

PM Insights

A publication for members of the PMI Chicagoland Chapter

June 2026

IN THIS ISSUE

President's Message	1
Introducing the 2026-2027 Executive Board.	2
Annual Leadership Forum Highlights.	3
Certification Highlights.	5
GUEST ESSAY: The Invisible Stakeholder.	6
2026 PM Symposium	7
2026 Fall Mentoring Program.	8
Youth Project Execution Program	8

PMI CHICAGOLAND CHAPTER MISSION

To be the Association of choice advancing Project/Program/Portfolio Management discipline including fostering professional growth and empowering individuals to fulfill their potential.



www.pnichicagoland.org



President's Message



Creating Value, Building Community, Empowering Growth

As we approach the close of another successful chapter year, I want to take a moment to reflect on what makes the PMI Chicagoland Chapter truly special—not the events we host or the programs we deliver, but the people we serve and the community we build together.

Every member joins PMI for a different reason. Some are seeking professional development. Others are looking to expand their network, earn certifications, advance their careers, explore new opportunities, or simply connect with like-minded professionals. Regardless of where you are in your professional journey, our commitment remains the same: to create meaningful opportunities that help you learn, grow, connect, and succeed.

Throughout this year, that commitment came to life through our monthly chapter meetings, PM Symposium, Career Conference, Job Fair, Leadership Forum, certification boot camps, mentoring programs, Special Interest Groups, networking events, and new member orientations. Each of these experiences was designed with one purpose in mind—delivering value to our members.

Our 2026 Leadership Forum challenged us to embrace the M.O.R.E. mindset and reminded us that success is measured not only by what we accomplish, but by the value and impact we create for others. That message reflects the direction of our chapter as we continue to focus on helping members thrive in an environment shaped by Artificial Intelligence, digital transformation, sustainability, and changing workforce expectations.

One of the greatest strengths of the PMI Chicagoland Chapter is our community. Every chapter meeting attended, every connection made, every mentoring conversation, every volunteer opportunity, and every professional development experience contributes to something larger than ourselves. Together, we are creating a network of professionals who support one another's growth and success.

Behind every program and member experience is a dedicated team of volunteers, directors, board members, sponsors, and partners who generously invest their time and expertise to serve our membership. Their efforts make it possible for us to continue delivering high-quality programs and meaningful opportunities throughout the year.

As we look ahead, we remain committed to enhancing the value of membership and creating even more opportunities for engagement. One of the most exciting developments on the horizon is the implementation of PMI's New Membership Model in Q1 2027. This approved initiative will make chapter engagement more accessible, strengthen local member value, and create additional opportunities for professionals to connect, learn, and contribute within our community.

At the PMI Chicagoland Chapter, our mission is aligned with PMI's global purpose: empowering people to make ideas a reality. Whether you are attending your first chapter meeting, pursuing a certification, seeking career guidance, volunteering, mentoring others, or leading transformational projects, you are helping shape the future of our profession.

Thank you for your membership, your engagement, and your trust.

Together, we are building more than a chapter. We are building a community where project professionals can learn, grow, lead, and create lasting impact.

Best Regards,

Ravi Avasarala, PMP, DASSM
President, PMI Chicagoland Chapter

Introducing the 2026-2027 Executive Board

The PMI Chicagoland Chapter welcomes the elected 2026–2027 Executive Board, an accomplished team of leaders dedicated to advancing our mission and elevating the project management profession across the region.

President	Vice President, Marketing and Communications	Vice President, Finance	Vice President, Community Outreach	Vice President, Membership	Vice President, Technology
					
Ravi Avasarala, PMP, DASSM	Robert (Bob) Mack, PMP, DASM	Eric Dolson, PMP, DASSM	Leslie Farrell, PMP	Bijal Patel, PMP	Tina Dodson, PMP
	Vice President, Professional Development	Vice President, Business Outreach	Vice President, Operations	Past President	
					
	Catrina Franklin, PMP	Ravi Natarajan, PMP, DASSM	Shyamala Ekambaram, MBA, PMP, DASSM	Raj Nair, PMP	



**Empowering people to
make ideas a reality**

Boost your career with the training, learning,
development programs, and resources needed
to stay ahead.

