

Money For Nothing, PDUs For Free

The PMI employs a Continuing Certification Requirements (CCR) program to encourage members to keep their skills and knowledge up to date. This basically means that to maintain your certification (be it PMP, CAPM, or PgMP) you have to meet the ongoing requirement for Professional Development Units (PDUs).

Money For Nothing

To some people this is viewed as a money grab, like selling you a cheap inkjet printer and then holding you to ransom on ink cartridges. You are now on the hook for continually paying to renew that credential you worked so hard to obtain, or lose it.

So every three years you have to prove you have taken enough courses and attended enough local meetings (both of which the PMI can happily provide to you for a fee) to ensure those valuable credentials stay on your resume.

Psst, it's 2011, Things Have Changed!

Actually, while the picture just painted is the mindset shared by many project managers, it is out of date and severely limited. Starting March 1st, 2011 the PMI broadened the eligibility of qualifying activities and simplified the categories for PDU claims. Also, the CCR program is as much about encouraging members to give back to the PM profession as it is to learning, so your options may be much wider than you think.

For the budget conscious of you out there (and let's face it you are here partly because the content is free) there are plenty of ways of fulfilling your 60 PDUs within a three year cycle that costs no money. Yep, all your PDU's for free!

PDUs For Free

While attending classes and dinner presentations are still valid ways to earn PDUs, both of these formats cost money that has to be passed back to attendees (sometimes with a healthy profit margin tagged on).

This article focuses on the freebies, the PDUs that can be obtained for zero dollars. Now, like a free lunch, these PDUs are not totally free, you have to invest some time and effort in obtaining them. However, if budget is your primary constraint, then that should never be an obstacle for keeping your credentials up to date.

Cautionary Note: If you work for a large corporation (maybe in a cold climate) and use the ongoing PDU requirement as justification for attending regular training courses and conferences (maybe in a warm climate) you might want to keep this article to yourself!

Understanding PDU Eligibility

The old PDU categories were quite confusing with 18 categories and numerous limits and exclusions. The new process reduces these 18 categories down to just 6 and greatly simplifies the process. The two major categories are:

- Education
- Giving Back to the Profession

Education – This includes things like courses, but also reading project management books, and watching podcasts, videos and webinars. It also covers things you may not be aware of such as

formal discussions with colleagues and co-workers about project management (heck you get paid to do that!) and being mentored by colleagues and co-workers.

Giving back to the profession – This is a lesser utilized group of categories that can account for a full 45 PDUs from the 60 total you need for a PMP or PgMP credential. You can earn PDUs for authoring or co-authoring relevant articles, newsletters and blog posts (like this) along with presenting webinars, podcasts, presentations, panel discussions etc.

You can also claim PDUs under the “Giving back...” category for any volunteer work like assisting at PMI events or even undertaking project management type activities in a community or charitable group. Plus, don’t forget that “Working as a Professional in Project Management” aka just being a project manager earns you 15 PDUs per renewal cycle anyway.

Show me the Money PDUs

Still not convinced you can get all your PDUs for free (well, no money)? Below are some examples of how 3 very different project managers can get their full allocation of PDUs without spending lots of money.

Anna Anti-Social – Anna doesn’t like attending her local dinner meetings, all that hand shaking and chatting over wilting salad makes her a bit squeamish about germs (she manages a virtual team). Her goal is to obtain her requirement for PDUs with as little physical contact as possible.

Anna points the web browser of her alcohol cleansed iPad to one of the many free eBooks on project management and begins to read. Making a note of the time she spends reading project management material and even working through the exercises for good measure she quickly racks up 30hrs and 30 PDUs under “Category C – Self Directed Learning” and did not even have to talk to anyone - bonus!

She collects a further 15 PDUs by logging details of the regular project work under “Category F – Working as a Professional in Project Management”, and her final 15 by writing an article on effectively managing virtual teams for her local PMI Chapter newsletter under “Category D – Creating New PM knowledge”. All done from the cleanliness of her hermetically sealed bubble!

Plugged-in Paul – Paul is a social media junkie; data feeds, blogs, and webinars occupy his world from checking his Tweetdeck account first thing in the morning, to updating his Facebook page last thing at night. Paul is switched on, with no boring 20th Century classrooms for him.

Paul has been moderating contributions on his PM wiki site for a couple of years now as part of his online degree. The content he has created there and the podcasts he regularly creates give him 45 PDUs in “Category D – Giving back to the profession”. This along with 15 PDUs he gets for the email correspondence with his PM peers about PM techniques. Claimed under “Category C – Self Directed Learning” and he is all set. Fully PDU’d up and all online, sweet!

Actions Speak Louder than Nerds

While self directed learning is good, doing stuff is the short cut to serious PDU surpluses.

Mentoring Mary – Mary learned project management the hard way, through 30 years of real world projects and the valuable lessons learned from every bump along the way. Now planning her wind down to retirement she wants to give back and mentor some of the bright young faces she sees at her local PMI Chapter events where she co-chairs the dinner speaker series.

Her local chapter’s mentoring program that pairs her up with new project managers for 12 x 2 hrs sessions gives her 24 PDUs under “Category E – Volunteer Service”. She earns another 21 for

her work on the dinner series maxing out the 45 PDUs in this category. Let's say she also gets 21 PDUs under "Category A" for attending the presentations that she helps organize (gaining her free admission) and she is already over her 60 PDU requirement.

Balancing the budgets and planning the fund raisers for her local Girl Guides group would also count for up to another 45 PDUs too, but she has more than enough PDUs already and it hardly feels like work anyway, more just helping where she can.

Summary

Hopefully this light hearted look at PDU collection has shown that if you think outside the course and know the new PDU categories, you can save some serious money. Thinking about project management and engaging in some PM discussions is a great way to start, as is volunteering and helping out more junior project managers. A good summary of the new PDU categories can be found [here](#).

However if you are more of a **Leisure Suit Larry** – You may want to explain to your boss why "Organizational Project Management" is so very important and that this course in, hmm Orlando, no wait, it is also offered in Dubai, is critical to the program's success. Also the conference in Texas, no Dublin, Ireland near the Guinness factory, will provide strategic competitive advantage – good luck with that!

Bio: Mike Griffiths is a cheap project manager living in Calgary, Canada who ironically also teaches courses for the PMI in warm climates. He can be reached via his blog at www.LeadingAnswers.com