

PMCDP Frequently Asked Questions

(Updated 9/2012)

Certification Review Board (CRB) Processes for Grading Past Performance

Question: *Does the Certification Review Board (CRB or the Board) consider past performance when determining whether to grant or deny Federal Project Director (FPD) certification?*

Answer: Yes—the Board does consider past performance. An FPD’s performance on his/her project(s) is one indicator of his/her ability to successfully manage future projects, especially at Levels III and IV which tend to be more complicated and have a higher level of risk.

Question: *If I take over a failing project, does that automatically mean that my performance will be judged as inadequate?*

Answer: No—the Board is interested in a candidate’s performance to determine if he/she made a positive impact on the project as well as lessons learned. Often, some of the best candidates are FPDs that took over a troubled project and made it better. Be sure in your certification package to discuss what you did on a project and how the challenges you faced made you a stronger FPD.

Question: *Does the Board give credit for project management experience on work accomplished prior to the issuance of DOE O 413.3B?*

Answer: Yes—the Board will credit documented experience accomplished prior to DOE O 413.3B, *Program and Project Management for the Acquisition of Capital Assets*, as long as the work is comparable. Candidates must draw parallels with the Critical Decision process, demonstrate experience managing capital asset projects, and discuss how their roles and responsibilities are similar to those of an FPD as defined by DOE Order 413.3B.

Question: *Does the Board give credit for Deputy FPD experience?*

Answer: Yes—please see PMCDP’s Certification and Equivalency Guidelines (CEG) for more information. <http://energy.gov/management/downloads/certification-and-equivalency-guidelines>

Question: *Why does the Board check references for Level III and IV candidates?*

Answer: Reference checks generate important feedback to the Board on the FPD candidate’s experience and leadership ability from individuals who have first-hand knowledge of the candidate.

Question: *Why doesn’t operations experience count towards the experience requirements for certification?*

Answer: Operations are not capital asset projects with a defined scope, schedule and cost, nor are they subject to DOE Order 413.3B.

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Question: Does the CRB accept position descriptions as evidence of prior work experience?

Answer: No—position descriptions do not always indicate the FPD’s project management duties and responsibilities; therefore, the CRB does not accept them as evidence of work experience. Project documentation, such as the Project Execution Plan or Charter, is accepted – please see the PMCDP’s CEG for more information.

Question: My title is not "project director", but I function as one on my project. How can I best explain this in my PMCDP profile?

Answer: You should state your current title and provide a description that demonstrates how your roles and responsibilities are commensurate with the core functions of an FPD, as identified by DOE O 413.3B.

Question: Does the CRB consider acquisition experience important for incumbent and perspective federal project directors (FPDs)?

Answer: Yes—experience in the acquisition process is critical to project success. Throughout the execution of the contract, the FPD serves as a “steward” for the government and must be familiar with contract terms and conditions to ensure the work performed is appropriate and consistent with contractual requirements. Failure to do so increases project risk, especially if requirements are unclear or are not followed properly. This could also result in potential cost and schedule overruns, as well as disputed labor claims should work commence that is not consistent with contractual requirements.

Question: What types of “soft skills” does the Board consider for Level IV FPD applicants?

Answer: The Board considers a FPD’s leadership and communication skills key to driving project success. Successful Level IV candidates must be able to demonstrate the ability to lead complex project teams, communicate effectively, both vertically and horizontally, and champion the successful completion of projects.

Question: What is the significance of the Project Assessment Reporting System (PARS) II in relation to certification?

Because the PARS II database serves as the central repository for project data across the Department, senior DOE leadership relies heavily on the timely updating of information in this database. It is the FPD’s responsibility to regularly update PARS II so that real-time project assessment and forecast data are available to DOE leadership. Failure to provide reliable and consistent information suggests the FPD is not communicating properly and not fulfilling the DOE O 413.3 B requirement to provide monthly project updates. The PARS II data is also used to verify a FPD’s project performance. Both project performance and PARS II reporting will be considered by the Board when evaluating Level III and IV certification candidates.

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PMCDP Certification Process

Question: *Who reviews the certification packages before they are presented to the Board?*

Answer: Certification packages are reviewed by independent reviewers who have extensive project management experience and are knowledgeable in FPD certification requirements. Prior to independent review, candidate packages are reviewed by the sponsoring Program Office.

Question: *What do Program Points of Contact do as part of the certification process?*

Answer: The PMCDP Program Point of Contact (POC) is responsible for presenting qualified candidates to the Board and supporting candidates throughout the certification process.

