Building a Culture of Continuous Learning Beyond CPM

Celebrating Alabama's Progress
Certified Public Manager® (CPM) Program
CPM Solutions Alabama 2021

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The research, findings, and recommendations presented in this white paper do not represent the views of any agency or organization, but rather the collective educational research and analysis from a diverse group of participants in the Certified Public Manager training program.

1. Introduction

Agencies in Alabama are investing time and money every year to have their current and future public sector leaders attend Certified Public Manager® (CPM) training. The mission of the program, facilitated by Auburn University at Montgomery's Office of Continuing Education, is to develop and strengthen the leadership behaviors and management skills of current and prospective managers by offering a dynamic, comprehensive, competency-based, and nationally accredited leadership development program to governmental managers employed in the public sector (Kelley, p.2).

> Until organizations can increase their percentage of engaged managers, they have little hope of increasing their percentage of engaged employees.
>
> Gallup. State of the American Manager.

Participants are trained in core competencies, such as leading people, developing self, and personal and organizational integrity. This is accomplished through scheduled management courses, projects, journal response evaluations, and leaderpack assignments. The journal entries and leaderpack assignments demonstrate understanding of the course content and encourage engagement in personal reflection. Participants are then able to take these teachings and apply them in their career.

After completing both CPM I and CPM II, the graduate is awarded a nationally recognized designation for public sector managers. While this in itself is something to celebrate, having a continuing program of leadership development after graduation would be even more impactful and benefit CPM graduates, their agencies and, therefore, the State of Alabama as a whole.

Continual learning and leadership development are powerful tools, so significant that making it a priority is one of three actions listed in Gallup's "State of the American Manager" that strengthens the engagement of managers (p.25). An engaged employee is "involved in, enthusiastic about and committed to their work and workplace" ("U.S. Employee Engagement"). This increase of engagement, in turn, cascades to other employees. Having CPM graduates continue their leadership development could potentially have far-reaching effects within their agency, such as increased retention, strengthened workplace culture, and a continued leadership pipeline for succession planning.

In this white paper, we will offer recommendations on additional programs or features that could be offered to further the continual development of CPM graduates through two avenues: the State Departments and Agencies who employ CPM graduates and the Alabama Society for Certified Public Managers® (ASCPM).

2. Current Continuous Learning Opportunities for CPM Graduates

Auburn University at Montgomery (AUM)

The facilitator of Alabama's CPM program, Auburn University at Montgomery (AUM), offers continuous learning opportunities to CPM graduates. AUM awards six graduate-level credit hours to Certified Public Managers® toward the elective credit requirement for AUM's Master of Public Administration (MPA) or Master of Business Administration (MBA) program. This opportunity is a win-win for CPM graduates. Not only are they able to build upon the foundational leadership skills learned in CPM through earning a graduate degree, they also save money in the process. AUM's website lists the cost of one graduate credit hour as $421. Therefore, the six credit hours earned by completing the CPM program saves Certified Public Managers a total of $2,526 in tuition expenses and puts them two classes ahead upon entering the master's program.

Also, earning a graduate degree can benefit the careers of CPM graduates, as it allows some state employees to accelerate their career advancement. A master's degree can count as a year of experience for some job classifications in the state merit system. For example, promotion to a Medicaid Administrator II requires permanent status as a Medicaid Administrator I and three years of experience in the field, but a master's degree in any field of study may substitute for one year of required experience. CPM graduates can use the opportunity to attend CPM afforded them by their agencies to take advantage of AUM's graduate programs and springboard their career in state government.

