Celebrating CPM Graduate Successes in Alabama

CELEBRATING ALABAMA'S PROGRESS

CERTIFIED PUBLIC MANAGER® PROGRAM

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.

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INTRODUCTION

"If you want to improve the organization, you have to improve yourself, and the organization gets pulled up with you." Indra Nooyi, Former Chairman & CEO of PepsiCo

The Certified Public Manager (CPM) program is designed to enhance the managerial skills of public sector employees by taking a holistic approach to the shaping of a leader. The shaping of these leaders ultimately drives improvements for the organizations they serve. This whitepaper is meant to celebrate the successes of Alabama's CPM program and recognize the drive, excitement, and commitment for excellence of Alabama's public sector employees who have completed this program.

Alabama's Certified Public Manager (CPM) Program, a nationally accredited and comprehensive management development program, has provided training for current and future public sector managers across Alabama for over thirty years. The *Celebrating CPM Graduate Successes* Solutions Alabama team (Team Success) will highlight successes of Alabama's CPM graduates by examining agency improvements resulting from CPM I projects, discovering overall graduate success stories and benefits of the program for graduates, researching best practices and marketing strategies of other selected CPM programs, and offering recommendations to strengthen and expand Alabama's CPM Program. This whitepaper examines which factors can most effectively expand Alabama's CPM Program by expanding its number of participants. Team Success has researched the cost savings of CPM I projects and benefits of the CPM program among graduates; researched best practices and effective marketing strategies of other selected CPM programs; and researched processes for tracking the successes of future CPM graduates.

What is CPM?

CPM is a nationally accredited, comprehensive management training program developed to strengthen the leadership skills of public managers. Alabama's accredited CPM program "develops and enhances the leadership skills of managers by utilizing course material, projects

and learning requirements" in order to "improve organizational culture and results for Alabama's citizens" (Certified Public Manager Program, n.d.). The national accrediting organization, the National Certified Public Manager® Consortium, (NCPMC or National Consortium) "establishes and preserves standards for the CPM designation, a nationally accredited, comprehensive management development program specifically designed to prepare managers for careers in federal, state, local government and in other organizations with a public purpose" (About, n.d.). NCPMC was officially developed with the completion of its constitution in 1980 which included Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, North Carolina, and Vermont. Its purpose is to hold individual CPM programs accountable to minimum standards while also providing program support.

The idea for a CPM program began in the 1970s in Georgia with two long term goals: (1) "To achieve and subsequently to maintain a level of national recognition for the CPM designation similar to that accorded by the Certified Public Accountant (CPA) designation;" and (2) "To foster and encourage the highest possible levels of competence and ethical practice by managers in state and other levels of government through a national body of professionally trained and oriented Certified Public Managers" (About: History of the Certified Public Manager Program, n.d.). Still today the National Consortium seeks to prepare managers for careers in federal, state, local government and in other organizations with a public purpose. Now more than 35 states boast a nationally accredited CPM program.

Alabama's CPM Program was introduced in 1986 and is accredited by NCPMC. The program is administered by the Office of Continuing Education and Community Engagement at Auburn University at Montgomery (Certified Public Manager Program, n.d.). The program has "expanded to encompass employees at all levels of local government who wish to learn current management and supervisory techniques to improve their leadership abilities" (2020 Program Guide, 2020). Alabama's program consists of a minimum of 300 contact hours including the successful completion of management courses, projects, journal response evaluations and elective hours. Alabama's Program is conducted in two segments, CPM I and CPM II, each

presented two consecutive days per month over a nine-month period. CPM I costs $1,800 per participant and CPM II costs $2,205 per participant, with agencies being billed quarterly.

The Alabama CPM Program promotes meaningful benefits for both employees and employers. While completing CPM, employees can earn graduate credit for the Masters of Public Administration (MPA) and Masters of Business Administration (MBA) at AUM; enhance leadership skills and become a leader in promoting quality public services; broaden intergovernmental networks; increase personal awareness and effectiveness; and strengthen critical thinking skills necessary for implementing innovative solutions (CPM Benefits, n.d.). There are many benefits for employers participating in the CPM Program including: strengthening employee engagement; improving employees' managerial skills; creating promotional opportunities; supporting a capstone project that improves effectiveness, efficiency or saves money; and obtaining recognition that is well known in government (CPM Benefits, n.d.).

An Associate Level Certificate is awarded upon completing CPM I which includes classwork, fulfilling elective training hours of credit, and an individual project aimed at benefitting the participant's organization. The full Certified Public Manager Designation is awarded upon fulfilling classwork, additional elective training hours, and completion of a management development capstone project in CPM II (Certified Public Manager Program, n.d.).

Two projects are completed by participants during Alabama's two-year CPM training. The first is the CPM I project assignment, the purpose of which is to "identify an organizational process or procedure [within the participant's organization] to determine how efficiency and/or cost savings could be enhanced" (Certified Public Manager I Project Guidelines, 2020). The CPM I project culminates in a written report detailing research and findings and delivering a presentation to an audience. The second "Solutions Alabama" project required by CPM II is a development capstone project. Unlike the CPM I individual project, the CPM II capstone project is a team project. The focus of these projects is to research and provide recommendations to relevant and interesting issues identified by state leaders. Working with stakeholders, teams collaborate to explore recommendations to offer improvements for the state.

In addition to recommending solutions benefitting state stakeholders through the completion of the Solutions Alabama project, participants gain competency in several key management areas, instilling in them the tools and confidence to leverage change in their personal and professional lives. The purpose of this project is for "participants to strengthen competencies in a number of key management areas such as partnering, workgroup team building, critical thinking, problem solving, knowledge sharing, interpersonal communication, conflict management and innovation, while strengthening written and oral communication through the white paper and presentation. Solutions Alabama teams will seek to raise public awareness and offer tangible data-driven recommendations to state leaders that can enable progress for Alabama's citizens" (2020 Program Guide, 2020). The success stories resulting from past projects illustrate how CPM's holistic approach to developing a leader's mindset ultimately translates into strategies creating connectedness and efficiencies in a graduate's personal and professional life.

