CSP® CERTIFIED SUCCESSION PLANNER™

PROGRAM GUIDE

The professional designation for advisors who guide privately held business owners through ownership and leadership transitions, built around the Succession Matrix®.

12	26.5	1	✓
self-paced online modules	CFP® CE hours	online certification exam	included with ISPA® membership

The CSP® Program

Program Overview

The Certified Succession Planner™ (CSP®) is ISPA®'s professional designation for advisors who guide privately held business owners through ownership and leadership transitions. Built around the Succession Matrix®, the program equips professionals to assess the personal, financial, business, management, and family factors that shape succession readiness and coordinate comprehensive planning engagements.

The self-paced curriculum combines required reading, on-demand video instruction, applied exercises, scored assessments, and downloadable resources and implementation tools.

Program at a Glance

- 12 self-paced online modules
- Approximately 25-30 hours to complete
- 26.5 CFP® CE hours
- Online certification exam
- Included with ISPA® membership

Who Should Enroll?

Professionals who advise privately held and family business owners, including financial and wealth advisors, CFP® professionals, CPAs, attorneys, business and family business consultants, exit planners, insurance and valuation professionals, bankers, and trust professionals.

Why Earn the CSP®?

Position yourself to capitalize on the lucrative succession planning opportunity among privately held and family-owned businesses.

- Lead broader succession engagements using a structured, multidisciplinary methodology.
- Identify planning gaps and coordinate the professionals needed to address them.
- Differentiate your practice and deepen your role as a trusted succession advisor.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the CSP® program, you'll be able to:

- Apply the Succession Matrix® to diagnose the succession-readiness of any closely held business, across all ten core factors
- Facilitate high-stakes conversations about ownership, leadership, and family roles that most advisors are trained to avoid
- Evaluate business structure, performance, and value using the frameworks succession planning requires
- Identify and develop successors using defined readiness criteria, not guesswork
- Build the governance and communication structures that let family-owned businesses make succession decisions without fracturing
- Position yourself as the advisor who leads the succession conversation, instead of the one brought in after the plan's already been decided

The 12-Module Curriculum

Each module combines focused instruction and practical application with a scored assessment.

Mi Introduction

Get oriented to the program, the Succession Matrix®, and the contributors behind the curriculum.

KEY TOPICS

- Orientation to the CSP® program
- Overview of the Succession Matrix® framework
- Family business fundamentals
- Program textbook and contributor introductions

1 Owner Motivation and Perspective

Understand the motivations and behavioral factors that drive an owner's readiness to move forward with succession planning.

KEY TOPICS

- Progression of owner motivations
- Stewardship mentality and attitude of humility
- How owner motivation shapes disposition decisions
- Building business value through the succession lens

3 Business Structuring

Compare business entity types and agreements that shape tax outcomes and transfer options.

KEY TOPICS

- Business organization and entity choice
- Pass-through structures and succession tax treatment
- Shareholder, operating, and partnership agreements
- Employment contracts and lease agreements

Mii Defining Succession Success

Learn how succession planning begins with defining success from the owner's perspective and understanding how business value influences every planning decision.

KEY TOPICS

- Business success vs. succession success
- The six approaches to business value
- Business disposition strategies
- Sale proceeds analysis
- Practical application and case exercises

2 Personal Financial Planning

Understand why personal financial independence is essential to a successful succession plan and how financial planning decisions influence business transition outcomes.

KEY TOPICS

- Financial independence
- Estate planning considerations
- Credit continuity
- Exit strategy planning
- Estate tax and business disposition analysis

4 Business Performance

Learn to evaluate financial and operational performance as a driver of succession readiness.

KEY TOPICS

- Core performance metrics
- Working capital and overcapitalization
- Measuring and sustaining business performance
- Performance's link to succession readiness

The 12-Module Curriculum (continued)

5 Strategic Planning

Build a strategic planning process that integrates succession priorities into the broader business plan.

KEY TOPICS

- Fundamental steps of strategic planning
- SWOT analysis and resource alignment
- Core values, goal-setting, and accountability
- Connecting strategic planning to succession planning

6 Leadership and Management Continuity

Identify and develop the leadership benchstrength a business needs to survive a transition.

KEY TOPICS

- Identifying key managers
- Motivating and retaining key managers
- Developing management bench strength
- Recruiting outside leadership talent

7 Management Synergy and Teamwork

Build the team alignment and communication that keep a transition plan executable.

KEY TOPICS

- Characteristics of high-performance teams
- Building trust and shared vision
- Effective communication and conflict management
- Coaching, mentoring, and team covenants

8 Successor Preparation

Apply defined criteria to identify, evaluate, and prepare successors for leadership.

KEY TOPICS

- Seven criteria for successor identification
- Successor development planning
- Preparing family member successors
- Alternatives when no family successor exists

9 Family Dynamics

Understand the family dynamics that can support or derail a succession plan.

KEY TOPICS

- Family business vs. business family
- Evolution of the family business
- Issues impacting communication and harmony
- Family business operating covenants

10 Family Governance

Give families the forums and processes they need to make succession decisions together.

KEY TOPICS

- Governance mechanisms and family business policies
- Forums for discussing the family business
- Business agreements and estate structures that prevent disputes
- The family member employee role

Program Details & Credibility

Maintaining Your Designation

Active ISPA® membership is the only ongoing requirement. No additional coursework, recertification exam, or separate maintenance fee is required.

Delivery Format

The CSP® program is fully online and self-paced, with on-demand video training, interactive lessons, quizzes, assignments, and downloadable tools and templates you can apply with clients. The certification exam is completed online and is self-administered.

Time Commitment

Most participants should plan to spend approximately 25–30 hours completing the curriculum, practical exercises, quizzes, and online certification exam.

Continuing Education

CFP® CE: The program is approved for 26.5 CFP® CE hours, allowing CFP® professionals to earn continuing education while building practical succession planning capabilities. NASBA / CPA CPE: Approval is currently in process. ISPA® will share an update when the status is confirmed.

The Expertise Behind the CSP®

The CSP® curriculum is grounded in decades of research and real-world succession planning experience helping family-owned and closely held businesses navigate transition. The program is built around the Succession Matrix®, developed through decades of practical application, and it draws on the expertise of Loyd Rawls, Jeff Faulkner, ISPA®'s Board of Directors, and other experienced succession planning professionals. You're learning a field-tested methodology, not an academic curriculum.

About ISPA®

ISPA® membership supports CSP® professionals beyond certification through the Succession Planning Assessment™ (SPA™), continuing education, practical tools and resources, webinars, and a multidisciplinary professional community.

Ready to Become a Certified Succession Planner™?

Build the knowledge and capability to guide more comprehensive succession planning engagements. Enrollment in the CSP® program is included with ISPA® membership.

Join ISPA® to enroll: ispassociation.org/courses/membership

Questions?
Contact Kelly Maheu, JD, CEO, ISPA®
kelly@ispassociation.org