Alabama Society of Certified Public Managers

Graduation from CPM is the end of formal leadership training for many Certified Public Managers. According to the 2019 CPM Annual Report & Program Survey published by the
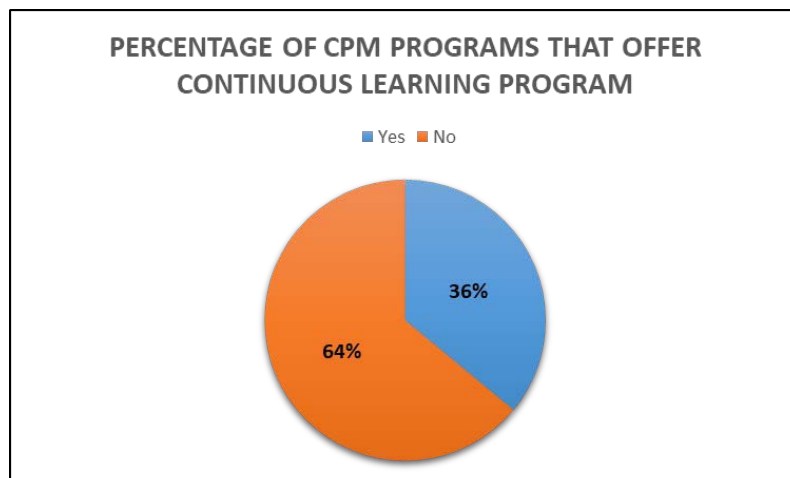

Figure 1. Percentage of nationally accredited CPM programs that offer a continuous learning program to their CPM graduates.

National Certified Public Manager Consortium, 64% of nationally certified CPM programs do not currently offer a continuous learning program for their graduates (q.84) (Figure 1). Alabama graduates are fortunate in that they are among the 36% of programs that do. The Alabama Society of Certified

Public Managers (ASCPM) invites CPM students and graduates to join in their efforts to "promote ongoing education, partnership, and cooperation in public service" ("ASCPM"). ASCPM's volunteer officers and board members work tirelessly (in addition to their full-time jobs) to provide opportunities for continuing education, networking, and community engagement.

Joining ASCPM has many direct benefits for its members. Monthly meetings include guest speakers that discuss topics relevant to leadership and state government. For example, members who attended the May 2021 meeting had the pleasure of hearing Governor Kay Ivey address the group. ASCPM also offers Lunch-and-Learns and social events throughout the year, as well as an annual seminar, to keep members connected to fellow Certified Public Managers in the state and keep the leadership skills learned in the CPM program sharp. ASCPM is a great way for CPM graduates to stay on the path of continuous learning.

Prior to COVID-19 restrictions, all ASCPM monthly meetings and seminars were held in-person. These in-person meetings had many advantages. Face-to-face contact has the benefit of one-on-one networking and is very conducive to getting to know fellow members of the society. In-person gatherings also allow for incidental conversations to take place around the main discussion, which enables members to share information in a less formal way. However,

when COVID-19 hindered social gatherings, ASCPM officers did a fantastic job of quickly transitioning societal events to a virtual platform via Zoom.

According to our discussion with ASCPM leaders, these virtual meetings have increased attendance and participation in the society's events during a difficult time. One explanation for increased attendance may be that CPM graduates from outside of the Montgomery area are now able to participate in these events. Prior to virtual meetings, members attending a monthly meeting were required to drive to a predetermined location, usually in the downtown Montgomery area, attend a one-hour lunchtime meeting, and then drive back to their agency of employment. This was not feasible for any CPM graduate working outside of the Montgomery area. Virtual meetings provide a more flexible accommodation while graduates continue to serve the needs of their employers as well as address the challenges faced within their own families. Virtual meetings have the added benefit of being recorded so that members unable to attend the meetings in real-time can watch the videos later and not miss out on any valuable learning opportunities that took place in their absence. ASCPM leaders indicated they plan to continue using video conferencing tools in some capacity in the future in hopes that the society's membership base will continue to expand across the state.

3. Continuous Learning Opportunities Provided by Other States' CPM Programs.

Alabama's CPM program is one of 36 programs accredited by the National Certified Public Manager Consortium (Kelley, p.2). Our team researched the CPM programs offered by neighboring states and found that many of these programs have implemented various

	Continuous Learning Programs/Practices Offered				
	CPM Recertification	Annual Seminar	CPM with Excellence	Alumni Society	Active Outreach Tools (Newsletter, Social Media, Website, etc.)
Alabama		X		X	X
Arkansas			X	X	
Florida		X		X	X
Mississippi		X	X	X	X
Tennessee	X	X			

procedures and practices to enable and encourage continuous learning among their CPM graduates. These findings are summarized in table above and the sections below.

