



Pioneer Bank & Trust

Trust & Investments

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Credentials

In the search for trustworthy advice, consumers may sometimes look to credentials and designations for clues to an advisor's expertise. To be a certified financial planner (CFP) or chartered financial consultant (ChFC) one must have extensive training and experience, for example. Some of the newer designations are oriented toward helping retirees manage their money.

The *retirement income certified professional (RICP)* designation is awarded by the American College of Financial Planning in Bryn Mawr, PA. Three college-level courses are required, taking from 60 to 80 hours each to complete. Continuing education is required as well.

A *certified retirement counselor (CRC)* has completed four online courses offered by the International Foundation for Retirement Education. The focus is on retirement income planning, long-term care planning and tax-efficient withdrawal strategies.

The *retirement management analyst (RMA)* designation may be obtained via a one-week "boot camp" at Texas Tech University or a five-week online course at Boston University. This program requires 120 hours of study.

A comprehensive guide and listing of professional designations in the financial services industry is maintained by the Financial Industry Regulatory Authority (FINRA) called "Understanding Investment Professional Designations." The Web address is <http://apps.finra.org/DataDirectory/1/prodesignations.aspx>. You may enter a designation or browse a list of them. Links are supplied to provide the background on each one.

Investors should also be aware that the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) has issued a bulletin advising investors on the use of titles and professional designations by financial professionals. Two key points:

- Financial professional titles are not endorsed by the SEC. A title is not the same thing as a license, though it might sound similar to the layman. A license affords certain legal protections to the consumers, while a professional designation or title does not.
- Rather than rely on a nice-sounding professional title, investors should investigate what the title means, what is needed to obtain the title, and who awards it. According to the SEC, "such titles are generally marketing tools, and are not granted by a regulator."

When looking for portfolio management help, it is well to remember that in the dictionary, "investigate" comes before "investment."

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