Celebrating Success in Alabama

The quality and efficiency of management in government have a major impact on the lives of citizens and the orderly functioning of society. Systematic training programs are essential to maintain and improve the effectiveness and professionalism of government managers (About, n.d.).

This quote represents why CPM training is so important and why it has the potential to impact the lives of Alabama's citizens even beyond the public sector. CPM's training approach to improve the professionalism of government managers starts with the individual's mindset – know yourself to lead yourself. That mindset translates into gaining perspective and learning how to take action using the communication and writing skills learned with those new perspectives. Having the courage and tools to implement change can ultimately create increased connectedness and effectiveness in the workplace. Many of these CPM Program benefits cannot be easily quantified, and not all success stories are publicly recognized by either the Program or the participant's agency. To recognize and highlight some of these successes, Team Success

conducted a limited survey of Alabama CPM Graduates from the last decade and conducted interviews of graduates with noteworthy capstone projects.

The experiences of past CPM graduates demonstrate how CPM's holistic training approach has shaped their perspectives and effectiveness as leaders on a personal and professional level. For example, Elizabeth Fralish, Loss Control Manager for the Office of Risk Management at the Alabama Department of Finance, says that CPM helped her have more confidence to be able to stand up and speak to people, and that it taught her communication and writing skills that eventually gave her an edge to become a manager (Fralish, 2021). Donald Tadlock, Program Director of Alabama Correctional Industries, touched on how CPM changed his perspective, saying "I learned things about myself and others that made an impact on me as well as the way I handled myself and the way I approached or saw others. We all have unique personalities, characteristics, demeanors, and lifestyle whether we are extroverts or introverts. When we learn how to deal with ourselves first, then we can learn how to treat and communicate with others. This was one of the most exciting and beneficial parts of CPM to me, learning different personality traits and how each individual was different and how collectively we can work together to accomplish many goals" (Tadlock, 2021).

Ultimately, these shifts in mindset and perspective could result in more effective leaders and increased efficiencies in government agencies. Team Success sent a survey to 444 past graduates of Alabama's CPM Program, of which approximately 100 of the recipients responded. Overall respondents indicated satisfaction with the program and indicated participation in the program strengthened his or her leadership and managerial skills in the workplace. Sixty-three out of 81 respondents were satisfied with the quality of the CPM program. And seventy-two out of 81 respondents would recommend the program to others. Thirty-six out of 81 respondents indicated that his or her CPM I project was implemented, 62% of which resulted in increased effectiveness, efficiency, and/or cost-savings for the participant's organization. Forty-nine out of 81 respondents indicated that their CPM I project resulted in increased effectiveness, efficiency,

and /or cost-savings for the State or their agency. See Appendix 1, Results of CPM Solutions Alabama Survey 2021, for more results of the survey.

One such successful CPM project was Elizabeth Fralish's "Tablet Survey Format" project (Fralish, 2021). As a loss control manager, Fralish visits properties throughout the state to give an assessment of that property's current condition and value. The Office of Risk Management within the Department of Finance also deals with automobile losses and personal injury, but property is the largest fund that the agency oversees. It is so large that agency personnel spend three days per week throughout the state to look at all the properties, collecting data on square footage, present conditions, finishes, plumbing fixtures, etc. Personnel would collect all the data on a paper form in the field, return it to the office where someone else would key in more data. Then, underwriting would have to add additional data. Not only did manually keying in data at so many steps cost time, it also introduced more possibility for human error. Fralish's CPM project was to convert these surveys into an electronic format, which would save time, physical resources, and decrease the opportunities for human error. She coordinated with IT programmers on the details of her "Tablet Survey Format" project which was subsequently implemented and is still used to this day. Now personnel can complete the surveys on a tablet, which can take pictures and upload data, and that also interfaces with the national appraisal program. As a result, Fralish's project increased production about 20% a year, saving her agency between $45,000-$60,000 annually. Fralish's project achieved national recognition, winning the ASKEW award for her CPM project. She notes that her project continues to evolve, and that another CPM graduate from the Department of Finance has built on her success, adding another component to the original tablet survey program to make it even more efficient (Fralish, 2021). Fralish notes, "we all are trying to make a difference," and CPM has helped her in so many ways both professionally and personally (Fralish, 2021).

Another CPM project successfully improving the efficiency of a process within her agency was completed by Pam Oates, an Education Specialist for the Alabama Real Estate Commission. Oates knew she could increase the efficiency of how license law training and testing was

administered in her agency. CPM gave her the opportunity to pursue realization of the idea with her CPM project in 2013 (Oates, 2021). Oates is responsible for the educational training of the instructors and administrators of real estate schools across the state. The instructors were requesting that more time be spent on the instructional techniques instead of the license law. Oates thought the license law content could be presented differently to free up additional time for instructional methods. Another issue was the procedure for administering testing for the instructors and administrators, which was either given in the classroom or faxed to individuals and then manually graded. The goal of Oates's CPM project was to provide the instructors and administrators more flexibility for testing, free up instructional time for teaching methods, and to not have to manually grade tests. To execute her idea, Oates coordinated with her IT department to create tests that could be provided electronically to an individual, completed online, and automatically graded upon submission. The test results are then e-mailed to the test-taker and maintained electronically through the program. Oates also created six customized license law manuals tailored to the exact services provided by the instructors which are provided electronically via e-mail and can be studied at the student's own pace. As a result, the savings in manpower is impressive. Before her project was implemented, approximately 200 instructors and administrators traveled from all over the state to spend a day at the Commission for instruction and testing. Now that has been eliminated and it is all provided electronically. The manual grading of tests for hundreds of people each year has also been eliminated, and Oates has more time to focus on actual teaching methods for the instructors while they are physically in the classroom (Oates, 2021).

