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How to Pass (or Avoid) a PMP Application Audit – Frequently Asked Questions

Q: How can I avoid an audit?

A: According to PMI, applications are selected for audit at random. However, this could mean that they randomly audit 10% of good applications and 95% of weak or suspicious applications. To avoid problems, make sure you have a well-written application that avoids anything that raises a “red flag” with PMI. The tools at FPMcertify.com/products can help with this.

Q: In your experience, what are the chances of getting audited?

A: From the hundreds of PMP applications I have helped with, I find that about 10% of well-qualified applications get selected for audit, but applications that contain wording that raises “red flags” in the preliminary review get looked at much more closely and audited at a much higher rate.

Q: What are some things that can cause a PMP application to have problems?

There are lots of very subtle things in a PMP application that can cause the PMI reviewer to arbitrarily decide the application doesn’t meet their requirements. PMI obviously won’t tell you what these things are, but the most common concern I see is wording that makes the PMI reviewer arbitrarily decide the project should be classified as non-qualifying “operations” rather than a qualifying professional project.

But there are lots of other things that can raise red flags such as wording or job titles that make the PMI reviewer doubt that you were the one actually directing and leading the project activities in the application.

Q: What happens if I am audited by PMI?

A: A normal audit involves a yes or no question sent to your contacts listed on your application about whether the information in your application is accurate. PMI may do more in-depth audits if there are concerns raised during the normal audit. In a normal audit, you will download a PDF form that you email to each of your project contacts. The form contains the information you put into that project on your application including the project title, description, contact information, your role, etc. In other words, your contacts only verify the part of your application that relates to their project (not your other experience or qualifications). Your contact would need to print off the form, physically sign the part that says they agree the information is correct, and mail the form back to you after signing across the back of the envelope. If they do not agree that the information is accurate, they also have a space in the form to explain why. You then mail the unopened envelopes for your projects to PMI and include a copy of your university diploma or transcript and proof of your completion of a 35-hour project management course. See page 3 of this FAQ for more wording advice.

Q: How do I know if my contacts would agree to what I put in my application about their project?

A: Send them an email beforehand with a “heads up” containing what you put in your application. Explain to them that it is for your PMP application and will only be seen by PMI and ask them if they would agree with what you are claiming in the case that PMI follows up (audits) your application. See page 3 for an example.

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Q: How should I choose who to put for the project contact? Does it affect whether I'll be approved?

A: Choose someone you were accountable to on the project. Don't use a co-worker. Normally use the most senior person involved in your project who would be able to agree that your application is accurate. During the 5 days or so that a PMI reviewer may spend vetting your application, they may do a few LinkedIn or Internet searches on your project contacts to try to understand who it is that is vouching for you for your project. Sometimes red flags are raised if your project contact is not someone who had a significant management role in the project (i.e., don't provide a line supervisor, friend, or project coordinator as a contact). Although it can be tempting to use the people who we are on the friendliest terms with, sometimes using a contact with a more impressive and senior role can help avoid the suspicion that a candidate does not have sufficient experience leading and directing project activities. So yes, having credible contacts with impressive job titles likely helps avoid further scrutiny of your application.

When PMI is concerned that an applicant's experience might not qualify because it is too focused on "operations" rather than "leading and directing project management activities", their decision to approve an application is *very subjective*. If a project contact has an impressive profile on the web/LinkedIn, a reviewer is more likely to assume that the project experience meets the PMP requirements because an impressive project contact is vouching for the experience. In contrast, if your project contact has a less-impressive-looking profile/job title, a reviewer may assume that you are just using a peer/friend/co-worker who will agree to whatever you wrote because they like you, regardless of whether the claims are accurate or not. You need to consider how your application will be judged by the PMI reviewer who has concerns over whether what you have done meets the requirements of leading and directing project activities in each of the required PMBOK process areas.

Q: Can you send me a sample audit form or other documents from past audits?

A: As part of my agreement with PMI, plus privacy considerations, I am not allowed to share that.

Q: What if my project contact refuses to verify that my information is accurate?