Arkansas

The Arkansas CPM program has developed a CPM with Excellence designation to acknowledge the participants' commitment to life-long learning. Alumni of the Arkansas Certified Public Manager® program can earn the designation by completing 30 or more professional development hours in a single year. Alumni who earn CPM with Excellence for two or more years earn special recognition. After two years of earning CPM With Excellence, for example, alumni reach the amethyst level, noted by an amethyst jewel on a CPM with Excellence lapel pin. Dr. Elizabeth Lundeen, the director of the Arkansas CPM program, explained that typically 3-5 CPM alumni receive the CPM with Excellence designation each year.

Florida

Florida boasts one of the most successful CPM programs in the country. As of September 2020, the Florida CPM program has graduated a total of 7,231 CPM designees since the start of the program in 1979, more than any other state (Florida Press Release, 2020). As a result, Florida has gone to great lengths to ensure that their CPM graduates flourish beyond graduation. For example, Florida's CPM program guide outlines "Organizational Strategies for CPM Success," suggested organizational best practices that agencies can implement to increase their return on investment of sending employees through the program (Florida CPM program guide, p.23). These strategies include developing a mentoring program that allows CPM graduates to coach new participants through their CPM journey, enacting a formal reward system to recognize graduates for their accomplishments, and supporting the continuing education efforts of Florida Society of Certified Public Managers (FSCPM) by encouraging employee participation.

FSCPM is an alumni association of participants and graduates of Florida's CPM program. With local chapters all over the state, FSCPM uses various outreach tools to keep graduates engaged and involved in the CPM "world" post-graduation. The society distributes a quarterly newsletter, maintains a very informative and user-friendly website, and manages active social media accounts on Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn.

Mississippi

The Mississippi CPM program has a CPM with Excellence designation similar to Arkansas. The CPM with Excellence program is designed to encourage graduates to continue their professional development and to renew their commitment to life-long learning. The participant attains a new level distinction every two years, with Excellence Level V being the highest. In addition to a required number of professional development hours to be completed, the participant must also attend the CPM with Excellence Seminar and receive a passing score on the Seminar exam ("Certified Public Manager with Excellence").

Tennessee

The Tennessee CPM program requires their graduates to recertify every other year. To be eligible for recertification, graduates must complete sixteen hours of professional development activities every two years. The Tennessee program hosts an annual alumni event, which includes speakers and leadership content that earns attendees eight hours toward the recertification requirement. Therefore, a graduate that attends the alumni event every year earns the required hours to recertify ("Certified Public Manager Tennessee"). This makes the recertification process easy and convenient for the graduates, promoting increased participation in the program.

4. CPM Graduate Survey Results

To gauge CPM graduates' interest in current ASCPM activities and to solicit suggestions
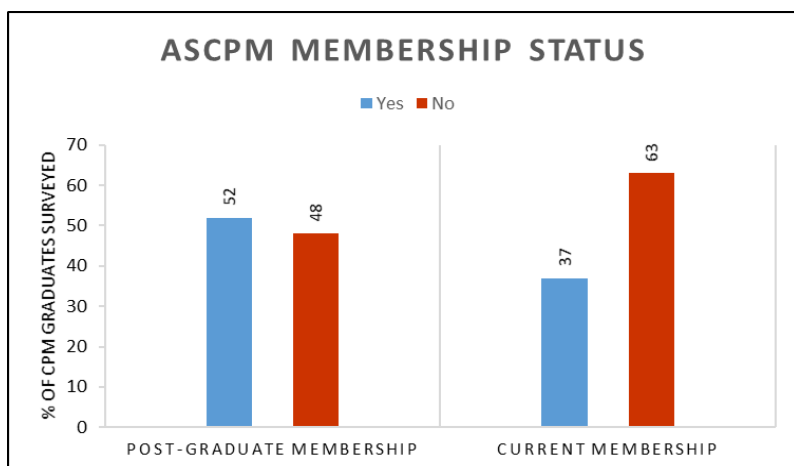

Figure 2. ASCPM membership status of CPM graduates, post graduation vs. current.

for future continuing education opportunities offered by ASCPM, an anonymous online survey was sent to 640 CPM graduates who completed the program between 2010 and 2020. With a response rate of 13%, results indicated that 52% of the survey responders were members of ASCPM at some point after completing the CPM program (Figure 2). However, only 37% still currently hold membership in the society. Retention of ASCPM members may be an area for improvement.

