

Integrated Team Learning Helps ACC Acquisition Management and Integration Center Get the Job Done Right for Air Combat Command



Background

Headquartered at the Langley Air Force Base in Virginia, the U.S. Air Force Air Combat Command Acquisition Management and Integration Center (ACC AMIC) provides strategic acquisition facilitation, integration and management for Air Combat Command, U.S. government agencies and allies through integrated program management and contracting support that produce mission-focused solutions while meeting contingency challenges.



of contract and project management knowledge, experience and skills.

ACC AMIC leadership wanted to implement on-going learning, enable knowledge transfer and ensure team members spoke the same language as contracting professionals throughout the acquisition life cycle — from pre-award requirements gathering, to quality assurance, through contract closeout. Additionally they wanted project and contract managers to move beyond mastery of technical skills to a broader, more strategic understanding of each other's roles.

“We needed our managers to move beyond technical skills to an understanding of the ‘business’ of acquisitions, including the appropriate terms, processes and laws,” said Ernest Sanchez, Chief Plans & Programs Division, ACC AMIC.

“We needed our managers to move beyond technical skills to an understanding of the ‘business’ of acquisitions, including the appropriate terms, processes and laws.”

Ernest Sanchez,
Chief Plans & Programs Division, ACC AMIC

basics of federal contracting and project management to more advanced topics such as contract negotiations and project scheduling and cost control. Many of the courses have been customized to be ACC AMIC specific and every effort is made to use a consistent group of instructors.

In addition to classroom-based learning, ACC AMIC has taken additional steps to help ensure on-going program success, including:

- Adopting the Project Management Institute (PMI®) *Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK®)* as the basis for its methodologies and vocabulary
- Providing on-the-job coaching
- Delivering topic specific workshops
- Running approximately one classroom-based course bi-monthly
- Enforcing a general rule that people need to initially complete key basic courses

The Challenge

In the late-1990s, ACC AMIC wanted to improve the capabilities of its acquisition team and break down perceived silos between various technical areas. As an initial effort, they wanted to focus on training civilian and military technical experts in contract management and project management. The learning program needed to be appropriate for military personnel, who rotate through the team approximately every 24-36 months. It also needed to address the reality that technical military team members arrive with varying levels

The Solution

For more than ten years, ACC AMIC has worked with ESI International to provide a dual track, project management and contract management certificate program. Over a two-year period individuals earn either a Master's Certificate in Project Management or a Master's Certificate in Government Contracting, both from The George Washington University.

To obtain a certificate, participants take five courses from their chosen course of study plus two electives from the other course of study. Course subjects span the



“Strategic thinking is increasingly important today as the government becomes more of a strategic, rather than a tactical, buyer. We are very keen on improving our business acumen when it comes to analyzing, documenting and communicating requirements for more strategic acquisition capabilities.”

Ernest Sanchez, Chief Plans & Programs Division, ACC AMIC

- Working to create camaraderie by encouraging people to work toward their certificates in groups
- Promoting and supporting an aggressive, two-year certificate completion time frame

While most courses are available on-site at ACC AMIC, team members also occasionally have the option of attending open enrollment classes. “We’ve seen real value in sending individuals to off-site courses,” said Sanchez. “Staff can meet people from different industries and backgrounds, hear what others are experiencing and bring back best practices to share with everyone.”

Recently, having achieved a strong project management culture, ACC AMIC has put aside the project management learning to explore new opportunities to build skills and knowledge and improve performance. They continue to offer contract management courses.

Results

The program has delivered significant positive results for ACC AMIC. Perhaps most impressive is a project success rate of near 100 percent. This compares to a 2009 Standish Group International study showing only 32 percent of all projects

succeed in delivering on-time and on-budget.

The classroom based learning, certificate programs and other efforts have broken through the silo mentality by helping team members understand each other’s roles and ensuring a clear and consistent approach to ACC AMIC business processes. Additionally, most program participants have earned either a Master’s Certificate in Government Contract Management or a Master’s Certificate in Project Management.

By applying project management principles as a daily practice, ACC-AMIC demonstrates a progressive approach to acquisitions that helps the teams deal with the inevitable challenges of change. According to Sanchez, developing requirements and understanding the right business needs at initiation of an acquisition project is the key to ACC AMIC’s record of success.

“Our group is seen as being pretty progressive when it comes to developing on-target requirements and then building acquisition teams with the right mix of people and skill sets,” said

Sanchez. “I can’t remember a time when we couldn’t get a project done. Even when missions change, we have the skills and knowledge to re-baseline without missing a beat.”

Next Steps

In addition to continuing to offer the certificate paths as needed, ACC AMIC is working on identifying additional learning areas that will help enhance team skills and knowledge particularly around those related to business analysis and strategic business skills. Sanchez and others have been attending and evaluating open enrollment courses in these areas as well as in program and portfolio management.

“Strategic thinking is increasingly important today as the government becomes more of a strategic, rather than a tactical, buyer,” said Sanchez. “We are very keen on improving our business acumen when it comes to analyzing, documenting and communicating requirements for more strategic acquisition capabilities.”



For more information about ESI International, call **+1 (877) 766-3337** or **+1 (703) 558-4445** or visit **www.esi-intl.com**.

PMBOK® is a registered trademark of the Project Management Institute, Inc.

PMI® is a service mark and trademark of the Project Management Institute, Inc., and is registered in the United States and other nations.