Attend a program!

pmichicagoland.org



Annual Leadership Forum Highlights

With more than 150 project executives in attendance, the 21st Annual Leadership Forum centered on PMI's [M.O.R.E. framework](#): **Manage perceptions, Own success, Relentlessly reassess, and Expand perspectives**. The program's theme, "Delivering M.O.R.E.," focused on three priorities shaping project leadership today: sustainability, change management, and AI's social impact.

The forum brought together chapter leaders, past presidents, Executive Council members, and industry leaders for a morning of discussion, networking, and practical insight. Organizations represented included Abbott, AbbVie, CVS, Kraft Heinz, Northwestern University, ComEd, and the American Bar Association.

What We Heard: Three Big Conversations



Michelle Ware-Ivy, emcee and PMI Chicagoland Chapter [Executive Council](#) Chair, opened the forum by spotlighting three conversations that sparked discussion throughout the day:

SUSTAINABILITY AT THE CENTER OF PROJECT VALUE



Dr. Joel Carboni, Founder, GPM (Green Project Management®), Author & Sustainability Practice Leader, challenged attendees to think beyond the traditional definition of project success. His message was clear: Value must be measured not only by delivery, but by long-term environmental, social, and economic impact.

- The iron triangle of scope, schedule, and cost is no longer enough. In today's climate and social volatility, project success must be measured by lasting environmental, social, and economic outcomes.
- Not every project should move forward. Impact thresholds as a governance tool can help PMOs and CFOs separate value-creating initiatives from those that quietly destroy value.
- Sustainability is strategy, not reporting. Use the M.O.R.E. framework & the P5 Standard to embed sustainability into project selection, PMO governance, and benefits realization while communicating trade-offs to boards & sponsors.

RETHINKING "DONE" THROUGH CHANGE MANAGEMENT



Mary Harden, VP & Sr. Change Management Advisor at Wintrust Financial Corp., brought the conversation closer to execution. Drawing upon her experience building an enterprise Change Management Center of Excellence (COE), she argued that the greatest risk is often not delaying delivery, but failed adoption—and that success must be defined accordingly.

Her main points included:

- "Done" needs a new definition. PMOs can measure success by sustained adoption and realized value, using metrics such as reach, depth, quality, and sustainability that resonate with sponsors and business leaders.
- Perception is a project risk. Stakeholder confidence and capacity mapping can reveal hidden resistance, change fatigue, and sponsorship gaps before they derail momentum, making change management a proactive risk discipline.
- PMOs can become enterprise change engines. A COE governance model with rapid reassessment, repeatable frameworks, and leadership coaching helped Wintrust speed value delivery and reduce resistance across transformation initiatives.

LOOKING AT AI THROUGH A BROADER LENS



Dr. Katelyn Jones, Decision Strategy & AI advisor whose firm, Noetic, invited attendees to widen the lens on AI. She encouraged leaders to look beyond efficiency and cost savings and ask a more meaningful question: "Who truly benefits?"

Her key recommendations were:

- Traditional AI metrics like productivity and cost savings tell only part of the story. True success must also reflect social impact—community outcomes, environmental effects, and lived experience—across the full project lifecycle.
- Responsible AI principles matter, but they are not enough. Frameworks centered on fairness, transparency, and accountability often still fail to meaningfully include the communities most affected by AI adoption.
- A practical five-step framework can improve AI strategy: diversify decision-making, assess who benefits or is harmed, measure business and social impact, reassess outcomes continuously, and expand perspectives to account for AI developments.

continued next page

Looking Ahead

The day ended on a high note, with prizes, practical workbooks, and new ideas for attendees to apply. The Chapter also celebrated the contributions of attendees, sponsor [Gremar Photography](#), and the new [Executive Outreach Leadership Team](#), whose efforts helped create a strong experience and a solid foundation for future forums.

