

Professional Certifications to Boost Your Payroll Career

Ready to turbo-charge your payroll career? Work toward professional certifications. They tell the world that you have a basket of key skills and industry-specific knowledge. With accreditation such as CPP after your name and on your [resume](#), you can apply for senior payroll positions and possibly increase your starting salary.

What's more, there's a good chance your boss could want to help you become certified. In a Robert Half [survey](#), 72 percent of CFOs interviewed said their company pays for some or all the costs of employees' attaining professional certifications, and 76 percent give financial support to keep staff members' qualifications up to date.

Payroll specialists, now is the time to move professional development to the front burner.

Professional certifications for the U.S. payroll industry

The American Payroll Association (APA) offers two industry-recognized [certifications](#) for those working in payroll:

- **Fundamental Payroll Certification (FPC).** The FPC is ideal for people just starting out in the payroll field. To earn the certificate, you need to pass a written test, which covers five key areas: core payroll concepts, compliance, paycheck calculation, payroll processes and systems, and accounting.
- **Certified Payroll Professional (CPP).** The CPP is an upper-level qualification. The FPC is not a prerequisite, although professionals with that certification need to have only 18 months of payroll experience before being eligible to take the CPP exam. Without the FPC, you'd need either three years of recent payroll experience or two years *plus* certain APA courses on the criteria list. The CPP exam covers the same topics as the FPC but with additional sections on audits and payroll administration and management.

How to ask your boss for professional development

You can certainly obtain the FPC and CPP on your own, but it's much easier — not to mention cheaper — when you have the support of your employer.

So how do you get your boss to invest in you? The secret is to think like a CFO.

- **Don't make it about yourself.** Instead, tell your boss the ways you will deliver additional value to the company after attaining your certification. Managers take return on investment (ROI) into consideration when deciding how to best spend budget dollars, so explain how professional certifications would lead to fewer payroll mistakes, more satisfied internal clients and greater compliance.
- **Spread new knowledge.** Team-oriented employees don't keep their expertise in a silo. Rather, they're eager to share what they've learned with coworkers, which leads to a better-informed payroll department. Explain how that change agent could be you.
- **Dare to negotiate.** Just like asking for a raise, you may not get all you want when requesting support for your professional development. But don't let that discourage you. If the boss won't pay the full exam cost, see if you can reach a compromise. If there's simply no room in the budget, consider asking for permission to study while you're on the clock.

Employers are eager to hire skilled payroll specialists, which is why they often give preference to candidates with a FPC or CPP. If you're ready for a career boost, start working toward one of these professional certifications today.

Accountemps, a [Robert Half](#) company, is the world's first and largest specialized staffing firm for temporary accounting, finance and bookkeeping professionals. Accountemps has more than 325 locations worldwide. More resources, including job search services and the [Accountemps blog](#), can be found at roberthalf.com/accountemps.