

Case Study: Portfolio Management in the 2020 Census Program^{1, 2, 3}

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Executive Summary

The Decennial Census is the United States oldest and most comprehensive source of information about the U.S. population. Most people know that the Census Bureau manages this very large, complex, multi-billion-dollar program and are familiar with the program and its purpose but they don't understand that, while the 2020 Census will be conducted on April 1 2020, the planning, staging and operations of the Census happen over a timespan of more than 10 years. This case study will focus on the Portfolio Management structure that the 2020 Census Program has in place to select and manage the many investments needed to conduct such a large and complex operation. It will profile the types of investments, the governance and processes used to select, initialize and manage those investments and the investment and budget challenges affecting the 2020 Census Program.

In this paper, we will present:

- The current structure of 2020 Census Program portfolio management
- Our 2020 Census Portfolio Management questionnaire, a tool designed to gather information about 2020 Census portfolio management programs
- Feedback from professionals involved with 2020 Census portfolio management processes

Key findings include:

¹ This paper is released to inform interested parties of ongoing operations and to encourage discussion of work in progress. Any views expressed on operational issues are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the U.S. Census Bureau.

² Second Editions are previously published papers that have continued relevance in today's project management world, or which were originally published in conference proceedings or in a language other than English. Original publication acknowledged; authors retain copyright. This paper was originally presented at the 5th [Annual University of Maryland PM Symposium in May 2018](#). It is republished here with permission of the author and conference organizers.

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- Portfolio management is being actively practiced by the 2020 Census Program.
- Decisions are being made by the 2020 Census Program governance structure.
- Key processes are at different level of maturity.
- Overall, stakeholders believe that portfolio management processes work reasonably well.

Introduction

In this paper, we describe the current 2020 Census Program portfolio management processes and the maturity of those processes. Figure 1 shows governance structure for the 2020 Census Program. From its charter (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018), the 2020 Census Portfolio Management Governing Board (PMGB) provides key oversight and decision-making support for the 2020 Census Program. It oversees 2020 Census Program investments and escalates matters to the Executive Steering Committee (ESC) when appropriate or when a specified threshold is met for cost, risk, or impact has been reached. Currently, most 2020 Census Program Governance Meetings meet weekly, but as 2020 operations ramp up meeting frequency will increase with additional operations-focused meetings added. Weinberg (2012), discusses 2010 census management challenges, many of which help inform 2020. In our interview discussions and other research, we learned that a 2020 census program management plan, focused on the operational phase, will document procedures and provide information on how decisions are made and will be resolved regarding the 2020 Census. Once out of the approval phase, it will document key project management processes including risk management, schedule management, issue management, and change management.

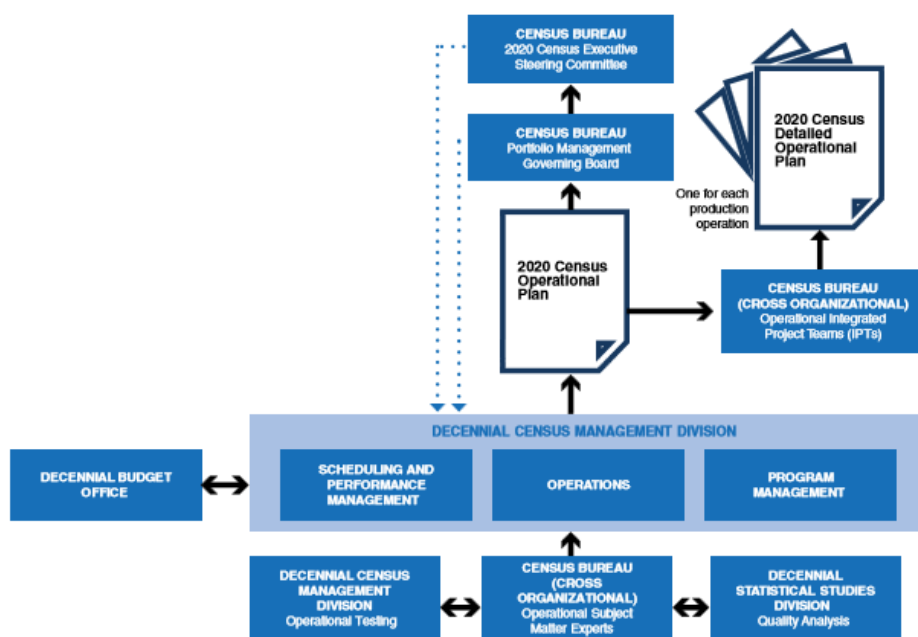


Figure 1: Organizations and Governance Boards for the 2020 Census Operational Plan
 Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2017)