In light of the personal and professional benefits participation in the CPM program can bring to government employees and public sector organizations, the Alabama CPM program wants to ensure it continues to multiply its success stories within the state and broaden the reach of this educational opportunity.

Growing Success: Best Practices & Marketing Strategies of Other CPM Programs

In the last decade, Alabama CPM has had 610 participants complete the Associate Level and over 550 receive the CPM designation. The Program averages 46 graduates per year. Approximately twenty state agencies currently utilize CPM at some level, and some even make it a requirement for all upcoming managers (Kelley, 2021). On the other hand, at least 40 other state agencies do not regularly utilize CPM; this number does not include local municipalities or federal governmental entities. Although the number of Program participants has been maintained or grown since 2018, Alabama CPM has both the desire and capacity for the program to expand, both in number of participants and the public organizations served. However, there are challenges to overcome to grow and expand the CPM program.

One challenge to expansion is quite simply a matter of funding from agencies and local municipalities. CPM's client base, the public sector, must maintain or achieve adequate funding to sponsor employees' participation in the Program. Although the Alabama CPM Program seeks to offer its services to public agencies at an affordable level, revenues must cover the costs of the Program. In addition to impacts by agency training budgets, employee saturation is another potential impasse to expansion, creating a situation in which agencies do not have many employees moving up into leadership roles that have not previously graduated from the course. These factors may be outside the Program's direct control, but it underscores how imperative it is that outreach efforts help public agencies understand the value of the program.

Although many programs, including Alabama, have achieved great success through tried and true word-of-mouth and relationship-building, this whitepaper explores best practices and marketing strategies of other CPM programs across the nation to identify any new or additional best practices that could be put into place to benefit Alabama's CPM program. The programs given particular focus include Florida, because it is one of the largest programs in the country, along with Tennessee, a relatively young but innovative program. Both programs strive to provide opportunities for members to continually increase their knowledge in the field of public

management and to provide an in-depth, comprehensive, competency-based, nationally certified development program for all managers from state and local government organizations, universities, and those from business and industry who desire this training and certification (TN FL 2021).

The Florida CPM Program graduates about 350 participants every year, and has one of the largest programs in the country with an impressive 42 cohorts around the state (Jimenez-Lopez, 2021). Participants include state, city, and county governments. Eighteen adjuncts assist in teaching the core competencies across the cohorts to classes of about twenty-five. Like Alabama's CPM Program, it is 100% soft funded. Costs to participate in the program depend on enrollment type (Frequently Asked Questions, 2021). The most economical option is a contract class, in which a flat fee is charged for twenty-five people from the same agency to go through the program. A co-op class allows an agency to host a class, offering twenty-five seats to other agencies at the contract class price. Open enrollment is a higher fee than the previous two options, and charges per person. Finally, classes offered by community colleges vary in price.

The Florida Program emphasizes in-class time and building relationships, meeting for eight four-day courses, resulting in 32 days of classroom instruction (About the Program, n.d.). The majority of participants complete the program within 18-24 months. Much like Alabama, Florida CPM currently has no official marketing strategy; it does not solicit its services (Jimenez-Lopez, 2021). Nor does Florida have a system in place for formally tracking outcomes of its projects, though its capstone projects look at in-house cost-savings and agency improvements, much like Alabama's CPM I-level projects. Florida CPM relies on word of mouth from the state-wide agencies it contracts with to the county, city, and municipal level.

Florida CPM's Director, Ms. Linda Jimenez-Lopez, says her program focuses on building relationships and connections between the participants and adjuncts emphasizing, "it's about the people we serve" (Jimenez-Lopez, 2021). And considering the roughly 8,000 CPM participants the program has graduated over its 42-year history, this strategy clearly works. Despite her program's success, Jimenez-Lopez plans to look at social media or podcasts to build a platform

more accessible to the public and younger workforce. In addition, she is assisting the NCPMC in its work towards a social media campaign for public service recognition.

At the other end of the spectrum, Tennessee is a much newer program, running cohorts for a little over four years (Clagg, 2021). The program has more than tripled[1] its number of participants during that period of time, despite the COVID-19 pandemic. Its participants include state, local, and federal employees, a melting pot resulting in beneficial collaborations (Clagg, 2021). Currently Tennessee CPM has expanded to three cohorts, and faculty travels to teach a theme to each cohort every month. Program participants meet for a total of twelve days over a period of twelve months, completing a capstone project before obtaining the CPM designation at the end of the program. The cost is currently $3,500, with many agencies taking advantage of the Split Tuition Program. This allows agencies to pay $1,750 up-front, and $1,750 after July, enabling agencies to split tuition over two fiscal years (Certified Public Manager (CPM) Tennesee, n.d.). Just like Alabama and Florida, Tennessee is fee-based. One interesting difference from Florida's program is that Tennessee CPM intends to continue incorporating online learning opportunities even after the pandemic. For example, participants can attend their regular cohort, makeup a class at a different cohort, or participate in an online class the last Friday of the month. Because teacher-participant interaction is absolutely necessary to the success of the program, these online classes will be a synchronous learning format (Clagg, 2021). Synchronous learning is an entirely virtual, interactive, real-time, and instructor-led online learning environment (Francescucci & Rohani, 2019). This is only one of the many ways Tennessee utilize technology to its advantage.

