The PMI Educational Foundation (PMIEF) empowers nonprofits with project management skills to help them better achieve their mission. PMIEF accomplishes this through its PM Capable Nonprofits pillar, one of the foundation’s three strategic focus areas. This includes grants to high-quality organizations like Special Olympics, Inc.

PMIEF’s 2017 grant to the organization for the “PMIEF – Special Olympics Project Management Center of Excellence” initiative enables Special Olympics to strengthen its project management capabilities to enhance fundraising, ensure more high-quality programming worldwide, and communicate consistent internal and external messaging.

Launched at Eunice Kennedy Shriver’s home in 1968 because of her stand against the injustices with which people with intellectual disabilities (ID) contend, Special Olympics has evolved from a backyard summer camp to an organization that today serves more than 5 million athletes. It provides year-round athletic training and competitions in a variety of Olympic-type sports for children and adults with ID. These include opportunities to develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage and experience joy. Athletes compete in 108,000 events annually in over 170 countries through 220 national and U.S. state programs.

With seven regional offices in Africa, Asia Pacific, East Asia, Europe-Eurasia, Latin America, Middle East/North Africa and North America, Special Olympics celebrates its 50th anniversary this year. Since its first biennial World Games in 1968, it has hosted 15 World Summer and 11 World Winter Games around the globe. In fact, its most recent World Games in Schladming, Graz and Ramsau, Austria boasted distinction as the world’s largest sports and humanitarian event of 2017.

Project Management Training

Despite its impressive record of accomplishment, Special Olympics has historically focused less on building organizational capacity and more on reaching people with ID through its renowned programming. As a result, the organization recognizes the critical need to more effectively leverage its time, funds and general resources. Grant-funded project management training is now equipping staff to develop and apply an understanding of this knowledge to address these issues. In addition, the grant permits Special Olympics to establish a Project Management Center of Excellence (PMCoE) to develop and implement a framework for its project planning, execution, governance and standardization through pragmatic resource allocation. Doing so will help problem-solve capacity challenges so that Special Olympics better meets the inclusion, healthcare and educational needs of the ID population.

According to Mary Davis, Chief Executive Officer, “Our partnership with PMIEF comes at an exciting time for Special Olympics as we prepare to launch several important initiatives related to our 50th Anniversary and upcoming World Games in 2019. The skills our staff is learning through hands-on project management training are helping our team deliver on key projects smarter and more efficiently, and no doubt having a positive impact on our larger movement.”

To date, nearly 100 Special Olympics staff in China, South Africa and the United States have participated in project management training, much of

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—Mary Davis, CEO, Special Olympics, Inc.
which was delivered by PMI Registered Education Providers. Prior to applying for the grant, PMIEF coordinated pro bono project management fundamentals training through Cadence Management Corporation for Special Olympics staff at its headquarters in Washington, D.C., USA in spring 2017. Upon receipt of the grant, the organization shared a business case with senior organizational leaders around the globe to discuss the rationale for, and import of, this initiative.

**Change Management Plan**

Following a gap analysis and extensive information gathering through staff focus groups, feedback sessions and job-shadowing activities, Special Olympics developed a roadmap, a project charter and an organizational change management plan. The latter includes a change magnitude assessment to inform change strategies for adoption and sustainability as well as to evaluate the PMCoE’s anticipated impact across the organization. In addition, Special Olympics developed a priority project dashboard that includes, for example, the 2019 Special Olympics World Games and Special Olympics Connect, a digital tool that links, tracks and supports millions of athletes, their families and their coaches.

This grant-funded initiative was also central to Special Olympics’ Integration Week, during which senior leaders identified key milestones that resulted in a milestone tracker to help ensure on-time project delivery. Furthermore, the organization showcased its collaboration with PMIEF through its internal communications, and will soon feature several project management training participants in its blog, “The Playbook.”

“Special Olympics is honored to partner with PMIEF,” Ms. Davis said. “The knowledge we have gained in the first few months alone has energized the team and reiterated the importance of project management strategy in our day-to-day activities. We look forward to the continued success of this initiative.”

Visit pmief.org to view a video with Ms. Davis discussing the mission of Special Olympics and learn how PMIEF’s grant is helping the organization achieve it.