appointment time for your examination. Do not arrive after the scheduled start time of your testing appointment or you may not be permitted to take the test and will not receive a refund. You must bring your Notice to Schedule (NTS) with you. This document contains a password that you will need to enter on the test center computer to login before you begin your examination. You will not be admitted into the test center without the NTS and you will forfeit all examination fees for that section. You must also bring two forms of identification.

See page 13 in the Uniform CPA Examination Candidate Bulletin for acceptable forms of identification.

5 RECEIVE YOUR SCORE(S)

After the examination, candidate responses are forwarded to the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA). When advisory scores become available, the AICPA forwards them to NASBA. NASBA forwards the scores to the Pennsylvania State Board of Accountancy for approval and subsequent release to the candidates.

Final Sections of the Uniform CPA Examination

Register for and complete each section of the Uniform CPA Examination. You must complete all four sections within 18 months. If you fail a section, you may retake it without any penalty other than a re-examination fee and the risk of credits for other sections expiring under the "18 month rule."

Work Experience

You must complete the required work experience:

- 3,200 hours if you have earned a baccalaureate degree (about 3 years)
- 1,600 hours if you have earned a master's degree (about 1.5 years)

This experience may be completed before and/or after taking this examination. Once you have completed the work experience, have your employer complete and submit the Verification of Experience Form (PDF).¹⁴

Certified Public Accountant - Certification Application (PDF)¹⁵

Submit this document to receive your certification.

¹⁴ Verification of Experience. State Board of Accountancy. http://www.dos.state.pa.us/bpoa/lib/bpoa/20/acct_board/cpa_verification_of_experience.pdf

¹⁵ Certified Public Accountant – Certification Application. State Board of Accountancy. http://www.dos.state.pa.us/bpoa/lib/bpoa/20/acct_board/appl-cert-0403.pdf

How much it does it cost to become certified?

Important: This chart does not include the cost of education, retrieving transcripts, postage, and other charges.

Credential Evaluation	\$140 (approx)
Uniform CPA Examination¹⁶	
Application Fee	\$95.00
Auditing and Attestation (AUD)	\$226.28
Business Environment and Concepts (BEC)	\$178.58
Financial Accounting and Reporting (FAR)	\$214.35
Regulation (REG)	\$190.50
CPA Certification Application and Verification of Experience	\$65.00
Approximate Total	\$1,109.71

16 "First Time Applicant Fees - Pennsylvania." National Association of State Boards of Accountancy (NASB). <http://www.nasba.org/nasbaweb/NASBAWeb.nsf/wpecf?openform&stateabbrev=PA>

Founded in 2003, the Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization that works to promote immigrant participation in the region's economic, political, and social life. These individuals enhance the productivity, profitability, and stability of the region's businesses and contribute to the state's overall economic growth.

MAIN OFFICE

One Penn Center
1617 John F. Kennedy Boulevard
13th Floor
Philadelphia, PA 19103
phone 215-557-2626
fax 215-557-2825

www.welcomingcenter.org

Our United Way donor option
number is 14726.

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NEW PENNSYLVANIANS

*Connecting immigrants, employers,
and communities*