The Tennessee CPM Program incorporates several best practices for recruiting, marketing, and tracking its successes. For Tennessee, technology is key. For example, Tennessee offers 100 hours of self-paced online instruction through LinkedIn Learning, and aligns those classes with the core competencies taught through CPM. For example, participants can choose

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[1] The TN program grown from 15 participants in 2018, to 28 in 2019, 53 in 2020, and 46 in 2021 (Clagg, 2021).

from Microsoft Office content, leadership content, coaching, how-to's, etc. As part of recruiting, prospective participants have the option to pay for the program, let participants take the online classes first to accumulate hours of credit, and then take the in-person classes necessary to achieve the full public manager designation (Clagg, 2021).

In addition, Tennessee employs an impressive marketing platform on social media, which was put to particular good use during the pandemic. Clagg found that YouTube is a particularly effective recruiting tool (Clagg, 2021). Part of his marketing from fall of 2020 included doing an informational session every month live on YouTube (and recorded for viewing later) during which he interviewed past alumni to share. He plans to continue interviewing alumni over the summer of 2021 who have had successful capstone projects to highlight the economic impact their projects have had in their organizations, which helps in recruiting. To make sure the Tennessee CPM platform remains active and visible, he also makes it a point to post pictures of what CPM participants are doing in class every month to social media accounts. Another tactic Clagg has found successful in maintaining alumni relationships is to create private Facebook Groups created with the particular networking needs of alumni in mind, including topics such as job postings (Clagg, 2021). According to Clagg, engagement and networking are key, something that careful utilization of social media platforms can enhance.

Tennessee's CPM Program also issues digital badges to it graduates. A digital badge is, simply put, a validated indicator of an accomplishment, or qualification. They provide a way for professionals to display their achievements, skills, or earned certifications as a digital emblem that allows anyone to click on the badge to discover the skills learned or accomplishments achieved. A digital badge can be shared across social media channels like LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, personal websites, resumes, or embedded into an e-mail signature (Borough, 2017). For students, digital badges can signal achievement to potential employers; motivate engagement and collaboration; improve

retention and learning; and support innovation and flexibility in skills that organizations say matter (Knight, 2012). For the Tennessee CPM Program, digital badges provide both publicity and visibility. In addition, it provides the program with some limited analytics on where the badges are going (Clagg, 2021).

Not all of Tennessee's success has been due to technology, however. Clagg emphasized, as did Florida's CPM Director, that "the #1 key is fostering relationships" (Clagg, 2021). He believes that most recruitment has been word of mouth, but he has also implemented alumni events and formally tracks the economic impact of capstone projects to bolster his program's network and reputation. For example, Tennessee maintains recertification requirements for maintenance of alumni's CPM designation. This entails earning sixteen hours of credit every two years for recertification. In conjunction with Tennessee's Government Executive Institute and Government Management Institute, CPM offers a one-day alumni event every year in central Tennessee at the Naifeh Center which constitutes eight hours of credit. For roughly $250, alumni receive not only all of the credit needed for that year's portion of recertification requirements, but they also get to enjoy relevant speakers, a day of training, and a banquet (Clagg, 2021). This networking event provides more than training; it provides CPM and its alumni the opportunity to reconnect and keep the CPM program relevant. In addition to purposeful efforts in fostering relationships, Clagg tracks the cumulative economic impact of these graduates' capstone projects on a spreadsheet, and the numbers that have resulted are certainly exciting and impactful to potential CPM program clients. In the first three years, the cumulative economic impact of capstone projects grew from $3.6 million, to $9.7 million, and up to $19.6 million by the third year (Clagg, 2021).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Team Success was tasked to recommend strategies for strengthening and expanding Alabama's CPM Program. In light of the extensive research conducted, Team Success has observed that word-of-mouth recruiting and intentional fostering of relationships, such as that

employed by Alabama's CPM Program, continues to be a highly effective, although informal, marketing strategy. Based on its research, Team Success would recommend CPM implement the following strategies to further expand its client base and increase its number of graduates:

- Track the economic impact of CPM Projects;
- Create social media accounts with video content;
- Offer a synchronous or hybrid learning option; and
- Utilize digital badging.

Track (and celebrate) the economic impact of CPM Projects.

Many, if not all, CPM Programs in the nation cite the potential increased cost savings or efficiency an organization will benefit from as a result of projects completed by CPM participants. However, the exact value of that benefit in comparison to the dollar value an organization invests in its employee to participate in the program cannot be publicized if the economic impact of graduates' projects are not formally tracked. Formally tracking the estimated cost-savings to agencies as a result of project implementation would be a worthwhile indicator in persuading potential new clients of the long-term value of allocating funding to training employees through CPM. Ultimately, the objective measure of steady growth in economic impact helps in recruiting (Clagg, 2021). Trent Clagg explains: "All CPM participants are encouraged to attempt to achieve some type of economic impact in their Capstone project. Several methods are used to calculate the impact. Some participants calculate the last three (3) years of data on some of the topics and evaluate the change. If the project is implemented the positive numbers are claimed as an economic impact. As an example, a city recorder realized that the city was paying for water line fixes between the meter and the house. By watching what was happening with the calls for repairs, the city recorder was able to alleviate $36,000.00 of expenses due to simply communicating the policy. TennCare Fraud prevention department used DMV records to locate possible benefit infringement by people who moved out of Tennessee. By using this new strategy 4 million dollars of state funds were saved. In the past only tips and other methods were used to locate individuals, the new strategy greatly assisted the department" (Clagg, 2021).

Nicole Pinkham, a consultant, and educator with AUM's Certified Public Manager Program, suggested the "Big Idea Project" that originated at a company she works with that recognizes and highlights employee successes. Based on Pinkham's suggestions, a way to track the economic impact of CPM is to recognize and celebrate CPM I and CPM II graduates' presentations whose ideas have proved profitable to their respective agencies. Recognitions and rewards to employees motivate and make employees feel valued and important in shaping the agency. The CPM employee can be recognized at graduation, at his or her agency, and in the state personnel's newsletter. Other recognition ideas can be:

- The CPM participant's likeness can be shown on a digital billboard which showcases his or her presentation.
- A "Day Pass" (take a day off anytime, no notice, no questions).
- A monetary gift from the CPM program and the agency which can be budgeted especially for spotlighting projects with cost savings to agencies.
- A "Thank You" video with a picture of the recipient posted on their agency's or CPM's website.

