



Online Training Course Descriptions 2017

The SPARK Institute, Inc. provides an online curriculum designed to help individuals in the retirement plan industry gain the knowledge and skills required to become successful. The courses also prepare individuals to earn the SPARK Accredited Retirement Plan Specialist (ARPS) and/or SPARK Accredited Retirement Plan Consultant (ARPC) designations.

Our online courses are updated twice each calendar year. The courses can be taken separately or in any combination and each course includes access to an electronic copy of a course manual that can be printed for additional learning support. Successful completion of each course earns an electronic certificate of completion and continuing education credits from the SPARK Institute, Inc. Brief descriptions of the courses are attached.

Basic

- ▶ Retirement Plans and Industry Overview
- ▶ Plan Features and Design
- ▶ Participant Communications, Education and Advice

Specialty

- ▶ Plan Activity and Accounting
- ▶ Plan Investments and Accounting
- ▶ Plan Reporting and Compliance
- ▶ Retirement Plan Market and Sales Process

Advanced

- ▶ Employee Communications Issues
- ▶ ERISA 403(b) Plans and the Final Regulations
- ▶ Retirement Plan Fee Reporting and Disclosure Requirements
- ▶ Understanding Multiple Employer Plans (MEPs)
- ▶ Retirement Income Products in DC Plans
- ▶ The Retirement Plan Market and Industry Issues-2016
- ▶ Trends Impacting DC Plan Investment Menu Design
- ▶ Strengthening the Employer-Sponsored Retirement Plan System
- ▶ ERISA Fiduciary Requirements and DOL Regulations

Features of the SPARK online courses include:

Learning Objectives. Each course provides learning objectives that outline the material covered in the exam. The concepts being taught are supplemented with illustrations and examples to enhance understanding of the material.

Learning Activities. Interactive exercises help the learner apply the concepts. All the exercises are optional, but recommended since they are helpful for clarifying concepts.

Exams. Essay exams are placed throughout the courses and an objective final exam is located at the end. The passing score is 80% for each course exam.

Navigation. Learners move between screens by clicking on the syllabus located in the side bar or by using the standard navigation tools including backward and forward arrows. A bookmark icon at the top of each screen saves the learner's place.

Support. A facilitator is available to the learner throughout the 182-day access period and will respond to any email, regardless of the topic, within 48 hours.

Course Descriptions: Basic Online Courses

Course 1: Retirement Plans and Industry Overview

This course reviews the essential characteristics and fundamental differences of defined benefit and defined contribution plans and examines their benefit structures and funding mechanisms. The history of employee benefit plans focuses on key legislation and the market response including industry and product trends. Upon completion of the course, which includes the following lessons, the learner will receive CEUs for 7 contact hours:

- ▶ Sources of Retirement Savings
- ▶ Social Security and IRAs
- ▶ Employer Sponsored Plan Concepts
- ▶ Qualified Defined Benefit Plans
- ▶ Qualified Defined Contribution Plans
- ▶ Other Tax Advantaged Plans
- ▶ Non-Qualified Employer Sponsored Plans
- ▶ Retirement Plan Stakeholders
- ▶ Retirement Plan Industry History
- ▶ Industry Trends and Issues

Course 2: Plan Features and Design

This course is designed to provide the learner with an appreciation of the value of retirement savings plans to the employer by examining the factors that drive the purchase and design of a plan. The requirements for legally establishing a plan and the roles and responsibilities of the parties involved with a plan are reviewed. Upon completion of the course, which includes the following lessons, the learner will receive CEUs for 10 contact hours:

- ▶ Corporate Culture Influences on Plan Selection
- ▶ Employee Demographic Influences on Plan Selection
- ▶ Types of Sponsoring Organizations
- ▶ Establishing Plan Objectives
- ▶ Plan Compliance Impact on Design
- ▶ Employee Eligibility
- ▶ Vesting
- ▶ Contributions
- ▶ Benefit Payments
- ▶ QDROs and Loans
- ▶ Plan Fees
- ▶ Plan Administration
- ▶ Investments
- ▶ Participant Communications Considerations
- ▶ The Plan Documents
- ▶ Setting Up a Plan
- ▶ Modifying a Plan

Basic Online Courses (Continued)

Course 3: Participant Communications, Education and Advice

The value of retirement savings plans to employees and the factors that drive enrollment and investment decisions are examined. This course then explores the requirements and options for providing employees with initial and ongoing plan information and investment education and advice. Upon completion of the course which includes the following lessons, the learner will receive CEUs for 3 contact hours:

- ▶ Legal Requirements for Participant Communications
- ▶ Section 404(c) of ERISA
- ▶ Interpretive Bulletin 96-1
- ▶ Plan Communications
- ▶ Investment Education and Advice

