SPACE EDUCATION AND OUTREACH SYMPOSIUM (E1)
SPACE WORKFORCE DEVELOPEMENT – CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES (7)

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ENABLING THE FUTURE THROUGH PROGRAM/PROJECT ACADEMIES

Abstract

The problems that complex projects seek to solve are novel in nature—they are often "firsts" or "onlies." Given that one-of-a-kind complex projects require innovation, learning is a precondition of success. From a competitive standpoint, the abilities to learn and apply knowledge are the only advantages an organization has in a world of complex projects.

A project academy is a response to the need for continuous learning in a complex project-based organization. By tailoring its approach to the unique needs of the project community while maintaining strategic alignment with the organization, a project academy can bridge a gap between the needs of the project workforce and those of the organization.

Like a project itself, a project learning organization has to be nimble and adaptive. Project knowledge is not timeless—it is local in nature and changes constantly. The project academy has to follow suit and be adaptive to the needs of its customer, the project workforce. There are other stakeholders in the project academy, but the direct customer is the project practitioner.

The NASA Academy of Program/Project Engineering Leadership focuses its activities at three levels: individual practitioners, project teams, and the organization. The academy offers competency-based training, developmental assignments, and hands-on opportunities to help individual practitioners develop their skills at each level of their careers. It currently supports over 100 project and engineering teams by offering a variety of tools and services, including: online assessments measuring team performance, workshops focusing on team effectiveness, technical life cycle support, and intensive coaching, mentoring, and consulting with expert practitioners. At the agency-wide level, it invests in knowledge sharing strategies that emphasize the power of telling stories through forums and publications in order to help create a community of practitioners who are reflective and geared toward sharing.

By addressing the needs of individuals, teams, and the community as a whole, the academy creates multiple "touch points" for professional development. In the process, individuals build their competencies skills, teams get the support they need in the field, and the agency matures as a learning organization. It is a flexible model that continues to adapt as the needs of NASA's workforce, projects, and stakeholders evolve.