

How To Advance FAC-P/PM In Any Government Organization

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Introduction

Federal civilian government organizations, which are looking to advance their Federal Acquisition Certification for Program and Project Managers (FAC-P/PM) implementation programs, can benefit from the body of knowledge that has grown since the certification was created. Experiences by the early adopters of the program and FAC-P/PM experts can be leveraged to advantage¹. Specific implementation methods have been found to efficiently produce lasting results. This paper draws from the growing body of knowledge and expertise to outline an approach that can be tailored by federal leaders and those associated with FAC-P/PM to advance their Agency's FAC-P/PM implementation programs.

Background

Since the creation of the Federal Acquisition Certification for Program and Project Managers (FAC-P/PM) in 2007 federal civilian government organizations have been working to establish compliant programs and certify their project managers. Progress has been sporadic. Some organizations are finding that they have limited ability to deal with the level of complexity and broad latitude they have been given to design and implement programs compliant with the established competency, training, and experience requirements. They understand the significant impact on their workforce and mission of their FAC-P/PM implementation decisions, are looking to balance the benefits available with the costs and impacts, and are looking for measures of the benefits. They recognize the importance of questions such as, "Who gets certified? What are the certification criteria? What is the certification process? How is training and experience balanced? How does this fit with what we are doing now? What are others doing? How is the implementation working?" They are finding a limited amount of implementation guidance and information readily available to help with their important implementation decisions.

FAC-P/PM is a three level competency-based project and program management certification for federal government civilian employees. It includes skills specific to the government environment that are not well represented by industry or commercial certifications. The Office of Federal Procurement Policy (OFPP) within the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) controls the program, the Federal Acquisition Institute (FAI) oversees the program, and the individual agencies are responsible for exercising

¹ The February 2011 study report titled "*Federal Project Management: Understanding FAC-P/PM and Competency*" is available from the American Society for the Advancement of Project Management at: http://www.asapm.org/asapmag/m_news.asp#FAC

the wide latitude they have been given to develop and implement compliant FAC-P/PM programs².

Within the individual agencies, the Chief Acquisition Officer (CAO), in consultation with appropriate agency officials, is responsible for developing workforce policies that apply the FAC-P/PM requirements as necessary to ensure agency program and project managers have essential program and project management competencies³. Essential agency responsibilities for FAC-P/PM program administration include identifying and assessing the program and project management acquisition workforce, developing this workforce in accordance with the FAC-P/PM standards, issuing FAC-P/PM certifications, and monitoring the continuous learning achievement.

Approach

Experience with FAC-P/PM implementation efforts by the early adopters has highlighted several key implementation phases to be accomplished if lasting results are to efficiently be produced. This experience has shown the value of assigning a FAC-P/PM implementation project manager for the organization with the requisite responsibility and authority to progress through these phases, and managing these FAC-P/PM implementation phases as a project by following a lifecycle framework. The FAC-P/PM project manager would progress through the implementation phases including discovery of key requirements and capabilities, design of certification standards and processes, development and acquisition of core program materials, deployment of program across the workforce and organization, and sustainment of the program through results measurement and continuous improvement.



Experience with FAC-P/PM implementation efforts by early adopters has also shown that it is advantageous, regardless of the status of an organization's FAC-P/PM implementation efforts, to pause periodically and reexamine. Given the rapidly advancing state of FAC-P/PM knowledge and experience this reexamination can be expected to yield beneficial insights and observations about adjustments to the organization's FAC-P/PM implementation program. Cycling through a version of the implementation lifecycle framework at most any point in time can be a useful approach to conduct a reexamination.