Specialty Online Courses: Record Keeping and Administration Track

Course 4: Plan Activity and Accounting

Individual participant accounting is a key characteristic of defined contribution plans. This accounting along with the processing of plan activity is referred to as record keeping. This course looks at the record keeper's involvement with the retirement plan. Upon completion of the course, which includes the following lessons, the learner will receive CEUs for 4 contact hours:

- ▶ Setting Up a Plan
- ▶ Information Maintenance
- ▶ Basic Plan Calculations
- ▶ Plan Financial Transactions
- ▶ Plan Accounting Workflows

Course 5: Plan Investments and Accounting

The primary function of a defined contribution plan is to receive cash contributions from employers and employees that are used to purchase investments. The expectation is that the investments will increase in value and/or produce income, on a tax-favored basis, resulting in adequate retirement savings for plan participants. The investment options for the plan and the type of accounting methodologies for both the plan and the participant are discussed, and the processes and procedures for trading and valuing those investments are reviewed. Upon completion of the course, which includes the following lessons, the learner will receive CEUs for 4 contact hours:

- ▶ Investment Characteristics
- ▶ Plan Level Accounting Methodologies
- ▶ Participant Level Accounting Methodologies
- ▶ Investment Activity and Information Requirements
- ▶ Investment Income Activity and Capital Changes
- ▶ Plan Investment Conversion Process
- ▶ Employer Stock Accounting

Specialty Online Courses: Record Keeping and Administration Track (Continued)

Course 6: Plan Reporting and Compliance

Retirement plans have many regulatory reporting and compliance requirements. In order to produce accurate reports and stay compliant, it is important for providers to have control and error correction procedures in place. These procedures help maintain the integrity of the data and ensure the proper operation of the plan. Service providers report plan information to sponsors and participants on a regular basis and they assist plan sponsors in the various audit and regulatory reporting requirements. Additionally, since qualified plans have annual compliance testing requirements, plan service providers typically assist plan sponsors in conducting the various tests. Upon completion of the course, which includes the following lessons, the learner will receive CEUs for 4 contact hours:

- ▶ Internal Controls and Servicing Standards
- ▶ Plan Reporting
- ▶ Plan Audits
- ▶ Regulatory Reporting and Filing
- ▶ Compliance Testing

Specialty Online Courses: Sales and Marketing Track

Course 7: Retirement Plan Market and Sales Process

This session provides an overview of the defined contribution plan market and the sales process. The class reviews today's market and product trends, discusses the plans cycle and outlines the requirements for setting both plan sponsor and plan participant expectations during the sales process. Upon completion of the course, which includes the following lessons, the learner will receive CEUs for 4 contact hours:

- ▶ Defined Contribution Plan Products
- ▶ The Retirement Plan Market
- ▶ The Sales Professional's Role
- ▶ Servicing the Plan

Advanced Online Curriculum

CE 2: Employee Communications Issues

This course reviews the current industry practices for the development and delivery of retirement plan communications focusing on legally required notices, administrative information, and education campaigns. The course also covers investment advice products and discusses current communications and advice issues. Upon completion of the course, which includes the following lessons, the learner will receive CEUs for 5 contact hours:

- ▶ Legally Required and Administrative Communications
- ▶ Employee Education Needs
- ▶ Education Campaigns
- ▶ Advice Products
- ▶ Current Education and Advice Issues

CE 5: Understanding ERISA 403(b) Plans and the Final Regulations

This course reviews the major provisions of the 403(b) plans subject to Title I of ERISA and includes a review of those provisions that are the same for ERISA 403(b) and 401(k) plans. The course also discusses those ERISA 403(b) plan provisions that are different from 401(k) plans. In conclusion, it examines the requirements for implementation and the progress that industry stakeholders have made bringing ERISA 403(b) plans into compliance with the final regulations. Upon completion of the course, which includes the following lessons, the learner will receive CEUs for 5 contact hours:

- ▶ 403(b) Plan Overview
- ▶ Plan Documents and Features
- ▶ Introduction to Plan Documents and Features
- ▶ Plan Administration
- ▶ Plan Investments
- ▶ Final 403(b) Regulations Implementation Issues

CE 6: Retirement Plan Fee Reporting and Disclosure Requirements

This course reviews the requirements and impact of the recent fee reporting and disclosure regulations including the increased fee reporting on the 5500 Schedule C and the required disclosure of service provider fees to plan fiduciaries and plan participants. Upon completion of the course, which includes the following lessons, the learner will receive CEUs for 5 contact hours:

- ▶ Legal Framework for Retirement Plan Fee Disclosure
- ▶ 2009 5500 Schedule C Changes
- ▶ Provider Disclosure Regulations
- ▶ Final Disclosure Rule for Participant Directed Retirement Plans
- ▶ Implementation of the Fee Disclosure Requirements

Advanced Online Curriculum (Continued)