Scope of the 2020 Census Program

According to the Census Bureau’s 2020 Census Operation Plan (2017), the 2020 Census includes 35 operations. Figure 2 show them organized into eight major areas that correspond with the standard Census Bureau Work Breakdown Structure. Operation refers to both support and business functions.

The 2020 Census Operations

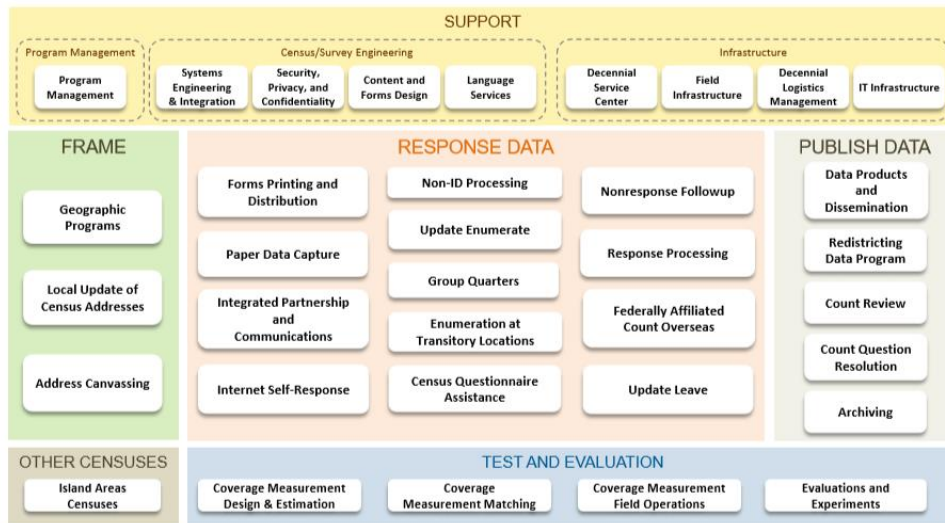


Figure 2: The 2020 Census Operations
 Source: Stempowski (2017)

Documented in the Operational Plan is an inventory of 350 redesign decisions that 2020 Census Program maintains which are part of the planning for cost-effective 2020 Census (Census Bureau, 2017). Figure 3 shows the decisions that had been made as of October 27, 2017.