Everybody wins when an agency gets a positive return on investing in the participant. The participant grows by attending the CPM program. The CPM program receives more agency employees to take the course. And the citizens of Alabama reap the benefits.

Utilize technology to reach more public sector organizations & increase number of participants/cohorts.

It is clear from Team Success' research that the fostering of relationships must remain the primary focus in reaching more organizations and potential new clients, but it is also evident that the Alabama CPM Program should invest more in technologies that will benefit the program. Even before the pandemic, there was already growth in the utilization of technology for marketing and education; COVID-19 resulted in a surge of remote learning and digital platforms and both businesses and educators will have to adapt to remain relevant going forward (Rahul 2021). Leveraging technology will help Alabama's CPM thrive. Specifically, Team Success

recommends Alabama CPM create a Facebook account, a YouTube channel, offer a synchronous and/or hybrid learning option, and begin a digital badging initiative.

Create social medial accounts and video content.

"Social media has quickly changed the contemporary marketing approach" (Dehgahni & Tumer, 2015). Although many social media platforms exist, Team Success recommends the use of Facebook and YouTube in particular. Alabama CPM does not currently have active social media accounts, but it does have access to AUM's marketing department which can assist CPM in developing and maintaining content for these platforms. Facebook and YouTube allow for an anytime, anywhere approach to marketing. Content can be viewed 24/7, and optimization features can be added to put its content at the forefront of research.

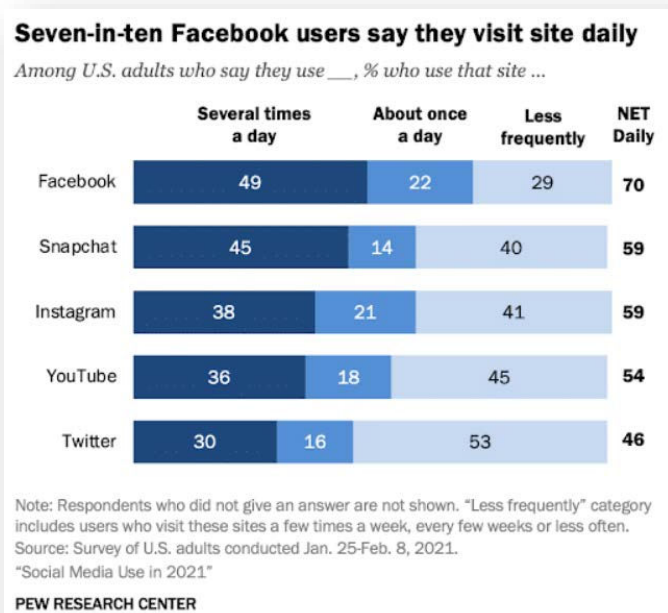The most popular social media platforms as of January 2021, ranked by number of active users in millions, are as follows:
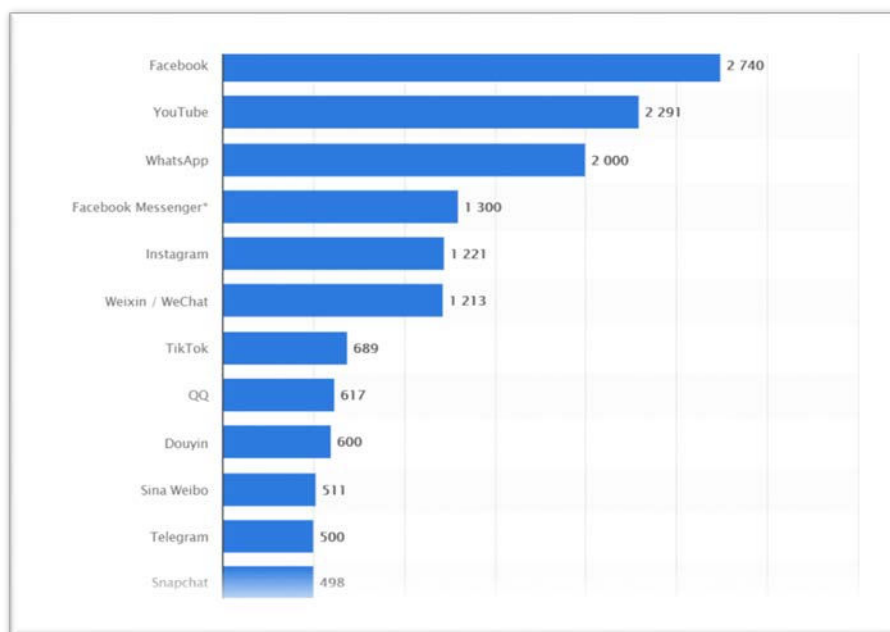
(YouTube by the Numbers: Stats, Demographics & Fun Facts, 2021)

Facebook is shown to be an effective, less expensive alternative to non-virtual marketing (Dehgahni & Tumer, 2015). Facebook can enhance a consumers' intention to purchase by enhancing both brand image and brand equity. This is done through trust-based advertising as opposed to push advertising. Many Facebook users' willingness to buy a brand has increased "as a result of seeing the most 'like's and 'share's, which suggest a brand is reputable" (Dehgahni & Tumer, 2015). Thus, the nature of trust based advertising dictates "that the successful effectiveness on consumers should include features such as participation, realization, personalization and feedback" (Dehgahni & Tumer, 2015). In order for Alabama CPM to optimize its Facebook advertising, it should focus on providing more customized messages to its customers as well as promotions to encourage the sharing of its messages.