Figure 3 shows the degree to which survey responders are satisfied with the current continuing education opportunities offered by ASCPM. Twenty-three percent of CPM graduates are satisfied "to a great extent", 29% are "somewhat" satisfied, and 37% are "not at all" satisfied with current ASCPM offerings.
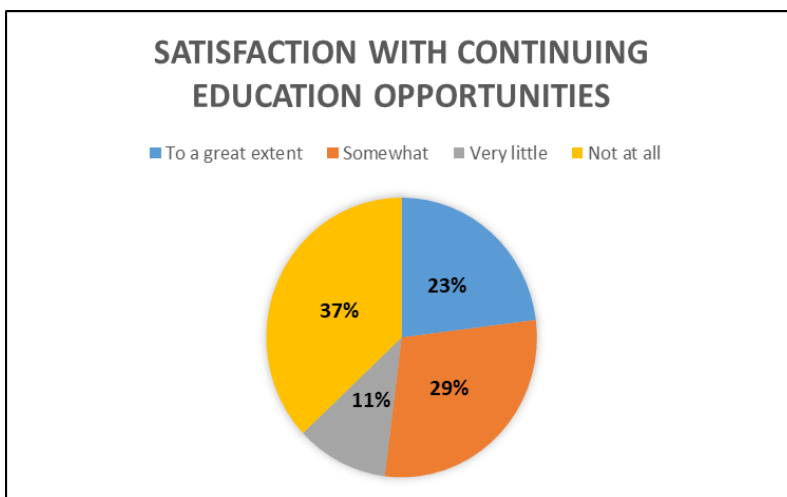
Figure 3. ASCPM members' degree of satisfaction with current continuing education opportunities offered.

In the survey, we asked for suggestions and ideas on continuing education opportunities that ASCPM could offer. The responses covered several different topic areas. Some expressed interest in access to refresher training courses on CPM topics, training offered at more convenient times, virtual training options so it would be easier for them to attend, and training on current issues facing

management. Some asked to expand on the current networking and social activities, such as hosting group events at Camp Chandler and distributing a regular newsletter. A few indicated they were either unaware of ASCPM or what it had to offer. We took these responses and used them to guide our recommendations.

5. Organizational Best Practices for Continuous Learning

Organizations must have a strategy for continuously developing leaders. State agencies and departments that have already taken steps to develop their leaders by sending them to participate in the CPM program should establish several organizational best practices to sustain those leaders' growth and foster a culture of continuous learning beyond CPM.

Mentoring

One way to continue a CPM graduate's growth and education, as well as pass on their experience to new CPM students from the agency, is by an agency- or department-sponsored mentoring program.

Mentorship occurs when an advisor or mentor provides guidance to a mentee or protégé, sharing valuable experience, skills, and knowledge. Building a mentoring program in the workplace facilitates educational opportunities that can help employees advance in their

> "Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other"
>
> John F. Kennedy

careers. Mentorship programs can increase employee retention, boost workplace satisfaction, foster professional growth, and groom prospective managers for promotion opportunities (Whitely).

Mentoring has benefits for both protégé and mentor. The benefits to the protégé include instilling professional values, improving leadership skills, and improving management skills while increasing leadership capacities.   A mentoring program also benefits the mentor by increasing their self-awareness, expanding their own professional development, enhancing their focus on establishing healthy culture, and forging strong relationships with key stakeholders within the Agency. (Hayes)

One key decision when developing a mentoring program is design. There are multiple models of mentoring. The more traditional model is one-on-one mentoring, where one person within as organization is paired with a more senior member of the organization. Other models include group mentoring, peer mentoring, and mosaic mentoring ("Models").

Other steps in a successful mentoring program include correctly matching the mentor and mentee, establishing guidelines for the relationship, and measuring the effectiveness of the program (*How to Start*).

Needs Assessment

When an agency has established a commitment to continuous learning for promotable employees, it is critical to determine what training and development is most appropriate. A thorough learning needs assessment is the foundation of a robust learning and organizational development program. A learning needs assessment is a systematic process of asking questions, comparing answers, and making informed decisions about what to do next to improve performance ("Learning").

