

## PM WORLD TODAY – FEATURED – JUNE 2009

## The New Federal Project Management Credential

By **Michael O'Brochta, PMP**

**Introduction**

An important movement has begun within the U.S. federal government; for the first time ever civilian employees have the opportunity to earn a certification in project and program management that was created specifically for them. This new certification credential, the Federal Acquisition Certification in Program and Project Management (FAC-P/PM) has been put in place by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) because according to the April 25, 2007 OMB memorandum for Chief Acquisition Officers from the Administrator of the Office of Federal Procurement Policy "Well-trained and experienced program and project managers are critical to the acquisition process and the successful accomplishment of mission goals." This focus on meeting mission goals through the efforts of program and project managers by means of an acquisition process underpins the FAC-P/PM certification. It spotlights the connection between skilled program and project managers and the effectiveness of the acquisition process within their organization. Now civilian federal government employees have an opportunity to earn not only the industry-accepted Project Management Professional (PMP) credential from the Project Management Institute (PMI) but also a FAC-P/PM credential that includes elements of particular relevance to them.

**Some History**

Project management has been alive and well in the federal workforce in the United States for a long time. In fact, some of the earliest adopters of the discipline of project management worked on American government projects; in the early 1960's the Program Evaluation and Review Technique (PERT) for assessing project performance was developed by Booz-Allen & Hamilton as part of the U.S. Navy's Polaris missile program. More recently, as the PMI experienced phenomenal growth during the past decade, an increasing number of civilian federal employees joined that organization and earned a PMP certification; according to PMI's Manager of Government Relations Valerie Carter there are now several thousand federal government employees who hold the certifications from PMI.

As a result of OMB's Office of Federal Procurement Policy Letter 05-01 dated April 15, 2005 the Federal Acquisition Institute (FAI) formed a cross-functional working group and developed recommendations for the "establishment of certification programs for program and project managers..." That policy letter, which provides a bit of insight into the reasons for establishing a special government certification, states that the action is being taken to build on "previous efforts to improve the development of the acquisition workforce" by addressing the broadened definition of acquisition contained in the Services Acquisition Reform Act of 2003 (SARA, P.L. 108-136); for the first time the term acquisition now includes "program and

project managers.” This is a significant expansion. It means that civilian federal government program and project managers are to now be subject to and benefit from actions taken to mature the acquisition workforce.

It is interesting to note that the creation of this new FAC-P/PM certification was done at a time when the U.S. government had the option of adopting the already established credentials from PMI. The fact that they weren’t adopted raises the question of why not. The PMP credential is certainly a well-recognized and respected credential for project managers, and the more recent creation by PMI of the Program Management Professional (PgMP) certification credential is on a similar path. So why not just adopt them? The answer likely falls into the “we are special” category. By that, it is meant that to an important extent, government program and project management is different from what is represented by the PMP and PgMP credentials.

This difference can be identified through a comparison of the competency areas that are required for FAC-P/PM with the knowledge areas for the PMP and PgMP. A couple of very important competencies needed to succeed in the civilian federal government environment are not addressed by the credentials from PMI. Most notable are leadership, systems engineering, and acquisition. The federal civilian program and project managers practice their disciplines mindful of the well-established reliance on acquisition processes and regulations, they perform their roles and responsibilities within organizations with legacies of leadership, and they are encouraged/required to address the entire lifecycle of the program or project from a systems perspective. It is not to say that these competencies are not beneficial for the non-government program or project, but it is to say that they are not well represented within the PMI certification credentials. As a point of information it is worth noting that the PMP and CAPM (Certified Associate in Project Management) credentials from PMI are recognized and do count toward a fraction of the requirements to earn the FAC-P/PM credential.

### **Applicability**

The FAC-P/PM program applies to all executive agencies within the US federal government, except those subject to the Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act (DAWIA, 10 U.S.C. §§ 1741-46); it is recognized and accepted by, at a minimum, all U.S. civilian executive branch agencies. This certification is not mandatory for all U.S. program and project managers; however at a minimum, program and project managers assigned to programs considered major acquisitions must be FAC-P/PM certified at the Senior level unless a waiver is granted by the appropriate agency official. The targeted completion date for this certification is one year from the date of assignment to the program or project. Major acquisitions are defined in OMB Circular A-11, Part 7, Exhibit 300.

The Federal Acquisition Institute (FAI) has the responsibility for oversight for the FAC-P/PM program. As such they are responsible for developing and reviewing FAC-P/PM competency and training standards, reviewing the FAC-P/PM implementation programs within the various government agencies, and developing training blueprints for agencies, vendors, or other

organizations to use to assess their courses against the FAC-P/PM standards. FAI also has responsibility for developing and making available to government employees training courses that specifically satisfy one of the five FAC-P/PM competency areas, the government specific competency area. Government agencies are responsible for the training that satisfies the other four competency areas.

## The Certification

FAC-P/PM certification is based on attaining competencies and experience associated with each of three levels and ensuring 80 hours of continuous learning is achieved every two years. There are three levels of certification; Entry, Mid, and Senior. Certification at a lower level is not a prerequisite for a higher level of certification. An applicant can satisfy the competency requirements through successful completion of suggested training, completion of comparable education or certification programs, or demonstration of knowledge, skills, and abilities.