A: You would need to contact PMI by email or phone and explain the situation to them. If the reason is that your contact is unreachable or just doesn't want to participate, PMI will likely allow you to substitute a different contact that you were accountable to for that project. If the reason is that your contact does not agree with what you put for the project that would be up to the PMI reviewer on what to do. They might allow you to substitute a different contact, revise what you wrote and get the revised one verified, substitute a different project and organization, invite you to reapply, or ban you from reapplying (though likely only in proven cases of fraud). To avoid this, it is ideal where possible to email something like I what I will paste below and ensure your contact is willing to agree with what you wrote in your application. Most of us in project management want to support each other's careers and are happy to verify the claimed experience, especially if you remind them it is for a one-time application and not something that will be posted online. You may need to explain to your contact the meaning of some of the terminology in your application like why you put your *role* as "project manager", when you might not have been THE office project manager for a project (see the example email later in this FAQ).

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Q: What should I send to my contacts before I submit my application?

A: Here is a sample heads-up letter that I have written to send to contacts. Since it and the rest of this document is copyrighted, you need to rephrase it in your own words:

"Hi XXXXX,

I wanted to get back in touch with you to let you know I am applying for the Project Management Professional (PMP) certification from PMI.org. I put you as the contact as my former Director in case PMI wants to verify the project experience I had with XXXXXXXXXX. I hope you don't mind. If PMI contacts you, I wanted to give you a heads up. If you have any questions or concerns, please email me.

Note that the information I have on my PMP application below is only for purposes of the application for the PMP certification, I do not use that wording in job applications or business development. For example, on the PMP application, I have my job title and role showing "Project Manager" but this is because PMI defines a project manager as someone who leads and directs some of the project activities. I am not claiming that I was THE official project manager for the project, and I don't use that wording on my resume/CV.

Thanks, Tim McLaren

FYI, here is the project experience I listed during my time working with XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX between 2003-2005:

Job Title: Business Analyst and Project Manager

Role: Project Manager

Industry: Resources

Project Title: XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

Started: Sep 2003

Finished: Dec 2005

PROJECT DETAILS

109.00hrs Initiating the Project

85.00hrs Planning the Project

160.00hrs Executing the Project

114.50hrs Controlling and Monitoring the Project

53.00hrs Closing the Project

Total: 520.5hrs

**Note: the above hours include 405.5 billable hours plus 115 hours spent on unpaid project research and planning activities

Role Description: I led and directed.... etc. etc...."

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Q: My application was randomly selected for audit. Any advice for me?

A: The biggest risk is that your project contact doesn't respond, or worse, tells PMI they disagree with your described project experience. This can be avoided by asking your project contact beforehand to review what you have written about their project and **making sure your application is written accurately but using the PMBOK wording that PMI will be looking for**. If you are audited, you can help speed up your things by reminding your project contacts to send their completed forms to you in a sealed and signed envelope. And you should send everything together to PMI in one envelope.

Q: I haven't received anything from my project contact after sending them an audit form. What should I do?

A: It can take some project contacts several reminders to send you back the sealed audit form envelope, so be prepared for that. Also, it is helpful to let them know that audits are a normal part of the PMP application process and that you appreciate their support of your PMP application.

Q: What should I do if my project contact sent PMI my audit response letter rather than sending it to me?

A: Don't worry about it. PMI will usually email you to say that they received it and you won't be penalized. But it is better if you can **avoid anything that brings extra attention to your application** in the first place. This includes avoiding contacting PMI about your application if possible.

Q: What should I do to make sure I pass the PMP application audit?

A: Re-read each of the answers above. And try to avoid getting "randomly" selected for an audit in the first place. Make sure you have a well-written application that avoids anything that raises concerns with PMI.

Keep in mind that PMI reviewers review hundreds of applications and are usually just following a script looking for various things that raise "red flags" with the application. Use the tools at FPMcertify.com/products to help you generate a successful application. If you use my FastPM Wizard or FastPM Concierge, you won't need to spend further time learning about the PMP application process. And you won't need to worry about all the little things that can cause problems getting your PMP application approved.

For more information or to learn about our FastPM Application Wizard and our money-back guarantee, go to FPMcertify.com .

Hope this is helpful!

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