Identifying training needs for employees require an agency's careful scrutiny of mission objectives, personnel, production, and costs. A training needs assessment is useful in identifying:

- Organizational goals and its effectiveness in achieving the goals.

- Gaps and discrepancies between employee skills and the skills required for effective job performance or promotion opportunities.

- Conditions under which the training and development activity will occur.

The end result of a needs assessment is a more precise picture of training needs. Without a clear understanding of needs, training efforts are not effective. The training will only be successful and perceived as such if the program is developed and carried out to meet those identified needs (Brown).

Commitment from Leadership

In order to create a more desirable workplace, increase job satisfaction, improve the overall organization environment, and help in reducing the risk of turnover, leaders need to understand the importance of investing in training and development opportunities (Anderson).

LinkedIn's *2018 Workplace Learning Report* listed the #2 challenge for talent development is "getting managers to take an active role in employee learning" (p.22). Based on this same report, more employees would devote time to learning if their managers instructed them to complete specific courses (p.26). This shows that direct involvement from managers has an impact on their employee's dedication to training.

6. Recommendations

Based on the research, the team offers the following recommendations to strengthen and expand continued education to benefit graduates of the CPM program.

Mentoring within an Agency

Each agency should create a mentoring program for continual learning. There are five key factors that will establish a successful mentoring program (*How to Start*).

Design → Attract → Connect → Guide → Measure
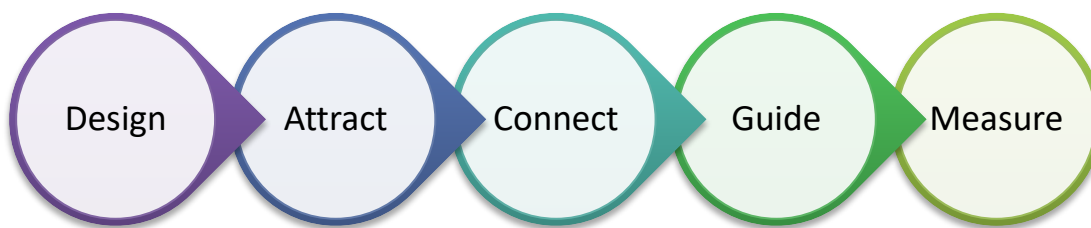
Design Within each agency, a mentoring program leader will need to be selected to champion the operation. The structure should be designed so that a CPM graduate is paired with a coworker newly enrolled in the program, and they remain partnered for the entire CPM course duration. The purpose is for the mentor to provide real-world scenarios where CPM competencies were put into practice and help the mentee

navigate their way through their learning journey. The mentee will also be able to provide information to their mentor on the latest leadership techniques being taught in class.

Attract

Once the initial design is complete, the agency will need to attract mentors by promoting the new program to CPM graduates within the agency. The promotion should include the reasons behind starting the program, the benefits of being a mentor, and the expectations of the program. When an employee is newly enrolled in CPM, the agency program leader should send them information on the mentoring program, highlighting the benefits of participation. Once the program is established, the promotional information can include success stories from previous participants.

Connect

The agency program leader should develop a standard profile for each mentor, which includes their MBTI type, development goals, interests, and communication preferences. Employees who indicate they want to be mentored would be provided with a few mentor profiles, and they would email the agency program leader with their top choices. Based on the responses, mentees are assigned to a mentor.

Guide

Each agency should develop and distribute a "mentoring best practices" document that gives guidance on frequency and structure. The best practices document would include example questions and topics to cover in the meetings, including a review of what was learned during the CPM class, discussing how the information could be applied in real life, and reviewing the assignment from class.

Measure

Measuring the success of the program would allow the agencies to make adjustments to better align the program with the needs and desires of the participants. A way to measure the program's success is evaluating participation and gathering feedback through a survey or questionnaire that asks for opinions on the strengths and weaknesses of the program.