The 2020 Census

2020 Census Operational Plan: 350 Decisions

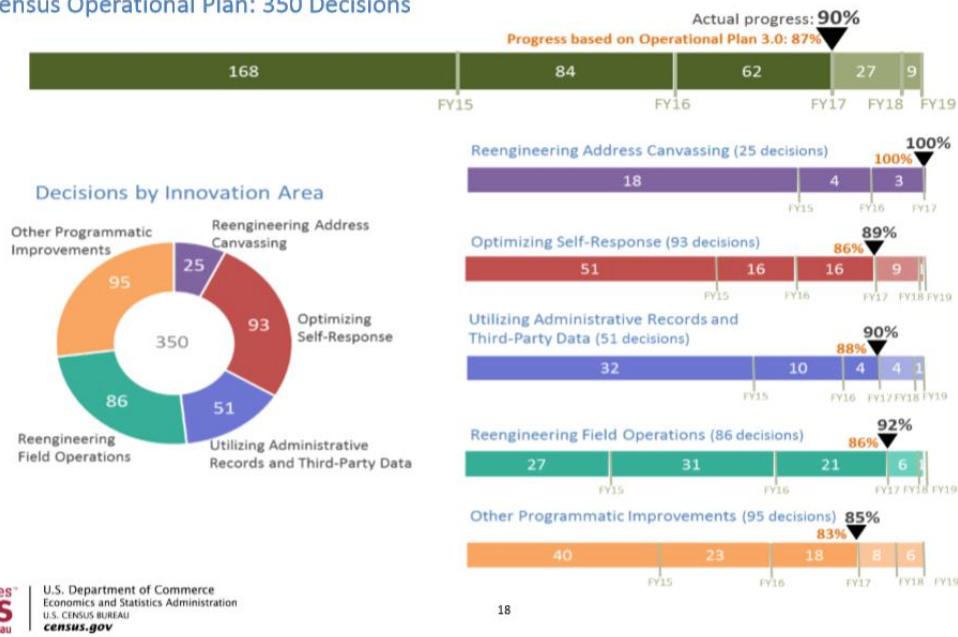


Figure 3: The 2020 Census: 2020 Census Operational Plan 350 Decisions

Source: Stempowski (2017)

Questionnaire Development and Invited Respondents

We used the process areas that we developed for our previous portfolio management maturity model research as the starting point for developing the questionnaire. The process areas were identified during previous interviews with Census Bureau portfolio management experts. They were slightly revised for the purposes of this study.

We invited 2020 Census Portfolio Management Board members (Phone interview requested, some accepted) and alternates (sent link to online form in most cases) plus a few select others who were heavily involved with governance in 2010 or now and are still attending meetings in some capacity to complete our questionnaire. They were asked to assess how well the selected portfolio processes worked and their opinion of the process' maturity.

Since 2012, the Census Bureau has made portfolio management a strategic priority across the enterprise with a few program areas ahead of the enterprise push. We were fortunate to interview people who have seen their programs evolve and change with leadership turnover as well as people who have participated in more than one governance program. Most of our participants were PMGB members, some managed portfolio management processes from a program management office, and some were program managers who are participating as subject matter experts for the PMGB. We conducted 11 phone interviews. In addition, 14 people completed our online questionnaire. Five of the people we interviewed on the phone also complete the online form. Overall, we had about 20 respondents including both phone

interviews and the online questionnaire. One notable comment regarding the questionnaire was that it would be helpful to add a brief description of each process area.

Evaluation of 2020 Census Portfolio Management Processes

We selected participants for our case study with the intent of getting knowledgeable portfolio management professionals to provide feedback on how well each process works and its maturity. We developed participant instructions and a script to standardize the interview. We also developed an online questionnaire after feedback from a senior manager as an alternative way to respond. The online questionnaire was structured to ask the same questions as the questionnaire used during the phone interviews. 2020 Census Program portfolio management professionals were asked to use a scale of 1 to 5 to rate how well 10 portfolio management process areas are functioning and also give them a maturity score based on the maturity model that we previously introduced and refined. The paper, *Ranking Portfolio Management Maturity* (Hostetter and Norris, 2017) details the updated model. The ten process area were:

1. Portfolio Management Governing Board (PMGB)
2. PMGB Members
3. Portfolio Management Process
4. Portfolio Inventory
5. Portfolio Management Process Documentation
6. Investment Management Process
7. Strategic Planning
8. Investment Performance Review
9. Staff Acceptance
10. Staff Training

In the following sections, the general results from the online questionnaire are shown. Key participant feedback on the process areas is reviewed. The number of responses varied by item. Every respondent did not rate every item.

Portfolio Management Wellness and Maturity Ratings for 10 Processes

Figure 4 provide an overview of the wellness levels.

1-Not well at all	2	3	4	5-Extremely well
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Figure 4. Portfolio Management Wellness Levels

Figure 5 provides an overview of the maturity levels.

