

UMD's First "VIRTUAL" Project Management Symposium Deemed a Success! ¹

By Kathleen Frankle

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The last-minute change to a *VIRTUAL* delivery did not alter the outcome of the University of Maryland's (UMD) annual Project Management Symposium held on May 7-8, 2020. Amazing, wonderful, outstanding, awesome, fantastic, exceptional and exceeding expectations were some of the expressions used to describe the two-day event! Survey results indicated that a whopping 99 percent of attendees stated they would attend another UMD Project Management Symposium as well as recommend the event to their colleagues.

Also gleaned from survey results were the top five reasons participants attended the event which included:

- Gain insights I can implement
- PDUs
- Interesting Topics
- Great Price
- Learn or Sharpen PM Skills

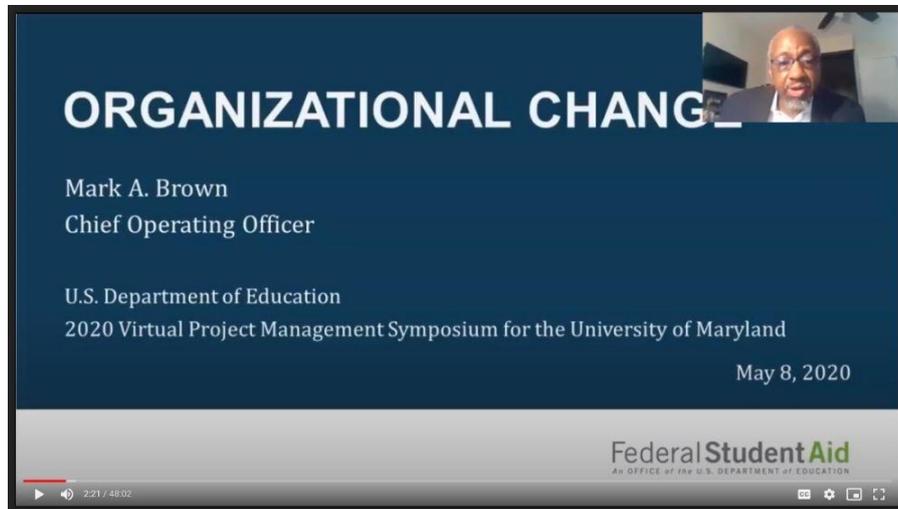


Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this year's Symposium had to be converted from an in-person event to a virtual one in only five weeks. Thanks to amazing and adaptable speakers, UMD maxed out the number of sessions that could be offered over the two days in a virtual environment. This first-ever *VIRTUAL* Project Management Symposium featured four (4) [keynotes](#) and fifty-five (55) individual sessions in five (5) concurrent tracks. A total of 64 different speakers presented on trending topics, best practices, lessons learned and case studies to five hundred and sixty project management professionals representing 273 different organizations from government, non-profits, industry and academia.

"I was a little concerned about the virtual experience," stated Laura Sharps, an Engineering Supervisor for Jacobs. "However, UMD pulled it off exceptionally. The content was awesome and I have lots of new ideas to take back to my team!" Meisha Watkins, Strategic Initiative Project Manager for the U.S. Postal Service stated, "The 2020 symposium was the perfect intersection of practical industry application &

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theory. Despite being online, I felt connected and 'in the room' with all of the speakers and moderators. Great job!"



Keynote speaker Mark Brown, Chief Operating Officer, Federal Student Aid, U.S. Department of Education kicked off the second day of the live symposium.

So how did the experience actually work? All registered participants received instructions on how to access a password-protected online version of the *VIRTUAL* schedule. That schedule included a description of each session, speaker photos and bios plus the WebEx links needed to participate in each session. Attendees were able to review the schedule and select which session they wanted to join.

"The ability to look at the agenda and have the option to hop from virtual room to virtual room was like intellectual shopping for your brain!" said Symone Mercado, Strategic Planning Project Manager from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. "Not only was each session insightful and clearly delivered (can I just say logistics were on point!), it was so much fun to have the freedom to really explore Project Management at my own pace. Overall, I was very impressed and would eagerly attend another session!"

Participants were able to earn up to 11.25 PDUs during the two-days of the live symposium sessions. Besides being able to attend the live sessions on May 7th and 8th, UMD recorded the speaker presentations and links to the recordings were posted on the password-protected online schedule. This offered participants the opportunity to view any of the sessions they missed during the live event at their leisure later and the ability to earn an additional 33 PDUs.

Cindy Miller, a teacher from Fairfax County Public Schools, said, "I Love the fact that I can 'attend' all sessions through recordings. Generally, I would have to choose one session out of five for each track, but now I can benefit from all of them!"



Session speaker Sandra Menzies (top right), presented "Imrov to Improve." The screen shot above shows Sandra and her demonstration team as they exposed symposium participants to Improv games to help them get out of their comfort zone and out of their heads to be in the moment in a safe and supportive manner.

Lorelei Pate from the Baltimore Chapter of Women in Cable Telecommunications stated, "Wonderful event which worked perfectly online! This allowed for multiple PDU's & learning to be gained not only in a deep dive during the 2-day live event but throughout the year at attendees' own pace. Fantastic value!"

The change to a *VIRTUAL* environment also provided the opportunity for participants from outside of the DC Metropolitan area to easily attend. Project Management Professionals from 28 states and 11 countries were able to participate with no risk of COVID exposure or any travel costs.

"It's the best project management symposium that I never attended" said Shane Perkins, Director of Investment Realization at Aurelius Group in Sydney, Australia. "Going virtual meant that I could sit half-way around the world in my pajamas, and still participate and hear the latest ideas."

Roy Lafferty from the US Department of Agriculture indicated that "many of my USDA co-workers, along with myself, could not have attended if the event had been in-person."

Despite the last-minute change to an online event, the evidence is clear that UMD's first *VIRTUAL* symposium was a success! Camille Hordatt, IT Project Manager at the Library of Congress, provided an excellent summary of comments received, "You delivered! Truly awesome experience, obtained from my home in the year of COVID-19! A well planned and organized event and a great source of innovative and new information."

It has already been decided that the 2021 Project Management Symposium will also be delivered virtually. Mark your calendar for Thursday, April 22 and Friday, April 23, 2021. Don't miss UMD's second *VIRTUAL* symposium and spread the word to your colleagues. Location, travel and virus exposure are no excuses for not attending! Registration will open in September 2020. More information will be coming soon!

Access the 2020 symposium website at <https://pmsymposium.umd.edu/pm2020/>

About the Author



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Ms. Kathleen Frankle has worked at the University of Maryland for over 20 years. She has significant expertise in the development and marketing of education and training programs, both online and in-person. Currently, she is the Marketing Manager for the Project Management Center for Excellence. In this role, she has managed their annual Project Management Symposium since its inception, fostering its growth from 178 participants to over 500. Ms. Frankle also works for the Center for Advanced Transportation Technology as Program Manager for two nationally known advanced transportation education programs including the Operations Academy Senior Management Program and the Consortium for Innovative Training and Education (CITE) that offers online blended and independent study courses. Ms. Frankle can be contacted at kfrankle@umd.edu.