Feedback from the pain-points exchange & survey highlighted where leaders want to go next: introducing M.O.R.E. to executive teams, sustaining the framework, and space for idea exchange. [PMI's Playbook To Apply M.O.R.E.](#) was communicated as a reference.

If one message was carried through the [2026 Leadership Forum](#), it was this: The future of project management is about more than delivering work. It is about delivering value—through sustainability, change management, and AI's broader social impact.

Planning is underway for the May 7, 2027, Leadership Forum! The team welcomes ideas for a **theme by August** and industry practitioner **speakers by October**.

Click on the links to [submit testimonials](#) to encourage peers/leaders to attend, [provide theme ideas](#), and [recommend speakers](#) for future Forums.

To [explore sponsorship](#) or volunteer to organize future Executive Outreach events, contact Francis Labayen at DirExecutiveOutreach@pmichicagoland.org.

Sunil Chainani, PMI-PMOCP, DASSM, PMP,
VP of Business Outreach

John Lopez, PMP, *Speakers Team Lead*



Photos:

- 1: Dr. Joel Carboni inspires attendees to elevate projects by incorporating sustainability.
- 2: Notable PMI attendees Jonathan Lee, Former Chapter President & M.O.R.E. Contributor; David Cumberbatch, PMI NA Managing Director; and Helen Cook, Chapter Executive Council Founder, attend the event.
- 3: Attendees engage in the spacious multi-screen ballroom.
- 4: Attendees raise applause for the event organizers, the Executive Outreach Leadership Team.



All photos courtesy of [Gremar Photography](#)

PMI Chicagoland Chapter Study Groups: Building Momentum Together

There's something powerful about not doing it alone.

Our PMI Chicagoland Chapter study groups continue to bring together driven professionals who are ready to take the next step in their project management journey. Whether you're just starting to explore certification or actively preparing for your exam, these groups are designed to provide structure, accountability, and a supportive community that keeps you moving forward.

Through peer-led discussions, shared resources, and real-world insights, our study groups create an environment where learning feels practical, collaborative, and achievable. We've seen firsthand how consistency and community can turn "someday" into "scheduled."

And that momentum is paying off.

We're proud to celebrate the following members who recently earned their **PMP® certification**:

- [Shellee M.](#)
- [Veronica R.](#)
- [Roxanne A.](#)
- [Mary A.](#)
- [Teena M.](#)
- [Elizabeth R.](#)



This is no small accomplishment. Earning your PMP requires discipline, commitment, and the ability to think like a project leader. Each of you has demonstrated exactly that, and we couldn't be more excited to celebrate this milestone with you.

Your success is also a reflection of the strength of this community. Every question asked, every session attended, and every moment of encouragement shared contributes to outcomes like these.

If you've been thinking about joining a study group, consider this your sign. The next cohort could be where your name gets added to this list.

Stay tuned for upcoming sessions and opportunities to get involved.

Your journey starts with one decision—and we're here to support you every step of the way.

New This Year: Intro to Certification Series

What if the next step in your career is something you're already closer to than you think?

That's the idea behind our new **Intro to Certification Series**, launched this year by the PMI Chicagoland Chapter to help more professionals explore the certifications that can elevate their careers.

We know that many professionals are already doing project work every day—leading initiatives, coordinating teams, driving results—without realizing they may already meet the experience needed to pursue a certification. This series is designed to bridge that gap.

Each session offers a clear, approachable introduction to a certification, including:

- What the certification is and who it's for
- How it aligns to real-world experience
- What to expect from the exam
- How to get started with confidence

So far, we've hosted sessions on:

- PMP®
(Project Management Professional)
- PMOCP™
(PMI Project Management Office Certified Professional)
- CPMAI™
(Certified Professional in Managing AI)

And we're just getting started.