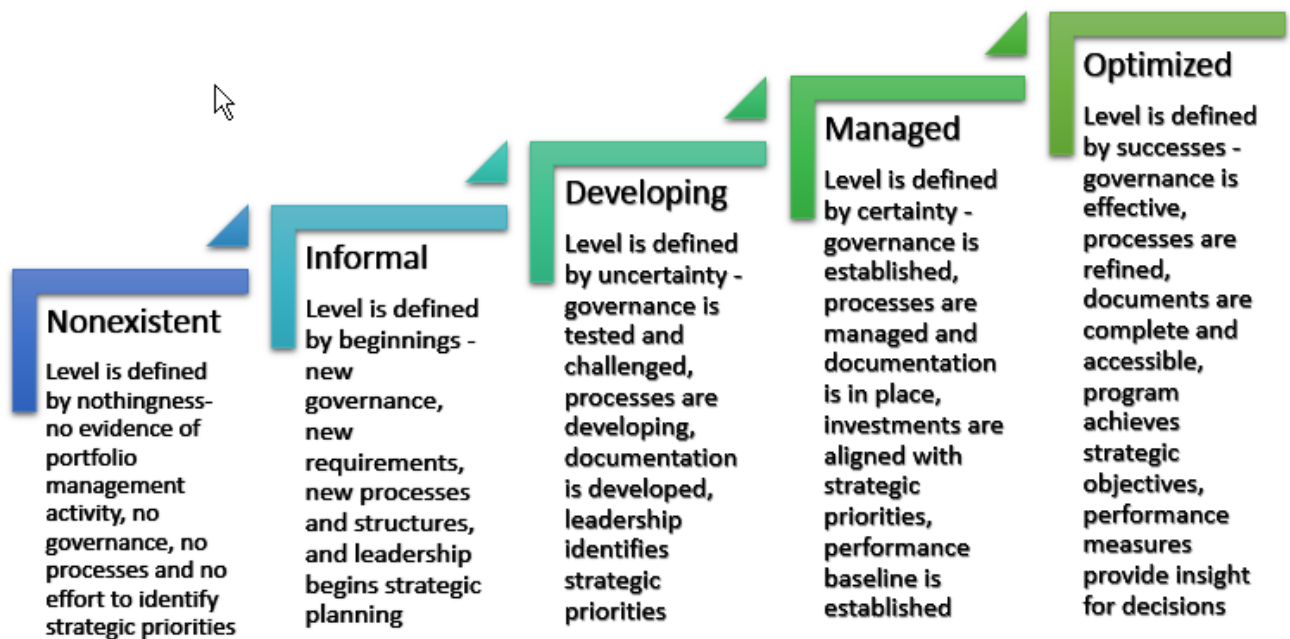


Figure 5. Portfolio Management Maturity Levels

Chart 1 shows how the portfolio management professional rated the ten processes on Wellness and Maturity. Overall, all process areas were rated as performing Well to just about Extremely Well. In terms of maturity, all process areas were rated as Developing to almost Optimized. The highest wellness rating average was 4.5 approaching Extremely Well for the Portfolio Management Governing Board (PMGB) process area. The lowest wellness rating which was still rated about Well at 2.8 for the Investment Management Process area. The highest maturity rating was 4.5 approaching Optimized for the Portfolio Management Governing Board (PMGB) process area. The lowest maturity rating was 2.8 for the Staff Training Process Area. It's important to note that for some process areas responses varied over a range versus being centered around a few response categories.