Question: *Is there any way to speed up the certification process?*

Answer: When preparing their packages, candidates should work with their designated PMCDP Program POC and use the CEG to craft short, accurate responses.

Question: *Is there a recertification process for Federal Project Directors (FPDs) who have been decertified?*

Answer: Yes—the CRB has established guidelines for recertification; however, it is important to note that recertification is not guaranteed and is completely up to the Board’s discretion. All requests for recertification will be considered by the CRB only after the condition(s) resulting in the decertification action have been addressed and adequate controls are put in place to prevent recurrence.

Question: *I have a scheduled interview with the Board in the coming days. Is there any information I can reference to better prepare myself for what to expect during the interview?*

Answer: The CRB Interview Guidance document provides specific details on the interview format, and includes suggestions for how to best prepare yourself for the questions the Board will ask you. The document is available on the PMCDP website: <http://energy.gov/management/downloads/crb-interview-guidance>

Question: *I was certified before the electronic profile in the Employee Self Service (ESS) System was implemented. When coming forward for a higher level of certification, do I have to enter the data from my old paper profile into ESS for the levels to which I was already certified?*

Answer: No—you only have to enter into ESS the information for the current level to which you are requesting certification. Documentation of experience claimed for this higher level of certification must also be provided.

Question: *Is it mandatory that candidates for Level III and Level IV certification be interviewed prior to being granted certification at those levels?*

Answer: It is at the discretion of the CRB whether a candidate will be interviewed or not. Should the Board want to interview a candidate, the candidate is notified and will be given the date and time of the interview. The interview may be conducted via conference call or in person.

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Question: *I submitted my certification package. How do I find out the results of my profile review and certification consideration?*

Answer: For initial independent reviews conducted by the PMCDP, requests for additional and/or clarifying information are coordinated through the Program Office, typically their project management office/group. Once the certification candidate has been considered, the CRB will notify the program office of the results. You will not hear directly from the CRB, the Office of Acquisition and Project Management (APM), or from a support contractor. Program Offices notify their certification candidates of CRB decisions according to internal protocol.

PMCDP Training and Curriculum Requirements

Question: *Why can't the PMCDP freeze certification requirements for candidates already in the program?*

Answer: Because the goal of the PMCDP is to develop qualified and capable FPDs, new requirements may be added when the Department institutes new priorities and/or identifies weaknesses and gaps in its execution of projects. While new requirements are not normally retroactive, they do affect candidates pursuing new or higher certification levels.

Question: *Does the PMCDP accept alternative training to satisfy any of the PMCDP's competency requirements?*

Answer: Training from non-PMCDP sources may be accepted. For each applicable competency, the candidate must demonstrate that the alternative course covers a majority of the topics taught in the PMCDP course.

Question: *I am a headquarters employee who wants an FPD Certification. Why aren't there more PMCDP course deliveries offered in D.C. and Germantown?*

Answer: The PMCDP is responsible for certifying capital asset project managers, almost all of whom are located in the field. As a result, getting classes to the field is the highest priority for the PMCDP. Annually, the PMCDP offers some course deliveries at the D.C. and Germantown locations to accommodate headquarters personnel, and to encourage FPDs in the field to visit headquarters.

Question: *Where can I locate new PMCDP curriculum and certification requirements?*

Answer: The CRB's policy decisions are published on the PMCDP website at <http://energy.gov/management/crb-policy-flashes>. Your Program's designated PMCDP POC is the best source of information regarding PMCDP policy and certification requirements. To locate your POC, please review the PMCDP POC list which is located on the PMCDP website: <http://energy.gov/management/downloads/pmcdp-program-points-contact-pocs>.

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Question: *I have taken contracting officer's representative (COR) training but it is greater than ten years old. Will this training alone suffice to fulfill the Level I competency for a working level knowledge of the role of a COR?*

Answer: The CRB requires COR training to be no more than five years old. You may, however, fulfill the competency by demonstrating equivalent training (within the last five years) and/or relevant experience.

Question: *If I attend a training course or seminar with subject matter relevant to the PMCDP curriculum, may I be permitted to complete a PMCDP course exam so that I may get credit for having completed one of the PMCDP courses?*

Answer: No—the PMCDP certification process provides for the submission of experience and education as equivalencies for demonstrating competencies required for certification. The PMCDP's curriculum has not been designed to allow participants to “test out” of its requirements with an elaborately administered psychometric testing program. The exchange of ideas, lessons learned, knowledge management, best practices, and building networks within the DOE PM community are all benefits that would be lost by having a certification system based solely upon testing.