This series is about expanding what's possible. Whether you're looking to deepen your expertise, pivot into a new space, or validate the experience you already have, there's a path for you—and we're here to help you find it.

More sessions are on the way, covering additional certifications and emerging areas in project management.

If you've been curious about certification but weren't sure where to begin, this is your entry point.

Stay tuned and join us for an upcoming session. Your next move might be closer than you think.

The Invisible Stakeholder: How Regulatory Bodies Shape Your Project Whether You Invite Them or Not



By: Keri Lestage

Early in my career, I watched a product launch unravel in a meeting I thought was going to be a formality.

We had requested a pre-registration meeting with the EPA, the kind of early consultation designed to align on the path forward before you commit to a full registration dossier. We came prepared. We had toxicology data. We had characterization data. We believed we understood what was required, and we believed we had it.

The EPA saw it differently.

Their questions weren't about gaps in our data; they were about the nature of the data itself. What we understood to satisfy the toxicology requirements, they viewed through a different framework entirely. The characterization work we had completed didn't map cleanly to what they were asking for. The timeline we had built our commercialization plan around quietly collapsed in that conference room.

It wasn't a failure of science. It wasn't a failure of effort. It was a failure of stakeholder alignment with a stakeholder we hadn't fully mapped.

THE STAKEHOLDER WHO NEVER RSVPS

Most project managers are trained to identify stakeholders as the people and organizations who affect, or are affected by, a project's outcome. We map them, engage them, communicate with them, and manage their expectations. The implicit assumption is that stakeholders are reachable. You can schedule a meeting. You can send an update. You can negotiate.

Regulatory bodies don't work that way. The EPA, FDA, OSHA, local health authorities, accreditation bodies, these entities set the rules of the game, but they don't sit at your table. They won't tell you what they need until you ask the right question through the right channel, often at a significant cost in time and money. They operate on their own timelines. And when your project collides with their requirements, the consequences are rarely minor.

They are, in every meaningful sense, stakeholders. They just never RSVP.

WHY THEY GET LEFT OFF THE MAP

There are a few reasons regulatory bodies get overlooked in stakeholder analysis. First, they feel abstract, especially early in a project when the focus is on building momentum, not identifying constraints. Second, in many industries, regulatory compliance is treated as a downstream function, something legal, a compliance the team handles after the development work is done. Third, and most insidiously, teams often don't know what they don't know. Regulatory landscapes are specialized, and the specific requirements that apply to a given product, process, or market can be genuinely non-obvious.

In my work as a project manager in highly regulated environments, I've seen this pattern across industries. A manufacturer develops a product with real efficacy data, only to discover that specific label claims require a data set for registration that takes 18 to 24 months. A healthcare facility implements a new protocol without realizing that certain accreditation standards constrain product selection in ways the procurement team never flagged. The work was good. The oversight was expensive.

MAP THEM EARLY. SERIOUSLY.

The fix isn't complicated, but it does require discipline. When you build your stakeholder register, include the regulatory landscape as a named input, not a footnote. Ask early: what bodies govern this space? What do they require, and when? What are the trigger points that activate their involvement?

This doesn't mean becoming a regulatory expert. It means knowing enough to know when you need one and building that consultation into your project timeline before the clock starts running against you.

For complex projects, consider a brief regulatory scoping exercise as part of your initiation phase. Treat the outputs the same way you'd treat any other stakeholder analysis: document the requirements, assess the risk, and build the timeline accordingly. A one-week scoping exercise at project start can prevent a 12-month delay at project end.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Every project operates within a regulatory environment. The managers who account for that environment from day one, who treat regulatory bodies as real stakeholders with real requirements and real timelines, are the ones who don't get surprised.

The invisible stakeholder is still a stakeholder. Map them first.



PMI Chicagoland Chapter 16th Annual PM Symposium: Adapt. Innovate. Amplify.

The future of project management is accelerating—and the most effective leaders aren't just keeping pace; they're setting it. Join project managers, program leaders, and changemakers at the PMI Chicagoland Chapter's 16th Annual PM Symposium to navigate complexity, embrace emerging technologies, and deliver greater impact in an ever-shifting landscape.

