

Learning tools in place for federal procurement community

by Anne Phillips



1998. THE FEDERAL PROCUREMENT and materiel management practitioners began to coalesce as a community. They sought recognition as professionals through the development of a certification program.

2006. Success. The federal procurement, materiel management and real property communities – all falling within life cycle asset management – now have, for the first time, the opportunity to be recognized as certified professionals through the newly established Certification Program, a component of the *Professional Development and Certification Program (PDCP) for the Procurement, Materiel Management and Real Property Community*. Federal employees will be provided with the learning tools to help them acquire required “skills, knowledge and expertise” through a structured program. The staff of the program management office at the Treasury Board Secretariat and the Personnel Certification Division of the Canadian General Standards Board (CGSB) are on a cross Canada tour providing information sessions for community members (of whom there are roughly 6,000).

PDCP team members, Colleen Post and Micheline Brunette, and CGSB Certification Manager, Roger Pharand, were in Ottawa on March 9 and 10 to outline the program to procurement, materiel management and real property specialists, encouraging them to enrol – and not just because they are ready to see the program in action, but because there is money from Treasury Board for the Canada School of Public Service to provide specific fundamental (required training) courses in these functions for the next two fiscal years.

And money matters. Training budgets have been strained, cut and at times zeroed in recent years under Program Review, but the new *Learning, Training and Development Policy*, in effect January 1, 2006, makes deputy heads of departments responsible for ensuring that “functional

specialists successfully complete training and/or validate knowledge associated with their professional and legal responsibilities.” They are also responsible for ensuring that “their organizations have adequate governance, processes, strategies and capacity” to implement the new policy. Departments will have to consider putting training back in budgets.

The comprehensive *Certification Program Manual* and the *Certification Application and Maintenance Handbook* contain detailed descriptions of the whole program, Certification Levels I-III, and a step-by-step process to apply and succeed, as well as the necessary forms. These documents and others are available at www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/pd-pp. The website also has an online core competency self-assessment tool to help each candidate determine where they are today and what they need to do to attain each certification level.

To start the process, ideally, a manager would use the Web-based assessment tool to create a profile of the competencies and behavioural elements that each position requires. If a manager did not create the job profile, the employee could do so and then discuss it with the manager before proceeding with the assessment process. Once the profile is finalized, the employee would then assess themselves against each line item of the job profile. The system then creates a personal gap analysis that not only identifies the competencies to focus on, but prioritizes the results and provides a list of recognized courses available to meet each requirement. This analysis is the basis of each candidate’s individual learning plan.

To be eligible to apply for Level I certification, a candidate must have at least three years of experience, two of which must be in the federal government. Everyone must first certify at Level I before moving on to Levels II and III. Where candidates believe they have already taken courses that cover the required material

or have the relevant knowledge and experience in a given area, they may apply for an equivalency. The certification program manager, assisted by a review panel of functional, policy, program and learning experts, will assess whether the candidate’s credentials meet the established criteria. Certified professionals must recertify at the end of five years. Requirements for maintenance and recertification are also outlined in the handbook.

The final step – successful completion of a knowledge exam – results in certification as either a Certified Federal Specialist in Procurement (CFSP) or a Certified Federal Specialist in Materiel Management (CFSMM). Candidates may acquire both designations over time if they are involved in both these functions, starting with the one in which they are the most proficient. Candidates are assessed against the competencies, knowledge and experience requirements outlined in the CGSB Standard for *Competencies of the Federal Government Procurement, Materiel Management and Real Property Community* – CAN/CGSB-192.1-2005.

At the end of the day federal procurement and materiel management specialists will be able to exercise more control over their own career paths within government and move more easily from one department to another. There will be greater consistency of skill sets across departments and agencies, contributing to better life-cycle management of the government’s assets. Best of all, they will be identifiable as professionals, certified by the federal government in their chosen field.

Questions can be directed to Colleen Post (613-941-3865), Micheline Brunette (613-954-4688) or Roger Pharand (819-956-0393). *MP*