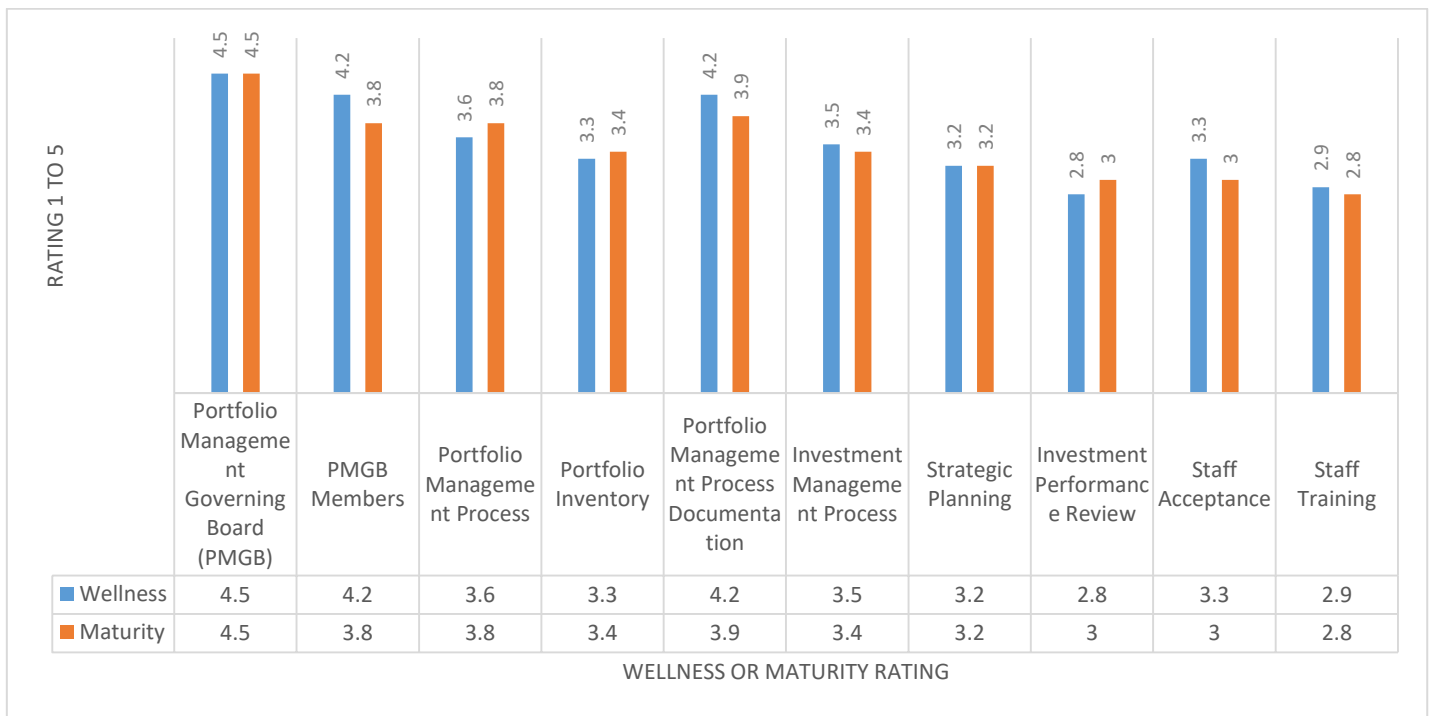


Chart 1. Portfolio Management Wellness and Maturity Ratings for 10 Processes

Feedback on Ten Process Areas

In addition to rating the ten process areas, participants were asked to provide comments about each area, including how it could improve. Those comments are valuable communications from key portfolios executives. One or two key comments was selected for each process area to give readers a feel for the types of comments that was provided for the item.

Portfolio Management Governing Board (PMGB)

Respondent feedback was positive about the PMGB. Comments included “it is a good board for managing 2020 Census.” One person wrote that it is “maturing over time and getting better from an operational perspective.” It should also be noted that it was reported that “2020 census is currently re-evaluating our governance structure to streamline and empower decision making at the lower levels so the PMGB doesn’t get so bogged down with low level decisions.”

PMGB Members

Respondents noted that “those who are active take it seriously and participate regularly, but we do have stakeholders who are not as engaged.” It was suggested that because member time is a big issue that “perhaps key topics could be delegated to key members responsible for work related to the delegated key topic.”

Portfolio Management Process

While respondents generally felt like this process is functioning well, it was noted that “2020 Census is relooking at this area to improve definitions, roles and responsibilities and clarity levels of decision making.”

Portfolio Inventory

There were a range of comments regarding the portfolio inventory. One comments was that it is “well defined for the 2020 Census.” Another felt that “many investments never come to PMGB.”

Portfolio Management Process Documentation

Respondents generally felt that “the documentation area is well maintained, organized, and updated.” It was noted “we do a good job here.” One suggestion was to work towards a paperless office.

Investment Management Process

There were a range of comments about the investment management processes. Key comments included that “the current process is effective. It meets deadlines and prepares reports accurately.” Another commented that “we have made great strides over the past 2 years to manage investments, but the process is done with a subset of the full PMGB.”