Alabama CPM's presence on Facebook with a free organization page alone will help increase exposure to potential new clients. Statistics show that 75% of Facebook users visit a local business page at least once every week, and Facebook has reported over 2.8 million active users in 2021 (Facebook by the Numbers: Stats, Demographics & Fun Facts, n.d.). The most engaging posts on Facebook tend to be status updates and images, suggesting that Alabama CPM should regularly post updates to its Facebook account and include photographs with those posts to increase user engagement (Facebook by the Numbers: Stats, Demographics & Fun Facts, n.d.). In addition, Alabama CPM should create "groups" in addition to its main page that can create additional engagement and networking opportunities for CPM and its participants as a supplement to the organization's main Facebook page.

Seven-in-ten Facebook users say they visit site daily

Among U.S. adults who say they use ___, % who use that site ...

	Several times a day	About once a day	Less frequently	NET Daily
Facebook	49	22	29	70
Snapchat	45	14	40	59
Instagram	38	21	41	59
YouTube	36	18	45	54
Twitter	30	16	53	46

Note: Respondents who did not give an answer are not shown. "Less frequently" category includes users who visit these sites a few times a week, every few weeks or less often.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 25-Feb. 8, 2021.
"Social Media Use in 2021"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

(Facebook by the Numbers: Stats, Demographics & Fun Facts, n.d.)

YouTube is another social media platform which allows users to watch, share, and upload videos. YouTube is used by 55% of marketers and accounts for 25% of total global mobile traffic (YouTube by the Numbers: Stats, Demographics & Fun Facts, 2021). With about 122 million daily users consuming more than a billion hours of video per day, "this is one of the most widely used social media platforms (and search engine) in the world" (YouTube by the Numbers: Stats, Demographics & Fun Facts, 2021). One study found that "YouTube advertising value significantly positively influenced the customers' purchase intention" (Aziza & Astuti, 2018). The "more entertaining and the more informative […] the higher the YouTube advertising value" (Aziza & Astuti, 2018). Based on this study, companies should pay more attention to the informative aspect and, secondarily, the entertainment aspect. In addition, "the ads need to have relevant information settings and adjustments to the user's interests in order to obtain a positive appraisal by the customers […] by tracking customers' cookies that make it easier to customize the information" (Aziza & Astuti, 2018). As the innovative program in Tennessee has been able to utilize YouTube as an effective marketing platform for its program, Alabama should also leverage this technology in the same manager to help create stronger successes. Clagg noted social media, especially YouTube, was an effective marketing platform particularly during the pandemic (Clagg, 2021).

In other words, Alabama's CPM program can capitalize on the advantages of Facebook and YouTube exposure even if it does not purchase digital advertising packages from those platforms. In fact, Team Success recommends Alabama CPM first create a YouTube channel (which is free) as well as a Facebook page for its organization (also free) before exploring paid advertising options. Video content then needs to be produced and shared to both Facebook and YouTube. Specifically, Alabama CPM should post video interviews of program alumni, sharing their successes and how CPM has impacted them. This not only gives the alumni recognition for their achievements, but also is easily shared as recruiting material. As Kelley astutely pointed out, expanding services to cities and municipalities will only happen if those organizations truly

understand the value of the program to public sectors employers and employees (Kelley, 2021). Creating a YouTube and Facebook account with video content of current classwork, team building exercises, and alumni success stories, will help those organizations see firsthand the value of the program. The information and entertainment value of the content can be enhanced by "creating teaser content or mini-series that are packed in comedy but still have clear information" (Aziza & Astuti, 2018).

Provide synchronous or hybrid learning option.

The changes brought by the COVID-19 pandemic have created demand for new kinds of learning experiences (Smedley, 2021). Virtual classrooms, or synchronous learning, allow for live, instructor-led development over a remote meeting platform with some of the same benefits as a traditional classroom such as breakout discussions and interactivity while learners are in the privacy of their own personal workspaces. It allowed learning "at a time when meeting in person was suddenly impossible" (Smedley, 2021). A "post-pandemic world is unlikely to revert to the pre-2020 learning environment," because "there was a certain inevitability to this change. Even without the pandemic, emerging technologies in the learning space and virtual collaboration tools were already causing a shift [….]. The pandemic didn't create this change; it accelerated it" (Smedley, 2021). If Alabama CPM is considering adding additional cohort groups, i.e., programs being taught in other locations around the state, it should most certainly consider online learning options. In addition, the viability of additional cohort locations could be piloted by offering a synchronous learning track to organizations in other parts of the state first, before investing in the physical space and adjuncts necessary to establish an additional cohort.

Even though face-to-face teaching is still considered by some to be the gold standard for establishing a trusting, collaborative environment (Smedley, 2021), synchronous learning and blended strategies can still be effective and afford flexibilities that in-person training does not. Admittedly, leadership development instructors "have to work with great intention to ensure that this form of training retains the benefits of in-person learning, like networking and peer support" (Smedley, 2021). For example, a study conducted in 2016-2017 explored whether the

use of synchronous online learning can deliver the same student performance and engagement outcomes as a face-to-face course (Francescucci & Rohani, 2019). The results suggest that a course "delivered entirely in a [virtual] classroom can deliver the same level of student performance outcomes as [face-to-face] learning" (Francescucci & Rohani, 2019). Although face-to-face learners tended to have higher levels of engagement than the virtual group, these differences in engagement did not affect the students' performance outcomes in the teaching of an introductory marketing class (Francescucci & Rohani, 2019).

