

# Developing and Applying the GAPPS Project Management Standards

A presentation by Dr. Alicia Aitken, CEO Human Systems International and, Member of the Global Alliance for Project Performance Standards (GAPPS)

The Global Alliance for Project Performance Standards (GAPPS) is a group of dedicated volunteers working together to unite the world of project management by mapping a path through multiple and competing standards. Over the preceding years many different standards for project management had emerged from various professional associations and government agencies. The resultant crush of standards, assessments, certifications and qualifications had begun to lead to confusion for individuals and organisations. The seeds for GAPPS were sown way back in the early 90's when a group of international project professionals decided to get together and share their stories, ideas and experience around project management standards and search for a way to work together to bring about global co-operation and collaboration. The vision of GAPPS is,

**GAPPS is the INDEPENDENT reference benchmark for alignment and transportability of Project and Program standards and qualifications**

The purpose of the GAPPS is to:

- Facilitate, develop, approve, publish, promote, maintain and review global project management standards
- Facilitate, develop, approve, publish, promote, maintain and review usage guidelines for project management standards
- NOT consult, advise, express opinion or develop products based upon standards and guidelines
- NOT provide training, assessment, certifications or qualifications to individuals based upon standards and guidelines

The members of the GAPPS are a collection of governments, professional associations, universities/education providers and Industry. As a founding member, SPM has been on the GAPPS journey for several years working closely with other members such as the Australian, NZ and South African government project management

standards agencies, other professional associations such as IPMA, AIPM, asapm, aace, PMSA, PMAJ, Universities from around the world including, Bond, Skema, the British University in Dubai, APM Group, Athabasca and UTS. Industry partners come from large and small organisations including Shell, Motorola, BG Group, RBS and Project Performance Group, Interlink Technologies, Living Planit and Human Systems.

The GAPPS develops performance based competency standards that are based on the core elements of various national and local standards. The intention is that the GAPPS standards can then form the "spine" against which other standards can be mapped. Performance based standards are a particular format of standards that describe "what" people in a particular role need to be able to demonstrate they can do. They do not describe "how" each activity must be completed. To date the GAPPS has published a Project Manager standard and a Program Manager standard. These are freely available on the website [www.globalpmstandards.org](http://www.globalpmstandards.org) for all individuals and organisations to download and use. The GAPPS is now working on the development of Sponsor and Project Controls Standards.

## Case Study Using the GAPPS Project Manager Standard

The GAPPS has been used by many different organisations in many different ways. Some organisations use the standards to help develop their job descriptions for project managers, other use the GAPPS standards to frame their recruitment interview questions. Some use just the complexity rating system the CIFTER to analyse the management complexity of the projects in their portfolio and check that the right resources are assigned to the right projects. Others use the mappings that GAPPS has produced to understand "which PM accreditation, credential or qualification is the best fit for our organisation." The following case study details one example of how an organisation can use the GAPPS Project Manager standards to drive organisational capability improvement.



Dr. Alicia Aitken speaking at the BCA-SPM Seminar in October 2012

## Background

A large Australian based organisation with operations extending into Asia. This organisation has a goal of improving project management capability from mediocre to excellent in 3 years. A comprehensive improvement program was launched that included;

- Methodology revamp
- Intranet redesign
- EPM software implementation
- Baseline competence of project manager population
- Develop & Implement a comprehensive training curriculum

GAPPS Project Manager Standard was selected as the base standard for assessing the current competence of 300+ project managers. The GAPPS PM standard was reviewed and adapted to suit the particular context within this organisation with the various elements mapped back to the corporate methodology. It was found that there were some additional topics that were particular to this organisation that needed to be included in the assessment, so additional units of competence were developed and added to the GAPPS core units. An online assessment was developed using the assessment model developed by Dr Lynn Crawford during her PhD research into the topic of assessing project managers for developmental purposes. It is important with self-assessment to use a scale that is objective to allow candidates to answer accurately and honestly. Scales that require people to judge how proficient they are, are often fraught with inaccuracy as people are hesitant to rate themselves as "expert" and below expert individuals have difficulty distinguishing how skilled they are relative to others.

