



# GAPPS

Global Alliance for Project  
Performance Standards

**A Framework for  
Performance Based Competency Standards for  
Program Managers**

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## Foreword

As program management has become a more widely recognized management approach, governments, individuals, and both public and private sector organizations have become interested in frameworks and standards that describe levels of acceptable workplace performance for program personnel.

The *Global Alliance for Project Performance Standards* (GAPPS) is a volunteer organization working to create such frameworks and standards by providing a forum for stakeholders from differing systems, backgrounds, and operating contexts to work together to address the needs of the global project and program management community.

These frameworks are intended to support the development and recognition of local standards and to provide a sound basis for mutual recognition and transferability of project and program management qualifications.

The GAPPS frameworks are intended to be used by businesses, academic institutions, training providers, professional associations, and government standards and qualifications bodies globally. Frameworks may be used “as is” to speed the development of local standards, or they may be adapted to local needs.

This document is the second produced by the GAPPS. In 2006 the GAPPS released the first version of *A Framework for Performance Based Competency Standards for Global Level 1 and 2 Project Managers*. Future documents may address sponsors, team members, and other roles involved with projects and programs.

*Note: Both program and programme are accepted ways of spelling this term. The GAPPS has adopted program as being the simpler and more widely used form. Program is used throughout this document except when referring to a document produced by an organization that uses the longer form.*

Version	Date	Summary of Changes
1.0	1 March 2011	Initial release
1.1	15 April 2011	Updated sections 4.3 and 4.4 to reflect final changes to ACDC Table; updated level ranges for role determination; added Appendix D
1.2	22 May 2011	Added missing names to list of contributors

# A Framework for Performance Based Competency Standards for Program Managers

## 1. Scope

This document contains a framework for performance based competency standards for three levels and six types of program manager. The contents of this document may be used “as is” to expedite the process of standards development, may be tailored to reflect cultural differences or local practice, or may be mapped to other standards to facilitate transferability of qualifications.

The GAPPS Framework consists of:

- A detailed approach to differentiating three levels of program manager based upon program management complexity.
- Eight units of performance based competency standards for the role of program manager.
- A description of six types of program manager based on which of the eight units apply.
- Supporting material to aid in the application of the standards.

This framework is intended to be used to assess threshold competency — demonstration of the ability to do something at a standard considered acceptable in the workplace. It is applicable to program managers in all fields of endeavour including, but not limited to: architecture, automotive, biotechnology, construction, defence and aerospace, design, education, engineering, financial services, government, government contracting, information systems, not-for-profit operations, pharmaceuticals, software, and telecommunications.

## 2. Performance Based Competency Standards

### 2.1 Overview

This section provides a brief overview of the subject of performance based competency standards (PBCS) for potential users of this document who are not familiar with the topic.

*Competent* comes from the Latin root *competere* which means “to be suitable.” In today’s workplace, the term “competent” is generally used to describe someone who is sufficiently skilled to perform a specified task or to fill a defined position — a competent physician, a competent salesperson, a competent plumber. Increasingly, organizations are interested in assessing the competency of individuals in order to guide employment and development decisions.

Broadly speaking, there are two major approaches to defining and assessing competency:

- *Attribute based* wherein personal attributes such as knowledge, skills, values, attitudes, and other characteristics are identified and assessed. Competency is inferred based on the presence of the necessary attributes.
- *Performance based* wherein work outcomes and performance levels are identified and assessed. Competency is inferred based on the demonstrated ability to satisfy the performance criteria.

PBCS, also called occupational competency standards, are widely used throughout the world and have been developed within the context of government endorsed standards and qualifications frameworks in Australia (Department of Employment, Education and Workplace Relations: DEEWR), New Zealand (New Zealand Qualifications Authority: NZQA), South Africa (South African Qualifications Authority: SAQA), and the United Kingdom (Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency: QCDA). Although all of these approaches are focused primarily on *performance based* competency assessment, some approaches do include aspects of *attribute based* competency assessment.

## 2.2 Design of the GAPPS Framework

PBCS typically address at least the following two questions:

- What is usually done in this occupation, profession, or role by competent performers?
- What standard of performance is usually considered acceptable to infer competency?

In the GAPPS standards, these questions are answered by defining:

- **Units of Competency**

A Unit of Competency defines a broad area of professional or occupational performance that is meaningful to practitioners and which is demonstrated by individuals in the workplace. This GAPPS framework includes eight Units of Competency.

- **Elements of Competency**

Elements of Competency describe the key components of work performance within a Unit. They describe *what* is done by individuals in the workplace but do not prescribe *how* the work is done. For example, program managers must “define risks and risk responses for the program,” but they can do it themselves or delegate the work to others. In addition, there are many different tools and techniques that they could use. This GAPPS framework includes a total of 28 Elements of Competency.

- **Performance Criteria**

Performance Criteria set out the type and/or level of performance required to demonstrate competency in each element. They describe observable results and/or actions in the workplace from which competent performance can be inferred. In the GAPPS framework, Performance Criteria can be satisfied in many different ways; there are no mandatory approaches, tools, or methodologies. This GAPPS framework includes a total of 105 Performance Criteria of which 75 are required for all roles.