This year's theme, "**Adapt. Innovate. Amplify.**," challenges you to go beyond execution. It's about aligning outcomes to what matters most, taking full ownership of results, and continuously evolving your approach in a dynamic, unpredictable environment.

Through engaging breakout sessions, inspiring keynote speakers, and meaningful peer connections, you'll gain practical strategies to think bigger, lead with confidence, and drive measurable value across your organization and teams.

Whether you're early in your PM journey or a seasoned leader, the Symposium offers the tools, perspectives, and community you need to rise to what's next.

ADAPT with purpose. **INNOVATE** with intention. **AMPLIFY** your impact.

Spotlight on one of our Keynote Speakers



Ray McElroy will show us how **To Boldly Go, Stepping Out of Ordinary to Extraordinary**. As the Founder of Ray of Hope, he will inspire you with a high-impact message about how ordinary people and organizations achieve extraordinary results. He'll explore what separates those who succeed from those who repeatedly fall short and what challenges companies to move beyond average performance. The session will cover methods to develop a positive mindset toward growth, innovation, and new opportunities. People facing the same problems often see different outcomes depending on their mindset.

INTERACTIVE Break-out Sessions

In addition to our inspiring keynotes, attendees can customize their learning experience by participating in break-out sessions, each covering three different topics. Networking with peers, leaders, and innovators will position you as a forward-thinking project manager ready to meet the challenges of tomorrow. Don't miss out on this essential event. Register now to secure your spot for October 9.

REGISTER HERE

Start the Fall in 2026 with Mentorship!

The PMI Chicagoland Chapter Mentorship Program Application Ends on 7/12/2026!



The PMI Chicagoland Chapter [Mentoring Program](#) was formed in 1977 and underwent a significant transformation in August 2016. The revised program is the **flagship program of the PMI Chicagoland Chapter** and is renowned internationally in the PMI Global Organization.

Kickstart the late summer and fall of 2026 by mentoring or being mentored by a credentialed volunteer. Our program fosters professional growth and strong relationships, connecting participants with experienced mentors, leadership, and ambitious mentees from across Chicagoland.

KEY DATES

- Application Opens: Week of 4/12/25
- Training: 7/25/26 - 7/30/26
- Kick-off Event: 8/8/25
- Mid-session Event: 10/10/26
- Final Event: 12/12/26

SIGN-UP BECAUSE YOU:

- Like collaborating with awesome likeminded professionals
- Want to elevate your skills and grow your network
- Need PDUs to allot for a new or existing PMI credential

[LEARN MORE AND REGISTER](#)

Youth Project Execution Program

LEAD A TEAM. SOLVE A REAL PROBLEM. GET MENTORED BY THE PROS.

A 3-week, hands-on program where student teams tackle a real community problem—guided by a dedicated mentor from the PMI Chicagoland Chapter. Build real project management skills, learn from working professionals, and walk away with a finished project.

🕒 3 weeks · 🎓 Ages 18–22 · 👥 Teams up to 4 · 📅 Session 1 online, 2 & 3 onsite · 🏆 Awards & recognition

WHY JOIN

- Real PM skills for your résumé & college apps
- A dedicated mentor plus a network of working PMs
- A finished project with real community impact

PROGRAM AT A GLANCE

Week	Phase	Format
Week 1	Kickoff	Online (Zoom)
Week 2	Check-In	Onsite
Week 3	Finals	Onsite

[REGISTER NOW](#)

Space is limited — sign up today!
Kicks off June 29, 2026

Open to students ages 18–22.

Awards: Top teams earn gift cards (up to \$30–\$40 per participant), certificates, and featured recognition from the chapter.

Questions? **Uzma Nikhath**, Director, Youth Outreach: DirYouthOutreach@pmichicagoland.org

We look forward to meeting you! — Youth Outreach Team, PMI Chicagoland Chapter