In considering the addition of a virtual or blended classroom cohort, Alabama CPM must also consider its audience. Senior-levels may not engage with this kind of content very well, but "aspiring leaders and frontline leaders typically have a greater receptivity to and engagement with self-paced online learning" (Smedley, 2021). In other words, Alabama CPM can tailor its solution to its audience. It has countless options to personalize learning, tailoring it to reach a new audience and meet the needs of modern learners. If COVID-19 taught leadership development instructors anything, it is that they must "prepare for a future of more remote workforces with dispersed teams" and "challenge [themselves] to design blended learning experiences for maximum impact and accessibility" (The New Fronter for Leadership Development, n.d.).

Although studies tend to show that performance outcomes in synchronous learning formats can be equated to that in a more traditional learning environment, it must be noted that student engagement may not be the same. In one study, Mordechai Gordon analyzed four aspects suggesting there is a "qualitative difference between face-to-face and synchronous online teaching and learning: the impact of a shared physical space versus multiple personal locations; non-verbal communication and body language; interactive activities and group work; and humor, laughter and spontaneous comments" (Gordon, 2020). At the conclusion of his research, Gordon stated that "it is much more difficult for educators to establish those deep and sustaining relationships with their students using Zoom or other synchronous web-based platforms. […] a software program cannot replace those strong and nourishing bonds between

[teachers and students]" (Gordon, 2020). This is a consideration CPM program directors must take account in light of the notion that building relationships are key to the success of the program. Jimenez-Lopez emphasized that the in-class time spent building relationships is the very foundation of a successful program (Jimenez-Lopez, 2021), and so a synchronous learning option may not be the best fit for every program.

Synchronous learning has the potential to provide multiple incentives to improve participation from long distance agency sites. For example, CPM prospects from the Department of Transportation's Regional site in Mobile, Alabama, would have to travel approximately 300 miles taking over five hours (MapQuest) round trip for each of the nine weeks of classroom instruction per year. Synchronous learning via live video instruction would not only save time but would also save per diem and mileage costs. At current per diem rates, the State would save the State approximately $1,530 per year in per diem travel reimbursement per State-employed CPM participant and a total of approximately $3,060 for those earning the full CPM designation by completing the two-year course of study. At the current reimbursement rate of $0.56 per mile, a State employee not having to travel from Mobile to Montgomery for class would save approximately $1,512 per year. Interactive video conference has proven to be an effective way to keep online participants motivated throughout the CPM sessions. Technology for live video conference options for multiple sites throughout the State should also be considered. Offering this technology at multiple distant sites creates a hybrid version of synchronous learning to balance the experience of both in person and online participants. In fact, studies suggest that "distance-learning students have advocated that the instructor on occasion conduct the class session from the distant site" (Grainer, 1999).

In addition, technologies already exist that may serve to close that gap in engagement between face-to-face learning and an online format. Alabama CPM should consider a new technology that is competitively priced yet able to enhance the quality of the student experience in virtual/hybrid class formats is the Meeting Owl Pro from Owl Labs (Meeting Owl Pro, n.d.). This innovative device provides a 360-degree camera, microphone, and speaker, but the feature

that provides the greatest enhancement to the experience over the present model is this device's ability to automatically zoom in to the speaker in the room and follow them. For example, many CPM instructors, and understandably so, have felt challenged by the need to deliver their talks from behind a podium while addressing a stationary web camera. This Meeting Owl Pro device would return freedom of movement to the speakers, placing them at their ease to move about and be expressive, while the camera imbedded in the unit tracks their movement by responding to the sound of their voice. Further, participant interaction in a hybrid environment will be improved as the camera can rotate in 360 degrees to capture the image of in-class participants responding to questions posed by instructors and carrying on the discussions that are such a key part of the CPM experience. At present, in-class participants can access microphones to aid in their voices carrying over to the virtual members, but the use of the same single stationary camera that places limits upon the instructors means that this conversation is never seen, hurting virtual engagement. To prepare for a future where virtual learning and the need to provide for virtual/hybrid learning options is imperative, Team Success recommends investing now in a simple-to-use yet powerful device that will do much to bring the virtual learning experience closer to that of traditional in-class CPM.

Utilize digital badging.

Team Success recommends Alabama CPM begin a digital badging initiative. Clagg's experience with digital badges in Tennessee is that they provide both publicity and visibility to its CPM program. For students, digital badges can signal achievement to potential employers; motivate engagement and collaboration; improve retention and learning; and support innovation and flexibility in skills that organizations say matter (Knight, 2012). Another potential benefit to the Alabama CPM Program of utilizing badges is that badges are trackable and have the potential to be analyzed like other forms of performance data. Even while digital badges are growing in popularity, they are still a relatively new phenomenon so many places still do not offer them nor do they necessarily carry the same weight with employers at present as traditional forms of certification (Sabo, 2015). However, Team Success recommends a digital badging initiative to

avoid being left behind; it is likely that digital badges will soon evolve into playing an important role in higher education for those achieving professional development, service hours, or special workforce training (Sabo, 2015).

Early adopters of digital badges are paving the way, proving the concept of the product and making it easier for others to follow. For instance, David Leaser, senior manager of innovation for IBM's training and skills organization, say that "IBM has become a recognized thought leader in digital IT credentials," and often "many small organizations often don't realize how lightweight a badge program can be," and that "the resources required to develop and manage one are not significant" (Moore, 2018). As someone who has seen firsthand the "real, measurable value for [stakeholders]" generated by digital badges, being used in every area "from employee development and recognition to hiring and resource management," Leaser expects more organizations of all sizes to adopt a digital badge program (Moore, 2018). Gary Matki, Dean of continuing education at the University of California, Irvine, takes an even stronger view that "Institutions that fail to get involved in digital credentials risk falling behind," describing digital credentials as an "institutional imperative" (McKenzie, 2019).

To avoid falling behind, Team Success recommends Alabama CPM partner with a digital badging provider, such as Credly and its badging platform, Acclaim, to offer digital credentials to CPM graduates. As an example, the College of Continuing Studies at the University of Alabama uses both Credly and Acclaim to provide digital credentials upon completion of select professional development opportunities (Digital Badging Program, n.d.).