Strategic Planning

It was noted that the 2020 Census Program needs to work on the year beyond 2020. Another comment was that strategic planning conversations should be brought to the PMGB.

Investment Performance Review

There were a variety of comments on this topic but most notable is that “recently the 2020 Census Program has made great strides to institutionalize regular performance reviews.”

Staff Acceptance

Respondent comments generally noted that staff are open to portfolio management process but that not all interact with the process regularly.

Staff Training

Respondent comments generally noted that staff training varies from area to area in regards to the portfolio management process.

Feedback on Challenges and Successes

When asked what they needed from the portfolio management system, notable responses included:

- “Info on the investments - performance measures.”
- “At minimum, understanding what investments are made and why.”
- “Awareness and approach to 2020 Decennial Operations and Decisions.”
- “Deeper understanding of priority work moving along.”

Respondents felt that successes of the portfolio management process were:

- “Informing leadership and stakeholders of issues, status, and decisions needed.”
- “Having all the right people in the room to make a decision and hearing input from the areas that are effected.” And,
- “operations are aligned to the WBS so they can be tracked and decisions are transparent.”

Areas where respondents felt the portfolio management process could do better included “more training and attention to the out years”, and “communication about strategic approach.”

Respondents defined success for portfolio management as:

- “Doing the right work at the right time to reach strategic goals and fulfill the mission.”
- “Investments are defined and prioritized based upon available budget. Once approved and funded, status is monitored and adjustments are made based upon data and not feelings.”
- “Information shared and decisions discussed and documented.”

How respondents evaluate success of portfolio management is” in addition to process areas, the results of using the data to course correct, control scope within cost and schedule constraints.” And “all efforts directed and aligned the strategic goals and objectives of the organization and updated on a continual basis.”

Overall, respondents seemed to view the 2020 Census Portfolio management program as “a good process for the Decennial Directorate.”

Conclusions

This case study provides information about the current state of portfolio management for the 2020 Census Program. Governance structures are in place and working according to plan. 2020 Census Program portfolio management professionals rated the program as functioning well for 10 key process areas. In general, these process areas are managed by the 2020 Census program. The feedback provided by the portfolio management professionals was very helpful. Their insight can help tweak current portfolio management practices as the 2020 Census Program shifts into operational mode for the 2020 Census. It was reported that 2020 Census Program is looking to improve the portfolio management program in preparation for peak operations such as empowering decision making at lower levels. It is expected that the wellness and maturity ratings of the ten process areas will change as changes are made to the 2020 Census portfolio management program. Our results reflect the current state 2020 Census portfolio Management Program.

REFERENCES

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Appendix A: 2020 Census Portfolio Management Questionnaire

2020 Census Portfolio Management Questionnaire

Thank you for taking the time to fill out our questionnaire.

We are conducting this review as part of a paper for the 2018 UMD Project Management Symposium. This paper is a follow-up to our 2016 & 2017 papers on a maturity model for portfolio management. This year we are doing a case study of the 2020 Census Program's practice of portfolio management.

Please send copies of any relevant documents describing the metrics or processes, and examples of reports or displays (e.g., dashboards) to us (susan.lynn.hostetter@census.gov & sherri.j.norris@census.gov)

Name _____

Portfolio Management Role

- 2020 Census Portfolio Management Governing Board (PMGB) voting member or alternate including chair or co-chair**
- 2020 Census PMGB advisory member (Decennial ADCs, Decennial office representative, etc...)**
- 2020 Census Program portfolio management professional (DPMO staff, SPPM staff, etc...)**
- Other** _____

The Current Process

We'd like to learn about the portfolio management process as you understand it and interact with it. We have a list of ten areas and would like to get your impressions of each

1. What do you think of the **2020 Census Portfolio Management Governing Board (PMGB) process?**

1A. How well does the PMGB process area work?

1-Not well at all	2	3	4	5-Extremely well

1B. How would you assess the maturity of the PMGB process area?