² Detailed information about FAC-P/PM, including the required competencies, can be found on the Federal Acquisition Institute (FAI) website at: www.fai.gov/certification/management.asp

³ The OBM Policy memo establishing FAC-P/PM and describing the Agency responsibilities may be found at: http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/procurement/workforce/fed_acq_cert_042507.pdf

Phase 1: Discover

Identify and assign a FAC-P/PM implementation project manager. Understand what FAC-P/PM program requirements and options exist, how other agencies are implementing FAC-P/PM, and what internal and external expertise exists to implement a FAC-P/PM program. Identify the internally and externally available FAC-P/PM compliant training; including training from other government agencies. Engage with other organizations involved with FAC-P/PM implementations and seek out FAC-P/PM communities of practice. Identify the target population of project and program managers within the organization and their project and program management related needs. Establish and document a baseline.

Phase 2: Design

Assemble a qualified core FAC-P/PM implementation team; get expert help where needed. Design a compliant FAC-P/PM program that meets the identified needs. Make key decisions about the scope and duration of the program, and about how each of the three certification levels will be addressed. Make key decisions about the continuum that exists between training-centric programs and workforce competency-performance development programs. Consider the costs versus benefits for the short term and the long term, and how much investment can be made now to produce meaningful results later. Establish relationships with key stakeholders.

Consider that some FAC-P/PM implementation programs are targeted, at least initially, at compliance; these types of programs are focused on the minimum effort to comply with established FAC-P/PM requirements. Understand that some FAC-P/PM implementation programs are targeted at more than compliance, to include current mission needs; these types of programs are focused on identifying the project/program management workforce and equipping them with the full set of competencies to meet current mission needs. Consider that some FAC-P/PM implementation programs are targeted at more than compliance or current mission needs, to include long-term strategic needs; these types of programs are focused on adjusting project/program practices and policies to leverage the strength of a workforce with higher levels of project/program management competence.

Establish and document a project plan that includes tasks, milestones, deliverables, risks, resources, responsibilities, and authority. Establish a communications plan. Establish performance metrics against which the FAC-P/PM implementation will be measured.

Phase 3: Develop

Create the core materials that will become the program. Develop organization policies and procedures for FAC-P/PM implementation. Determine who gets certified, what the certification criteria are, and what the certification process is. Establish and charter review panels and boards as needed. Develop competency assessments to identify employee needs and gaps, and to confirm satisfaction of competency requirements. Develop materials for training and competency development; use and integrate existing materials from related programs. Insure

materials meet FAC-P/PM competency and organization-specific requirements. Follow project plan. Maintain relationships with key stakeholders and follow communications plan. Baseline the materials.

Phase 4: Deploy

Develop and follow plans and schedules to deploy FAC-P/PM throughout the organization. Consider volume and pace of deployment. Consider deployment sequencing by FAC-P/PM level, by organizational unit, or by project prioritization. Consider deployment at headquarters as well as field and remote organizations. Consider how deployment will be integrated into existing workforce programs and into learning management systems. Collect and evaluate feedback regarding deployment and previously baselined materials. Maintain relationships with key stakeholders and follow communications plan. Collect and evaluate measures of FAC-P/PM performance. Share program performance measures with other organizations.

Phase 5: Sustain

Perform periodic assessments of the program. Adjust program and materials based on collected feedback and FAC-P/PM performance measures. Size the program to match the long-term steady-state demand. Adapt the program to changing needs of the organization. Share program materials with other organizations; participate in FAC-P/PM communities of practice.

Conclusion

The goal established by OMB for FAC-P/PM is “well-trained and experienced program and project managers.” Organizations that are finding they have limited ability to deal with the level of complexity and broad latitude they have been given to design and implement compliant FAC-P/PM programs can benefit by leveraging the experiences of FAC-P/PM experts and early adopters.

Acknowledgements

This FAC-P/PM study referenced in this paper, which was conducted by Tim Jaques, Brent Hansen, Morgan Henrie, and the author of this paper, benefited enormously from their substantial levels of project management and government expertise.

The American Society for the Advancement of Project Management (asapm) and IBM Center for the Business of Government made notable commitments to advancing project management in the civilian federal government by sponsoring the referenced FAC-P/PM study. This study was also supported with an important survey conducted with the Washington DC Chapter of the Project Management Institute (PMI).