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The Program Manager's PMP

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The process for earning the new Program Management Professional (PgMP) credential is much more involved than the PMP. Here is a look at the differences between the two, and the criteria to earn each of them — from one of the 100 or so people who has earned both.

In the fall of 2007, the Project Management Institute (PMI) [introduced a new credential](#), the Program Management Professional (PgMP), to certify skills in the discipline of program management. The new credential was the result of PMI identifying key business drivers and acknowledging the next stage in the development and maturation of the discipline. Since the PgMP is new to the industry — there are approximately 100 PgMP-certified professionals worldwide (compared to more than 270,000 PMPs) — a comparison with the Project Management Professional (PMP) credential will help program managers to understand whether they should consider getting their PgMP.

The two business drivers behind the new certification provide interesting context for program managers to consider. For one, while program management had its origins in the 1950s with the facilitation of large weapons systems development programs undertaken by the U.S. Department of Defense, it is still largely considered to be a nascent discipline, particularly in the commercial sector. As program management has migrated beyond the government sector, professionals in virtually every industry have identified its value as an approach to managing large, ongoing initiatives.

Secondly, there was an increasing demand for guidance from PMI's members inquiring about career and professional progression beyond the PMP certification. The combined demand of the marketplace and members essentially brought about the creation of the PgMP.

Now, let's walk through the differences between the PMP and the PgMP and the criteria to earn each of them.

Earning the PMP Credential

To those of us in the business of managing projects, PMP certification has almost become a right of passage. Its widespread recognition as a professional standard has made it essential for anyone looking to forge ahead in project management and business as a whole. Although not exclusively designed for relatively inexperienced project managers, the qualifications make it particularly attractive and useful for those at the relative beginning of their career. To be eligible, you must have completed 35 hours of project management education and have a minimum of three years of experience managing projects — 4,500 hours of which must be spent leading and directing project tasks, and not simply being a member of a project team.

The four-hour, 200-multiple-choice-question exam is difficult and comprehensive, covering the full

range of project management areas of expertise, including the five project management processes and nine knowledge areas in PMI's *A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK Guide)* and the area of professional responsibility (e.g., ethics). The certification itself is an excellent way to demonstrate your ability to manage the triple constraint and, perhaps more importantly, to demonstrate your commitment to project success and professionalism.

Those professionals, regardless of industry, who have found themselves leading projects, communicating with and managing stakeholders, developing project schedules and managing budgets should seek their PMP certification without hesitation.

The PgMP Challenge

Program management focuses on achieving successful results by paying attention to the overall business benefits through an emphasis on benefits management. These benefits are realized by keeping a sharp eye on the many complex interdependencies that exist between component projects, and not necessarily on any one particular project. Note the distinction here. Project management concerns itself with single projects, while program management lives almost exclusively in the plural.

If the qualifications for earning PMP certification lend themselves to project managers with three or more years of experience, without question, the PgMP skews to the more experienced professional. To qualify, those with a bachelor's degree or global equivalent must have at least eight years of experience, which include four years managing projects and four years managing programs.

Although not a hard and fast rule, PMI deems one year of experience as 1,500 hours of actual work in a 12-month period. Therefore, the required eight years translates into 12,000 hours of experience (8 years x 1,500 hours).

Along with the vast documentation required to prove you've achieved 12,000 hours of experience, you must submit eight, 200-word experience summary statements. These will cover your proficiency in such areas as:

- Coordinating the management of specific projects
- Spanning functions
- Establishing credibility and rapport with stakeholders
- Vetting and designating project managers
- Bringing project scope and organizational objectives into alignment
- Controlling program scope
- Integrating multiple projects
- Facilitating cross-cultural communications and personnel conflict.

Still with me? The next hurdle is the 170-multiple-choice-question examination, which is based on the PMI Program Management Professional Examination Specification and the Program Management Standard. The questions emphasize planning, execution and controlling, and deal with program definition, initiation and close out as well. In contrast to the scoring of the PMP exam, each question in the PgMP exam is weighted according to degree of difficulty, with more difficult questions yielding a higher score when answered correctly. To earn a passing grade, you must have a weighted score of 325, though how each question is weighted is not disclosed.

Once you've officially passed the written exam, the colleague review process will begin. Twelve colleagues of your choosing will receive a 360-degree assessment to complete on your professional experience and achievement. You must provide professional contacts of one supervisor, four peers, four direct reports and three professional references. So unfortunately, there's no packing the jury with softball buddies.

The PgMP Degree of Difficulty

As you can see, the majority of this article has been spent on the PgMP. This isn't because I'm proudly favoring my new credential, but because the process is simply much more involved. The managing of programs — again, large, ongoing initiatives — is in many ways the next logical step in the career of a project manager. Therefore, project managers, certified or otherwise, who have found their responsibilities increasing and their projects blending into programs should take the plunge and seek out this rigorous certification. PgMP certification, although still somewhat new in the business world, denotes skills in communication, business and management and, above all else, a unique ability to recognize similarities in disparate projects and ensure that each facet of a program is linked to your organization's overall objectives.

In addition to detailing the requirements and differences between the two certifications, I can tell you from firsthand experience that neither is easy to obtain. But, both have proven to be endlessly valuable both personally and professionally.

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