The organisation was then ready to conduct their assessment! However, the initial review of the HR system to create the list of candidates revealed a common problem, many of the "project managers" on the list were found to have the title but were not actually performing the role, others who

# SPM's Participation in



SPM has been actively participating in GAPPS. Since its commencement in 2003, GAPPS has held 28 working sessions in different countries, covering 5 continents. SPM has been attending majority of the working sessions.

SPM has contributed to the development of the Global Project Manager standards and the Program Manager standard of GAPPS. Our SPM representative, Yip Kim Seng, participated in the endorsement process for the Endorsed Provider scheme – based on GAPPS Quality Assurance model to enable an organization to enhance the value of its specific project management certification process by including the “stamp of approval” from GAPPS. Kim Seng is currently also a board member of GAPPS.

Besides attending the working sessions that are held approximately 3 times a year, SPM has hosted 2 of them – first in 2006 and the second last year in November.

delegation from Australia, Austria, Indonesia, UK and US. We took the opportunity to introduce our overseas guests to our new Gardens by the Bay. We had the Project Director of PM Link, to brief them on the project before a tour of the two conservatories. As it was Deepavali season, we took them to Little India to savor Indian cuisine and the festive sight and sound.

## Working Session 27 in Cape Canaveral, Florida, USA

NASA, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration of USA, hosted the WS27 meeting in Radisson Hotel from 13<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> February 2013. Besides working on the development of Project Sponsor and Project Control standards, GAPPS participants were treated to a tour of Kennedy Space Centre at Cape Canaveral.



## Working Session 28 in London, UK

From 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> June 2013, WS28 was held in The Cumberland Hotel in central London. The group continued working on developing the Project Control standards.

For both working sessions 27 and 28, SPM was represented by 1<sup>st</sup> VP, Yip Kim Seng. President, Dr Ting Seng Kiong will represent SPM at the Working Session 29, in Edinburgh, Scotland in September.

Continual engagement with PM practitioners and representatives of international organisations at GAPPS forums contributes to keeping SPM at forefront of Project Management knowledge and development.



GAPPS WS27 team taking in the wonders of the Kennedy Space Centre's Vehicle Assembly Building where space shuttles are built.



GAPPS WS28 team relaxing over dinner after a day's work



GAPPS WS26 team having their discussion in Singapore Recreation Club



GAPPS WS26 team (with spouses/partners) at the Gardens by the Bay



GAPPS WS26 team taking in the Deepavali festivities in Little India

## Working Session 26 in Singapore

GAPPS WS26 was held in Singapore Recreation Club on 8<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> November. It was attended by 17 persons. SPM invited 3 partners to join in the proceeding to have an appreciation of GAPPS work. They are Ms Helen Chen of the Centre for Public Project Management, Dr Luke Peh of SIM University, and Chan Kum Yew of TÜV SÜD PSB Learning Pte. Ltd. SPM Council members, Bernard Ho, Ruby Lai, Yuen Mun Wye and Yip Kim Seng played hosts to the

*The GAPPS Work Session was a golden opportunity for the unique alliance of stakeholders with diverse backgrounds, in the project management community, both worldwide and in Singapore, to congregate to learn from one another and to promote mutual recognition and interoperability of national or local project management standards. I have learnt much from the intensive interaction over the 3 days. I would like to thank SPM for being such a gracious and wonderful host.*

**Dr Luke Peh, UniSIM**

were known to be working as project managers were not on the list as they were “hiding” under different titles to avoid detection. A lot of effort was put into cleaning up the data on the HR system before a final list could be obtained.

The results of the assessment were used to identify development opportunities for individuals including work experience, coaching and training. The assessment results were mapped to the training curriculum offered by the organisation and individuals were given a list of recommended training courses based on an algorithm that took into account the number of years of experience they had, assessment results and training courses that had been completed recently. The aggregated

results were used by the organisation to identify potential areas for improvement across the organisations where

- The methodology was weak and underpinning weaker scores in competency
- There were cultural nuances within the context of this organisation that were impacting on the take up of certain aspects of the project management methods
- The project manager assigned to the project was either over or under qualified to be managing the risks associated with the management complexity of the project they were running