		Level 1: Nonexistent	Level 2: Informal	Level 3: Developing	Level 4: Managed	Level 5: Optimized
Governance Structure	1. Portfolio Management Governing Board (PMGB)	Portfolio management governance structure is not defined	Portfolio management governance structure is formally defined, investment decision authority is formally delegated to governance structure	Portfolio Management Governing Bodies are chartered and meeting infrequently, decision authority is being established, governing boundary lines are being developed	Portfolio Management Governing Bodies are completing processes and meeting on a scheduled basis, decision authority is rarely circumvented, governing boundary lines are defined	Portfolio Management Governing Bodies are completing all processes and decisions on time and governing authority is established and respected by organization leadership
		Level 1: Nonexistent	2	3	4	Level 5: Optimized

1C. How could the PMGB improve?

2. What do you think of the **PMGB Members** process?

2A. How well does the PMGB Members process area work?

1-Not well at all	2	3	4	5-Extremely well

2B. How would you assess the maturity of the PMGB Members process area?

		Level 1: Nonexistent	Level 2: Informal	Level 3: Developing	Level 4: Managed	Level 5: Optimized
2. PMGB Members		PMGB members are not identified	PMGB members are identified and educated on their roles	Most to all PMGB members are attending meetings	PMGB members are prepared and ask probing questions	PMGB members actively refine and improve the portfolio management process
		Level 1: Nonexistent	2	3	4	Level 5: Optimized

2C. How could the PMGB Members improve?

3. What do you think of the Portfolio Management process?

3A. How well does the Portfolio Management process area work?

1-Not well at all	2	3	4	5-Extremely well

3B. How would you assess the maturity of the Portfolio Management process area?

		Level 1: Nonexistent	Level 2: Informal	Level 3: Developing	Level 4: Managed	Level 5: Optimized
Management Tools	3. Portfolio Management Process	Management tool requirements are not identified	Management tool requirements are identified	Developing management tools, beginning to incorporate use of tools into processes	Some management tools are completed and incorporated into processes	Management tools are fully operational and incorporated into portfolio management processes
		Level 1:	2	3	4	Level 5:

Nonexistent				Optimized

3C. How could the Portfolio Management process improve?

4. What do you think of the Portfolio Inventory process?

4A. How well does the Portfolio Inventory process area work?

1-Not well at all	2	3	4	5-Extremely well

4B. How would you assess the maturity of the Portfolio Inventory process area?

		Level 1: Nonexistent	Level 2: Informal	Level 3: Developing	Level 4: Managed	Level 5: Optimized
Investment Portfolio	4. Portfolio Inventory	Existing investment projects are not identified	PfM process is working to identify new and existing investment projects within governance threshold	PfM process has identified most new and existing investment projects within governance threshold	PfM process makes funding decisions on most new and existing investment projects within governance threshold	PfM process makes funding decisions on all new and existing investment projects within governance threshold

Level 1: Nonexistent	2	3	4	Level 5: Optimized

4C. How could the Portfolio Inventory improve?

5. What do you think of the Portfolio Management Process Documentation process?

5A. How well does the Portfolio Management Process Documentation process area work?

1-Not well at all	2	3	4	5-Extremely well

5B. How would you assess the maturity of the Portfolio Management Process Documentation process area?

		Level 1: Nonexistent	Level 2: Informal	Level 3: Developing	Level 4: Managed	Level 5: Optimized
Project Documentation	5. Portfolio Management Process Documentation	Project documentation requirements are not identified	Project documentation requirements are identified	Developing document templates, assessing existing documentation for new and existing projects	Completing project documentation for new and existing investments	90-100% of new and existing investment projects are documented

Level 1: Nonexistent	2	3	4	Level 5: Optimized

5C. How could the Portfolio Management Process Documentation improve?

6. What do you think of the Investment Management process?

6A. How well does the Investment Management process area work?

1-Not well at all	2	3	4	5-Extremely well

6B. How would you assess the maturity of the Investment Management process area?

		Level 1: Nonexistent	Level 2: Informal	Level 3: Developing	Level 4: Managed	Level 5: Optimized
Portfolio Management Process	6. Investment Management Process	Portfolio management (PFM) process requirements are not defined	PFM process requirements are being identified and discussed	PFM process is developing	PFM process is partially developed and documented	PFM process is fully functioning and documentation is updated regularly
		Level 1: Nonexistent	2	3	4	Level 5: Optimized

6C. How could the Investment Management improve?