What is a Digital Badge?

A digital badge is an image that is linked to personalized metadata, which provide specific information about your achievement.

(Digital Badging Program, n.d.). Digital badges, such as the ones pictured, have metadata attached allowing interested parties to view, with a single click, detailed information on a student's skills and qualifications (Digital Badging Program, n.d.). This is a useful, transparent, portable, and verifiable way to demonstrate skills and achievements (Digital Badging Program, n.d.).

CONCLUSION

The Certified Public Manager program, as a tool for building up leaders within a multitude of Alabama's state governmental agencies, is a success worthy of being celebrated. The program, as administered through AUM, has been producing tangible gains in the careers of graduates, as strongly supported by the results of the survey administered as a part of this present project. Building upon the communication skills of students, encouragement of cross-agency networking and collaboration, and exploration of how various personality types see the world and interact with one another are all hallmarks of the CPM program in Alabama. The caliber of instructors brought in to teach over the two-year course of the program is truly remarkable, and these instructors do much to make the CPM journey highly enjoyable while being highly challenging. What is more, the projects completed by all first-year students of the program have the potential to bring concrete and measurable gains to the agencies that send students, as evidenced by examples such as the streamlining that Pam Oates was able to bring

to real estate examinations. The Real Estate Commission is still reaping the benefits of this project in terms of agency time and money saved. The proposal presented by Elizabeth Fralish to improve necessary data collection methods for the Office of Risk Management was practical, was implemented, was given national recognition, and continues to save money for the Department of Finance to this day.

An additional feature of the Certified Public Manager curriculum is the second-year Solutions Alabama group project, of which this is an example. In our case, time devoted to this effort has allowed us the opportunity to interact with CPM program coordinators from the strong yet contrasting programs of Florida and Tennessee. A strength of CPM is that the National Consortium gives broad guidelines as to what constitutes a CPM program, and individual states can tailor the specifics to meet individual needs. While Alabama remains vibrant and has much that could be exported for use by other programs, there are features of other programs that, if adopted here, could add strength to what we have. The size of Florida's program forces an observer to look deeper to discover how their program has been able to grow so large. Florida's large population and significant number of well-funded cities and counties allow their program to operate across many physical campuses and to accept students from local government units beyond the state level. Florida's coordinator, while new to the position, is bringing a wealth of CPM knowledge to the job along with boundless enthusiasm, and so this program remains one to watch as she places her own unique stamp on the institution. On the other hand, while Tennessee's program is relatively new and only a fraction of the size of Florida's, the energetic embracing of features such as digital badging, the tracking of economic impacts brought about by student projects, and the fostering of continued alumni participation in the program mark Tennessee as a rising program with many features worthy of consideration and emulation by others. Interviews with the Florida and Tennessee coordinators provided an excellent window on the wider world of CPM and were highlights of this project.

In offering suggestions of our own, we would like to offer the strong recommendation of increasing the presence of CPM across social media platforms. At this stage, effectively using these platforms is essential for outreach to potential students and agency leadership and must be considered if the goal is to strategically grow Alabama CPM. Even if resources within CPM in this respect are limited, the program has the advantage of being able to lean on the know-how of the broader AUM marketing department, who could be gainfully plugged in to grow a social media presence. The continued use and refinement of synchronous learning now and into the future is a need that has been highlighted by the recent challenges faced by all when confronted with the need to find ways to continue a functioning program in the face of strict and changing rules and best practices concerning in-person gatherings. While most would agree that in-person learning is the ideal format for CPM, the present reality dictates that wider options must be prepared for and offered to students. Being intentional about this will lead to better learning outcomes than the ad hoc measures that were, by necessity, employed beginning in 2020.

It is the sincere wish of our Solutions Alabama team that the work that has been devoted to this project will, in similar fashion to projects that have gone before, provide positive recommendations to state leaders and decision makers who in turn will make informed choices that, in so many small ways, make life better for the employees of the State of Alabama and the population as a whole.

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Appendix 1 – Results of CPM Solutions Alabama Survey 2021

Note: Questions 3, 4, 7, 12, 18, and 19 asked for written responses and are not included here to protect the privacy of responders.

Q1 - What year did you graduate from CPM?

Year	Count
2010	3
2011	3
2012	5
2013	7
2014	5
2015	6
2016	4
2017	9
2018	8
2019	7
2020	24

Q2 - I applied the CPM content to strengthern the way I lead and manage in the workplace:

Response	Count
Very Strongly Agree	37
Strongly Agree	32
Agree	8
Disagree	3
Strongly Disagree	1
Very Strongly Disagree	1

Q5 - How important was the CPM designation in creating promotinal opportunities for you?

Very important	18
Important	27
Moderately Important	19
Of little importance	15
Unimportant	3

Q6 - Have you accomplished any career goals since graduating from CPM?

Q8 - Was your CPM I project implemented?

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Q9 - What is the likelihood that your CPM I project resulted in increased effectiveness, efficiency, and/or cost-savings for the State or your agency?

Response	Count
To a great extent	20
Somewhat	29
Very little	10
Not at all	19

Q10 - If your CPM I project resulted in a cost savings, how would you estimate the cost savings for your agency or organization?

Response	Count
$1,000 - $10,000	9
$11,000 - $25,000	3
$26,000 - $50,000	2
$51,000 - $75,000	0
$76,000 - $100,000	1
$101,000 - $250,000	2
$251,000 - $500,000	0
Greater than $500,000	2

Q11 - Describe your satisfaction with the quality of the CPM program:

Q13 - To what degree would you recommend the program to others?

Response	Count
Definitely	60
Very probable	12
Possibly	7
Probably not	1
Definitely not	1