Question: *The Board recently instituted new peer review requirements at Level IV. What is the rationale for requiring peer review experience for Level IV applicants?*

Answer: Project peer reviews are important tools used to ensure successful execution of projects. For reviews to be successful, the team must be comprised of seasoned members directed by an experienced team lead. Those with the most experience are more likely to be able to identify potential risks that would derail a project. Because Level IV FPDs are supposed to be the best project managers, it is imperative that they engage in peer reviews. By participating in peer reviews, Level IV FPDs have the opportunity to share their expertise and knowledge while also gaining access to lessons learned and best practices of others. By leading a peer review, Level IV FPDs demonstrate their ability to create and direct a highly functioning team.

Question: *Why does the PMCDP continue to reduce the number of courses that can be waived for applicants who possess an active Project Management Professional (PMP) credential?*

Answer: The PMP is a generic project management credential that does not cover many of the knowledge areas specific to DOE. Because it is essential that FPDs understand project management within DOE, the PMCDP only allows one course, *Project Management Essentials*, to be waived by the PMP.

Question: *My site has a limited amount of line item capital asset projects. Since the PMCDP doesn't accept project director (or equivalent) experience managing general plant projects (GPPs) or other small construction efforts, how can applicants from my site obtain the requisite capital asset construction project management experience needed to satisfy the requirements for higher levels of PMCDP certification?*

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Answer: Many of the larger DOE projects have a number of sub-projects. These may be separate buildings, or other discrete subsets of the overall work breakdown structure that contain specific cost, scope, and schedule constraints. Candidates who manage sub-projects and demonstrate that their duties are commensurate with those of a FPD per DOE O 413.3B can apply that experience towards higher certification levels. Please note, however, that FPD-equivalent experience differs from that of Deputy FPD experience as candidates may only claim a total of one year of experience while serving as a Deputy FPD.

PMCDP Continuing Education Requirements

Question: *How do I record my continuous learning points (CLPs)? Who is responsible for approving them?*

Answer: You must enter your CLPs into the Corporate Human Resources Information Service (CHRIS)/Employee Self Service (ESS) system and provide a brief description of the activity. Once this is complete, your first-line manager will review your CLP request. If approved, your request will be routed to the APM approving official. If APM approves the request, your CLPs will be recorded.

Question: *Are there other ways FPDs can earn the 80 CLPs besides training?*

Answer: Yes—FPDs may earn CLPs through other project management activities as identified in the Continuous Learning Points Credit Assignment Table located in the CEG.

Question: *According to the PMCDP's Continuous Learning Points Credit Assignment Table, incumbent FPDs earn 10 CLPs over a two-year period. I have been an incumbent FPD for two years, so will I be eligible for the 10 CLPs?*

Answer: It depends. The formal definition of “incumbent FPDs” are those FPDs formally appointed to direct capital assets in accordance with DOE O 413.3B, *Program and Project Management for the Acquisition of Capital Assets*. Thus, if you have been assigned to manage a DOE capital asset project during this two-year period, and the project is recorded in PARS II, you will earn 10 CEUs. If not, this option will not be available to you.

Question: *Is there a recommended timeframe for when I should update my CE records in the CHRIS/ESS system for my first-line manager's approval?*

Answer: The PMCDP recommends all CE credits be logged into the CHRIS/ESS system as soon as the activity is complete as this will allow your first-line supervisor – and the APM approving official – ample time to review and approve them.

Question: *Can I get CE hour credit for training taken prior to my most current certification date?*

Answer: No— CE hours must be attained after the date of your most current certification. Training taken before the certification date will be disapproved by APM.

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Question: *How can I find out how many CLPs I can earn for taking a PMCDP course?*

Answer: In general, each full day of instruction translates to 7 CLPs. For a complete list of the CLPs for each PMCDP course, please refer to the PMCDP Curriculum Map.

General Inquiries

Question: *Why is there so much emphasis on having FPDs with the appropriate level of certification assigned to projects? Why are these metrics tracked?*

Answer: The Department is focused on project management success. The DOE has been rightly criticized for not having FPDs assigned to projects at the correct certification level. By maintaining a high number of projects with an FPD certified at the correct level, the Department demonstrates accountability and compliance with its own policy that directing FPDs be certified at a level commensurate with the project.

Question: *I only need to take one more class to satisfy the requirements for Level I certification, but according to the current PMCDP training schedule, it is not being offered again this fiscal year. What can I do?*

Answer: Each Program has a POC who is responsible for assisting you with all PMCDP matters. The POCs work directly with the PMCDP and can help you meet your certification and training needs. The PMCDP training and delivery schedule is updated frequently with additional course deliveries. Check the PMCDP website regularly for schedule updates.