- **Explanatory Statements**

Explanatory Statements help to ensure consistent interpretation of the Elements and the Performance Criteria by expanding on critical or significant aspects of them to enable consistent application in different contexts. Where the Explanatory Statements contain lists, the lists are generally illustrative and not exhaustive.

Although some of the terms and definitions of the GAPPS framework described above differ in some respects from other PBCS, the overall approach is consistent and compatible with generally accepted practice within the field of competency development and assessment.

The Performance Criteria in this document focus on *threshold* performance — demonstration of the ability to do something at a standard considered acceptable in the workplace. They do not measure *superior* performance — what the best program managers do. Superior performers should, however, be able to satisfy the threshold criteria without difficulty.

The GAPPS standards include the minimum number of Performance Criteria needed to infer competency. As a result, a candidate must satisfy all of the Performance Criteria in the applicable Units in order to be viewed as competent. In addition, the Performance Criteria represent different levels of detail. The number of Performance Criteria in a Unit or Element is not proportional to the amount of time or effort that a program manager must spend in that area to be viewed as competent.

The material in this document can also be used to support learning and development when applied by qualified educators and trainers. In order to provide such support, the GAPPS Framework would need to be expanded to address questions such as:

- What skills and knowledge are needed to demonstrate this standard of performance?
- What are the parameters for collecting evidence and assessing performance?

### 3. Programs and Program Management

#### 3.1 Definition of Program

The term *program* has been defined in many different ways. For example:

- “A temporary, flexible organisation structure created to coordinate, direct and oversee the implementation of a set of related projects and activities in order to deliver outcomes and benefits related to an organisation’s strategic objectives; a programme is likely to have a life that spans several years.” (*Managing Successful Programmes*, UK Office of Government Commerce, 2007)
- “A programme is a set of related projects and organisational changes put in place to achieve a strategic goal and to deliver the benefits that the organisation expects.” (*IPMA Competence Baseline*, International Project Management Association, 2006)
- “A group of related projects managed in a coordinated way to obtain benefits and control not available from managing them individually. Programs may include elements of related work outside the scope of the discrete projects in the program.” (*The Standard for Program Management*, Project Management Institute, 2008; adapted from *The Handbook of Project-Based Management*, J. Rodney Turner, 1992)

Other definitions of program tend to be conceptually similar to these three: all recognize that a program is expected to actually deliver benefits (rather than just create the potential for benefits), and all recognize the existence of multiple, discrete projects within a program.

The definitions are all close enough in meaning that it is not necessary to choose one in order to understand what a program is.

#### 3.2 Types of Programs

Programs and program management span a wide range of undertakings:

- Development or expansion of a major transportation system such as a subway or an urban highway
- Implementation of an Enterprise Resource Planning system and the supporting policies, processes, and procedures
- NASA’s Mission to Mars
- Organizational change to implement a new corporate strategy
- Projects done for health care clients by an engineering consulting firm
- Regional activities of an oil and gas extraction company

- Major weapons system acquisition
- Crisis response
- Information Technology (IT) department support for a single line function such as sales or engineering

And some key characteristics of programs often vary considerably:

- Program manager’s authority to originate or terminate projects
- Degree of integration with the sponsoring organization
- How the sponsoring organization will evaluate the program manager’s performance
- Number of projects
- Interdependence of projects
- Similarity of technical disciplines
- How the program is initiated and the criteria for termination

To determine the impact of these differences, GAPPS developed a typology of programs based largely on the work of Sergio Pellegrinelli (IJPM, 2005) and Alan Stretton (unpublished review of program management literature, 2007). A portion of that analysis is included in Figure 1, below. The entire typology is available on the GAPPS website.

Program Characteristic	Type of Program			
	Strategic Program	Operational Program	Multi-project Program	Mega-project
<b>General Purpose</b>	Deliver assets and benefits that are directly linked to attaining the sponsoring organization’s desired future state	Deliver assets and benefits that are critical to the sponsoring organization’s day-to-day operations	Achieve synergies from projects with common traits such as shared resources, similar clients, or product technology	Deliver a specific asset to the sponsoring organization
<b>Key Differentiating Feature</b>	Link to a specific business goal or strategic initiative	Relative interdependence of constituent projects	Relative independence of constituent projects	Significantly larger than the sponsoring organization’s typical projects
<b>Reason for Grouping Projects</b>	Early results influence decisions about later projects	Minimize negative impact on ongoing operations	Benefits expected from synergy	So much larger than the organization’s typical projects

**Figure 1: Extract from the GAPPS Program Typology**

Further analysis and extensive discussion with program managers led to the following conclusions:

- The role of the program manager is fundamentally the same for strategic programs, operational programs, and multi-project programs: the type of program does not affect the role.
- Although a mega-project is often called a program, the role of the manager of a mega-project is substantially different from that of the managers of the other program types. As a result, the role of mega-project manager is *not* covered by this framework.