

Program Management Improvement and Accountability Act: Implications for US State and Local Governments

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The U.S. President signed S. 1550, the Program Management Improvement and Accountability Act (PMIAA), into law on December 14, 2016. PMIAA requires the US federal government to implement a number of Project and Program Management (for the purposes of the article, referred to as PPM) reforms and implement best practices to ensure the more effective practice of PPM. This law validates the importance of PPM and reinforces its applicability to projects and programs in the public-sector.

While the passage of PMIAA is a significant milestone in the broader recognition of PPM, it is important to remember that it is applicable to the US federal government only. The other two levels of government in the US – state and local – do not have similar legislation focused on PPM adoption in the public-sector. There may of course be outliers to this statement as there are, for example, over 89,000 distinct local governments in the United States.¹ Nonetheless, generally speaking, regulations, mandates or policies requiring the adoption and practice of established PPM practices in state and local government bodies are rare, at best.

As a project professional interested in the expansion and recognition of the discipline, I am interested in ways to address this perceived gap. This is because adhering to PPM best practices and increasing organizational project management maturity can have huge benefits for organizations in the public-sector. For example, the National Academy of Public Administration reported that adopting PPM practices “would enable the government to more consistently and efficiently achieve important public purposes, save taxpayer dollars, enhance service delivery, and perhaps most importantly, rebuild public trust.”² For these reasons and more, it is critical that state and local governments follow the lead of the federal government in mandating the formal adoption of established PPM practices.

However, rarely are Project and Program Managers in a position to actually craft policy or other legislation for the myriad state and local government bodies in the US. Therefore the question becomes, *if I am a project professional interested in expanding the project management maturity level of my broader state or locality, what can I do to affect change?* I believe there are at least three actions that could immediately be taken in response to this question. They are:

- **Practicing what you preach.** One of the most effective things a Project and Program Manager working in a state or local government organization can do is to *know* PPM best practices and to *consistently demonstrate* them in the workplace. Being an

¹ US Census Bureau, “Census Bureau Reports There are 89,004 Local Governments in the United States”, August 30, 2012, accessed December 16, 2016.

<https://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/governments/cb12-161.html>.

² National Academy of Public Administration, “Improving Program Management in the Federal Government”, July 2015, accessed December 16, 2016. <http://www.pmi.org/-/media/pmi/documents/public/pdf/business-solutions/improve-program-management-federal-government.pdf>.

effective project and program leader and actually showing the value of PPM practices can speak volumes to your colleagues and superiors.

- **Influencing up.** Project and Program Managers at the state and local level can influence their superiors to increase organizational commitment for resources and recognition of PPM within their specific department or agency. Influence efforts can be supported by the numerous research findings and case studies developed which show the value of PPM.³
- **Contacting those in power.** As an American citizen, you are free to directly contact your state and local representatives and request that they institute policy that improves PPM practice at the public organizations they represent.

In addition to actions the individual Project or Program Manager could take, there are organizational or institutional actions that could be done to encourage increased PPM awareness, or even legislation, in more states and localities. For example, the Project Management Institute could play a leading role in advocating directly to state and local legislative bodies for PPM application in their government. Another, no doubt long-term, action that could be done is for universities and accrediting bodies (such as the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration, or NASPAA) to encourage PPM to be taught in public administration and public policy programs. Educating our up-and-coming public-sector leaders about the importance and value of PPM could result in a future cohort of government leaders who champion its application in the public-sector.

In short, PMIAA is a step in the right direction, but there clearly is still work to be done to ensure PPM practices are institutionalized in the non-federal government bureaucracy in the US. Due to the tens of thousands of separate government bodies across the US, there will not be a consolidated piece of PPM legislation to affect every public-sector organization. Instead, public-sector Project and Program Managers – and the broader professional community – will need to do the hard, grass-roots level work required to influence, promote and advocate for PPM adoption in state and local governments. Doing so will be performing a service not only to our profession, but to the citizens of the communities and states in which we live.

References

National Academy of Public Administration. July 2015. Improving Program Management in the Federal Government. <http://www.pmi.org/-/media/pmi/documents/public/pdf/business-solutions/improve-program-management-federal-government.pdf> (accessed December 16, 2016).

Project Management Institute. 2010. The Value of Project Management. <http://www.pmi.org/-/media/pmi/documents/public/pdf/white-papers/value-of-project-management.pdf> (accessed February 3, 2017).

³ Consider, for example, this excellent yet succinct white paper from the Project Management Institute: <http://www.pmi.org/-/media/pmi/documents/public/pdf/white-papers/value-of-project-management.pdf>.

US Census Bureau. August 30, 2012. Census Bureau Reports There are 89,004 Local Governments in the United States.
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