

# **aPRO<sup>TM</sup> PM Performance Assessment Opportunity**

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By Stacy Goff, PMP, IPMA-D; President of *asapm*, American Society for the Advancement of Project Management

## ***The Opportunity***

Universities, their students, and enterprises and government entities in your communities can benefit from a new organizational project performance assessment standard that *asapm*, the American Society for the Advancement of Project Management, has developed, and is making available.

## ***The Background***

Every organization today is trying to improve their performance, and successful projects are the best way to manage that type of organizational change initiative. And yet, far too many projects fail to achieve their intended benefits, in all practice areas, and all organizations. Ironic, that the discipline that should be most-powerful in enabling organizational performance improvement is not fully implemented in most organizations. This despite hundreds of millions of dollars spent in project management training, certification, methodologies, and software tools over the last 20 years. One reason? Developing competent Project Managers is just a part of the solution. The entire solution involves a more holistic assessment of every facet of the organization that touches upon project and program success. It also includes identifying the practices that support success, while highlighting and improving those that do not.

Organizational assessment has been a popular subject for over 30 years, with such breakthrough initiatives as the US Department Of Defense-mandated SEI-CMM (Software Engineering Institute's Capability Maturity Model, or more recently, CMMi). This initiative has been so successful that it has also spawned hundreds of proprietary, closed, consultant-enriching "project management maturity model" assessments—few of which have done much to improve PM Performance. Thus enters *asapm*, the American Society for the Advancement of Project Management, focused on improving organizational and individual PM Performance. We decided to play a key role to fill the gap in increasing the effectiveness of all projects. We launched a project to study the business needs, identified current options, evaluated the strengths and weaknesses of key offerings, then defined, designed and delivered a new US Standard for Performance Rated Organizations in project and program management.

In this paper, we trace some of the key and differentiating factors we uncovered that were demonstrated by very few in this market; we discuss the opportunity for Universities and advanced-degree students to tap a rich database of corporate and government assessment results, to contribute to University/Industry interaction in your communities, and to publish journaled articles promoting your findings. You also have the opportunity to help define the database, together with several key open items, including contributing to the answer of a key question, *how should organizations evaluate project success?*

### ***The aPRO Standard***

The result of the *asapm* initiative is *aPRO*, the ***asapm* Performance Rated Organization** standard. *aPRO* is a framework for organizational project and program performance assessment. This standard differs from most other project or program organizational assessments in many ways:

- It is offered under a "copyleft" agreement, so that others can customize and modify it.
- It has gone through an extensive public exposure draft period, with opportunities for those not involved in its creation to comment, recommending changes or additions.
- *asapm* will open the results database for extended research by University professors and their advanced-degree students. Only one other model we studied has done this, and we are working with that group. Their open model has already inspired research projects in several other countries.
- Rather than dwelling on complex interactions between an organization's inputs and processes, it is a pure Performance Standard—evaluating the results. This is a much more efficient approach.
- Instead of placing organizations at one of several "levels," it highlights the areas that deserve the most attention to improve performance. *asapm* also uses this more efficient approach to assess the performance competence of individuals.
- The efficiency of the *aPRO* approach results in significantly less time demand from the assessed organizations, and significantly fewer hours from professional assessors, or from University students who perform assessments as part of a class project.
- In addition to performance improvement opportunities, the *aPRO* process can uniquely certify an organization as an ***asapm* Performance Rated Organization**, an unprecedented benefit.

The *aPRO* standard was built on an initial foundation—Organizational Competence in Project Management, or OCiPM, developed and used by William Duncan. Duncan was the primary author of the original Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK® Guide), for the Project Management Institute (PMI). The purpose of OCiPM was to provide the same insights for organizations that his prior efforts offered project managers. Duncan is a founding member and long-time contributor for *asapm*, and serves as Certification Chair. Duncan collaborated with a team of *asapm*'s experienced project managers, organizational assessment consultants, and project management services providers to develop the *aPRO* standard. *asapm* completed the *aPRO Exposure Draft* period February 10, 2010, and made *aPRO* available to the public on April 5, 2010.