ASCPM Outreach: Website

While ideal, a stand-alone ASCPM website could be expensive and require substantial commitment to keep maintained. Instead, enhancements to the current ASCPM webpage would

be advantageous in disseminating important information to current members as well as individuals seeking more information about ASCPM. A webpage is a great place to post recordings of virtual meetings and archive Lunch & Learns so that members can access that information at a later time. A detailed calendar of events would allow individuals not currently on the ASCPM emailing list to find out information about upcoming meetings and organizational functions. The webpage should be frequently updated with pictures of ASCPM activities and articles highlighting ASCPM and its members' accomplishments. It could also have a feature to allow online payments, so members could submit renewal fees, buy ASCPM merchandise, and pay for social events. This would simplify the process for members, possibly making it more likely for them to participate and remain active in ASCPM. This function would also benefit ASCPM itself by streamlining the membership process and serving as an electronic record of annual membership and attendance for social events.

ASCPM Outreach: Newsletter

A quarterly ASCPM newsletter would be a useful tool for communicating with society members and dispersing information. The newsletter could be a simple electronic publication distributed to the ASCPM email list and, possibly, state agencies. It should include important announcements, promote upcoming ASCPM events, highlight outstanding member accomplishments or promotions, and advertise opportunities to serve within the ASCPM organization. It could also provide articles, book reviews, or other relevant information pertaining to leadership and public management. It may be necessary to establish a Newsletter or Publications Committee to oversee the preparation and dissemination of the newsletter each quarter. We think this is a great way to keep individuals associated with ASCPM informed and connected to the organization and its current events.

ASCPM Outreach: Social Media

In today's modern world of social media, Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn have become the primary platforms from which many professionals, especially those of the millennial generation, prefer to receive information. ASCPM currently has a private Facebook group that includes posts on leadership topics and information about meetings and events. We recommend

expanding to other social platforms, like Instagram and LinkedIn. Social media is a powerful, cost-effective tool for connecting with the CPM community. However, we would warn against trying to expand too fast. A successful social media campaign may take time. The organization needs to carefully assess their audience and see what platform is a good fit for them (Poliska).

Refresher Courses

Several CPM graduates who responded to our survey indicated their interest in refresher courses on CPM subjects. We recommend CPM refresher courses be offered to graduates through AUM's Office of Continuing Education and Community Engagement in order to keep graduates' toolboxes full of the tools they need to be great leaders. Regularly reinforcing training is a way to boost memory retention on fundamental topics, such as critical conversations, communication skills, and the Myers-Briggs personality type (*What Is the Forgetting Curve*). Refresher courses are also a great way to relay new information and concepts to graduates so they are always cognizant of the latest and greatest in leadership development. We want the knowledge that students gain in the CPM program to endure long after graduation.

CPM with Excellence

Another recommendation for ASCPM is to create a CPM with Excellence program. The CPM with Excellence program would be a public acknowledgement of a CPM graduate's commitment to continue their learning beyond CPM. This would not only encourage the participant but also set an example for others and influence the culture of state agencies. A Gallup article explains that "beyond communicating appreciation and providing motivation to the recognized employee, the act of recognition also sends messages to other employees about what success looks like. In this way, recognition is both a tool for personal reward and an opportunity to reinforce the desired culture of the organization to other employees" (Mann).

Arkansas and Mississippi have CPM with Excellence programs on which the Alabama program can be modeled. Participation in the program would require an active membership in ASCPM and a minimum number of continuing education hours to be earned each year. Options to earn hours could include book reports, attending training related to a CPM competency, and attending the ASCPM yearly conference. A form should be created that allows the participants

to submit required information to attain credit for these hours. For every two years the requirements are met, the participant would be awarded a new designation.

The participants earning a new designation should have their commitment publicly recognized by awarding them with a certificate during the ASCPM Annual Seminar. In addition to the certificate, the CPM with Excellence program should send letters to each participant's agency leader and direct supervisor so they have the opportunity to give the participant individual recognition within their agency. This would require extra effort on the behalf of the leaders and supervisors, but praise from leadership has a powerful impact. When employees were asked in a Gallup survey who gave them their most meaningful and memorable recognition, more than half said it was from leadership (Mann).

7. **Conclusion**

We are grateful for the commitment and achievements our state agencies and ASCPM have shown in their current efforts in developing leaders. Our team hopes that the information and recommendations we have provided will improve on this solid foundation. We encourage those who implement these recommendations to notify all CPM graduates so everyone interested has a chance to take advantage of these amazing opportunities.

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