CE 7: Understanding Multiple Employer Plans

This course reviews the legal basis and structure of defined contribution multiple employer plans. It also covers MEP plan features, administration and compliance, noting the similarities and differences with single employer defined contribution plans. Finally, the course discusses the major issues facing MEPs in today's economic environment. Upon completion of the course, which includes the following lessons, the learner will receive CEUs for 5 contact hours:

- ▶ Introduction to Multiple Employer Plans
- ▶ Plan Design, Administration and Compliance
- ▶ Benefits of Multiple Employer Plans
- ▶ Multiple Employer Plan Issues

CE 8: Retirement Income Products in Defined Contribution Plans

This course provides an overview of the retirement income products available in today's employer sponsored defined contribution plan market and will review the issues with the acceptance of these products by both plan sponsors and participants. Upon completion of the course, which includes the following lessons, the learner will receive CEUs for 5 contact hours:

- ▶ The Need for Retirement Income Products
- ▶ Plan Design Considerations
- ▶ In-Plan Product and Service Options
- ▶ Due Diligence and Implementation Issues
- ▶ Regulatory Issues

CE 9: A Closer Look at Investments

Understanding investments, beyond the basics, can be a challenge for anyone who is not involved with trading on a daily basis. However, an understanding of how to analyze investments and the nuances of how investments are affected in the market is beneficial to a wide range of staff in the retirement industry. This course will look at investment and market performance as well as the tools used to analyze investments. While the investments covered are not unique to retirement plans, the course will look at the legal framework that pertains to investments within a plan and how investment fees are handled within a plan. Upon completion of the course, which includes the following lessons, the learner will receive CEUs for 5 contact hours:

- ▶ Legal Requirements
- ▶ Understanding Investment Performance
- ▶ Analyzing Equity/Stock Investments
- ▶ Analyzing Fixed Income Investments
- ▶ Analyzing Cash Equivalent Investments
- ▶ The Market at Work
- ▶ Key Economic Influences
- ▶ Retirement Plan Investment Expenses

Advanced Online Curriculum (Continued)

CE10 – The Retirement Plan Market and Industry Issues-2016

This course reviews the current state of the retirement plan market. It provides research data from the 2016 SPARK Marketplace Update and other sources, discusses product and service trends and reviews current regulatory and legislative activity. Upon completion of the course, which includes the following lessons, the learner will receive CEUs for 5 contact hours:

- ▶ Retirement Plan Market Overview
- ▶ Participant-Directed Plan Market
- ▶ Product Trends
- ▶ Service Trends
- ▶ Regulatory and Legislative Update

CE11 - Trends Impacting DC Plan Investment Menu Design

This course examines how investment menus are designed starting with the key legislation and regulations that shape the process, the investments that are available in today's financial markets and key trends that are impacting how fiduciaries make their investment design decisions. Upon completion of the course, which includes the following lessons, the learner will receive CEUs for 5 contact hours:

- ▶ DC Plan Investment Menu Regulatory Framework
- ▶ Plan Investment Committee
- ▶ Participant Directed Plan Investments
- ▶ Trends Impacting Investment Menu Design
- ▶ Investment Management Best Practices

CE12 – Strengthening the Employer-Sponsored Retirement Plan System

This course reviews the recent growth of retirement savings in the U.S., the types of tax-favored retirement savings vehicles available to workers and the gaps in retirement savings opportunities. This course also looks at recent trends and proposals designed to close the coverage and participant gaps and reduce retirement plan leakage in order to strengthen the employer-sponsored retirement plan system for U.S. workers. Upon completion of the course, which includes the following lessons, the learner will receive CEUs for 5 contact hours:

- ▶ Retirement Plan Coverage
- ▶ Plan Participation
- ▶ Plan Leakage
- ▶ Looking to the Future

CE13 – ERISA Fiduciary Requirements and DOL Regulations- *note, this is a 10 hour course*

This course reviews the legal foundation for fiduciary responsibility, incorporates the new DOL regulations and discusses the impact to service providers and the issues resulting from the new regulations. Upon completion of the course, which includes the following lessons, the learner will receive CEUs for 10 contact hours:

- ▶ ERISA Overview
- ▶ Fiduciary Duties and Standards of Conduct
- ▶ Fiduciary Practices
- ▶ Prohibited Transactions: Parties in Interest
- ▶ Prohibited Transactions: Conflicts of Interest and Exemptions
- ▶ Prohibited Transactions: Best Interest Contract Exemption (BICE)
- ▶ Fiduciary Liability
- ▶ Current ERISA Fiduciary Issues
- ▶ Service Provider Impact

Archived CE Courses (no longer being updated):

- CE1 – ERISA Fiduciary Issues
- CE3 - Defined Contribution Plan PPA Provisions
- CE4 - Current Retirement Plan Fee Issues