The standard consists of five **Units**, or areas of Project Management Performance; each Unit has two-to-three **Elements**, or key organizational actions. Each Element has three-to-five **Performance Criteria**, observable results and/or actions from which satisfactory performance can be inferred. The Units are:

1. Align Projects with Organization Strategy
2. Provide Executive Leadership to the Management of Projects
3. Ensure Adequate Resources for Projects
4. Develop Project Management Talent
5. Ensure Reliable Framework for Project Management



It is this structure, oriented towards observable results, that supports the efficient and immediately-useful assessment provided by *aPRO*, the ***asapm* Performance Rated Organization** standard.

### ***Self Assessment or Professional Assessment***

Organizations use *aPRO* one of two ways. They can download the standard from the *asapm* website, and use it to informally or formally assess their department, site, or entire organization. The outcome: An overall summary that shows areas where their performance meets or exceeds the performance criteria and highlights the areas that need attention to improve performance. These areas could suggest actions ranging from improving strategic alignment of projects, to professional development of project staff. Alternatively, interested organizations can contract with trained, professional Recognized Assessors (RAs), who have been through a special *aPRO* training program to prepare them to more-thoroughly interview key stakeholders and explore the evidence to assure an accurate assessment. Among the advantages of engaging Recognized Assessors is that most have experience not just with assessment, but also with guiding clients through their Performance Improvement Plans.

This special Recognized Assessor training provides assessors with a detailed and proprietary Assessors Guide, that contains more information about the assessment Performance Criteria, the evidence to evaluate, key follow-on questions to ask, and other insights from the experiences of the *aPRO* project team, and other assessors. Another advantage of using the Recognized Assessors is that those professionally-assessed organizations with a 100% Pass score can be recommended by their assessor to be granted certification as an ***asapm* Performance Rated Organization**.

### ***The Academic Opportunity***

We see a range of opportunities for mutually beneficial involvement from Universities:

- A. Use the *aPRO* standard in advanced classes to perform organizational assessment of project management strengths, which can provide University outreach to your communities, equip students with an extremely enriching experience, and help increase the economic potential of organizations in your circle of influence.
- B. Participate in designing the database for organizational assessment data collection and analysis.
- C. Mine the *aPRO* (cleansed of organization identity) database of organization assessments to analyze key trends and differences between organizations in the same and different sectors, and their project management performance.
- D. Participate in the establishment of *asapm* standards or guidelines for project and program success. One of the outcomes of our research is the discovery of the weaknesses of most measures, which either focus too much on project measures, and fail to relate to longer-lasting organization benefits.
- E. Publish findings in mainstream media and juried Journals, and present at USA and World Congresses on project management, through *asapm* (IPMA-USA), and IPMA, at the global level.

### ***Your Role***

We think this is an unique opportunity for advanced collaboration between not-for-profit professional

associations, Universities, and businesses and government agencies in your sphere of influence. It can provide clear economic benefits to organizations that wish to improve their project and program management performance, and their business results. All this, while providing a rich new arena for relevant research. You can participate in this program by contacting *asapm* at [pres@asapm.org](mailto:pres@asapm.org). We also value any of your suggestions and ideas we have not yet considered.

### ***About asapm***

*asapm*, the American Society for the Advancement of Project Management, is a not-for-profit professional society dedicated to advancing the practice of project and program management in the United States. *asapm* is the USA Member Association of IPMA, the International Project Management Association. *asapm* offers a full range of project and program management certifications, beginning with entry-level knowledge-based examinations, similar to other organizations, and continuing to Advanced Performance-competence based certifications of Project Managers, Senior Project Managers, and Program Managers. Working through its members, with IPMA, and with other professional associations around the world, *asapm* continues to increase its leadership role, improving project and program management performance competence throughout the USA and beyond.



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