At the FAC-P/PM Entry level the project manager should have: knowledge and skills to perform as a project team member, the ability to manage low-risk and relatively simple projects or to manage more complex projects under direct supervision of a more experienced manager, an overall understanding of project management practices including performance-based acquisition, a recognition of an agency's requirements development processes, the ability to define and construct various project documents, under supervision, and an understanding of and involvement in the definition, initiation, conceptualization or design of project requirements. They should possess at least one year of project management experience within the last five years; project management experience includes experience constructing a work breakdown structure; preparing project analysis documents; tailoring acquisition documents to ensure that quality, effective, efficient systems or products are delivered; analyzing and/or developing requirements; monitoring performance; assisting with quality assurance; and budget development. A minimum of 112 hours of training in specific subjects is required.

At the FAC-P/PM Mid level the project/program manager should have: knowledge and skills to manage projects or program segments of low to moderate risks with little or no supervision, the ability to apply management processes, including requirements development processes and performance-based acquisition principles, to support the agency's mission to develop an acquisition program baseline from schedule requirements, plan technology developments and demonstrations and apply agency policy on interoperability, the ability to identify and track actions to initiate an acquisition program or project using cost/benefit analysis, the ability to understand and apply the process to prepare information for a baseline review, and can assist in development of Total Ownership Cost (TOC) estimates, and the ability to manage projects as well as program segments and distinguish between program and project work. They should possess at least two years of program or project management experience within the last five years that includes experience at the entry level as well as experience performing market research, developing documents for risk and opportunity management, developing and

applying technical processes and technical management processes, performing or participating in source selection, preparing acquisition strategies, managing performance based service agreements, developing and managing a project budget, writing a business case, and strategic planning. A minimum of 88 hours of training in specific subjects is required.

At the FAC-P/PM Senior level the program manager should have: knowledge and skills to manage moderate to high-risk programs or projects that require significant acquisition investment and agency knowledge and experience, the ability to manage and evaluate a program and create an environment for program success, the ability to manage the requirements development process, overseeing junior-level team members in creation, development, and implementation, the expert ability to use, manage, and evaluate management processes, including performance-based management techniques, and the expert ability to manage and evaluate the use of earned value management as it relates to acquisition investments. They should possess at least four years of program and project management experience on federal projects and/or programs, including managing and evaluating agency acquisition investment performance, developing and managing a program budget, building and presenting a successful business case, reporting program results, strategic planning, and high-level communication with internal and external stakeholders. A minimum of 112 hours of training in specific subjects is required.

## Conclusion

Civilian federal agencies in the United States are involved in comparing their existing project and project management competencies and training to the FAC-P/PM standards, they are involved with implementing FAC-P/PM certification programs within their own organizations, and they are awarding FAC-P/PM certifications to their employees. The training vendors are doing likewise for their course offerings. FAI is demonstrating leadership in carrying out their role of oversight, they are serving as a vocal FAC-P/PM advocate, they are offering guidance to those involved with FAC-P/PM implementation, and they are offering FAC-P/PM Capstone Government Specific training classes government-wide.

It is worth noting that FAC-P/PM seems to be well aligned with important aspects of the recently enacted American Reinvestment and Recovery Act. Section 6 of the February 18, 2009 Memorandum For The Heads of Departments and Agencies titled “Initial Implementing Guidance for the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009” from OMB Director Peter Orszag requires “heightened management attention on acquisition” in order to “apply sufficient and adequately trained workforce to responsibly plan, evaluate, award, and monitor contracts; ensure an adequate number of qualified government personnel are available to perform inherently governmental functions during the acquisition life-cycle; and provide appropriate agency oversight at critical decision points.”

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**Michael (Mike) O'Brochta**, who has managed hundreds of projects during the past thirty years, is also an experienced line manager, author, lecturer, trainer and consultant. He holds a master's degree in project management, a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering, and is certified as a PMP®. As Zozer Inc. President, he is helping organizations raise their level of project management performance. As senior project manager at the CIA, he led the project management and systems engineering training and certification program to mature practices agency-wide. Mr. O'Brochta's other current work includes the development of standards and courseware for the new Federal Acquisition Certification for Program and Project Managers, project management office formation and management, the development of project management life cycle methodologies, project management maturity assessments, project management occupation development, and the creation and delivery of successful project management classes and workshops for participants at various knowledge levels. He serves at the PMI corporate level on the Community Development Management Advisory Group and at the chapter level where he built and led the international PMIWDC Chapter-to-Chapter program. Mr. O'Brochta has written and presented papers at every PMI North American Global Congress during the past decade as well as at many international, and regional conferences. His recent presentations at PMI conferences in Denver and Sao Paulo drew the largest audiences at those conferences. Topics that he is currently passionate about include how to get executives to act for project success and great project managers. Since his recent climb of another of the world's seven summits, he has been exploring the relationship between project management and mountain climbing. Mike can be reached at [mobrochta@zozerinc.com](mailto:mobrochta@zozerinc.com)