7. What do you think of the Strategic Planning process?

7A. How well does the Strategic Planning process area work?

1-Not well at all	2	3	4	5-Extremely well

7B. How would you assess the maturity of the Strategic Planning process area?

		Level 1: Nonexistent	Level 2: Informal	Level 3: Developing	Level 4: Managed	Level 5: Optimized
Strategic Planning	7. Strategic Planning	No strategic planning process	Leadership engages in strategic planning	Leadership completes strategic plan and shares with staff and stakeholders	Leadership uses strategic plan for program planning	Leadership updates strategic plan as needed
		Level 1: Nonexistent	2	3	4	Level 5: Optimized

7C. How could the Strategic Planning improve?

8. What do you think of the Investment Performance Review process?

8A. How well does the Investment Performance Review process area work?

1-Not well at all	2	3	4	5-Extremely well

8B. How would you assess the maturity of the Investment Performance Review process area?

		Level 1: Nonexistent	Level 2: Informal	Level 3: Developing	Level 4: Managed	Level 5: Optimized
Investment Review	8. Investment Performance Review	Investment review requirements are not identified	Investment review requirements are identified	PMGB conducts investment management reviews for investment projects	PMGB assigns action items to investment project managers during investment review	PMGB tracks progress on action items from investment reviews

Level 1: Nonexistent	2	3	4	Level 5: Optimized

8C. How could the Investment Performance Review improve?

9. What do you think of the Staff Acceptance process?

9A. How well does the Staff Acceptance process area work?

1-Not well at all	2	3	4	5-Extremely well

9B. How would you assess the maturity of the Staff Acceptance process area?

		Level 1: Nonexistent	Level 2: Informal	Level 3: Developing	Level 4: Managed	Level 5: Optimized
Staff Participation	9. Staff Acceptance	Staff do not communicate on new and existing projects	Staff informally communicate on projects as work begins	Staff beginning to learn and follow process for communicating investment project proposals	Staff communicate investment proposals before work begins	Staff communicate proposals for investments one to two years in advance

Level 1: Nonexistent	2	3	4	Level 5: Optimized

9C. How could the Staff Acceptance improve?

10. What do you think of the Staff Training process?

10A. How well does the Staff Training process area work?

1-Not well at all	2	3	4	5-Extremely well

10B. How would you assess the maturity of the Staff Training process area?

		Level 1: Nonexistent	Level 2: Informal	Level 3: Developing	Level 4: Managed	Level 5: Optimized
Staff Training	10. Staff Training	No training for portfolio management processes	Informal training on portfolio management processes	Developing formal training for portfolio management processes	Formal training for portfolio management processes (as needed)	Staff involved in portfolio management have access to training

Level 1: Nonexistent	2	3	4	Level 5: Optimized

10C. How could the Staff Training improve?

Challenges and Successes

We would like your feedback on the portfolio management process, as a person involved, so that we may understand how well the process is working.

11. What do you need from the portfolio management system? What do you get out of it?

12. What do you think are the successes of the portfolio management process?

13. Where do you think the process could do better?

14. How do you define success for portfolio management?

15. How do you evaluate success?

General Comments

16. Do you have anything you would like to add?

CLOSING STATEMENT

- Thank-you for sharing this information with us.
- Our paper will be presented at the UMD PM Symposium on May 10. Please let us know if you would like to see a copy once it is published.

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Susan Hostetter, PMP, is a project management professional with over twenty years' experience with Federal Statistical programs. Ms. Hostetter has been instrumental in standing up and managing risk management, project management, portfolio management, strategic planning, and performance management processes for large survey and Census programs. She has a Master's Degree in Management with a Project Management emphasis from the University of Maryland's University College, a Master's Certificate in Program Management from George Washington University and a Bachelor's Degree in Business Administration from Mary Baldwin University. Susan can be reached at susan.lynn.hostetter@census.gov.



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