HUMANITARIAN ACADEMY · HUMANITAIRES JOBS

Project DPro (PMD Pro) Foundation exam preparation

Course handout · Day 1 : The exam, the Project DPro Guide and project management basics

Independent, free preparation for the Project DPro Foundation (PMD Pro) exam: 8 days of 6 hours to master the five project phases (identification and definition, set up, planning, implementation, closure), the logframe, governance, the critical path, risks, change control and the guide's five principles. Guided readings in the free PM4NGOs guide, graded deliverables, quizzes with explanations and three original mock exams, including a full one in the official format (75 questions, 2 hours, 65%). The official exam is taken and paid for with PM4NGOs; this preparation is neither endorsed nor accredited by PM4NGOs.

https://humanitairejobs.org/en/academy/preparation-examen-pmd-pro/jour-1/

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Day 1 : The exam, the Project DPro Guide and project management basics

Objectives

- Know the real format of the Project DPro Foundation exam and how to register with PM4NGOs.
- Define project, programme, portfolio and operations, and place the project manager in the development and humanitarian sector.
- Describe the five-phase model, the decision gates and the four competency areas of the guide.

What exactly you are preparing for

This preparation targets the **Project DPro Foundation** exam (formerly PMD Pro level 1), designed for project managers in NGOs, development agencies and humanitarian action. The reference is the **Project DPro Guide, 2nd edition**, published free of charge by PM4NGOs under a Creative Commons licence.

Official exam format, as stated by PM4NGOs at the time of writing:

- **75 multiple-choice questions**, with no negative marking;
- **2 hours** (120 minutes);
- pass mark: **65%**, i.e. 49 correct answers;
- **open book**: you may consult the guide, but any AI help (ChatGPT, Copilot, etc.) is forbidden;
- taken online on the PM4NGOs exam platform, one attempt per exam purchased.

Some official questions ask for several correct answers, to complete a sentence or to put steps in order. Our mock exams use one correct answer per question, but our quizzes and exercises also practise the order of steps.

Important. This preparation is independent. It is not endorsed or accredited by PM4NGOs. Project DPro and PMD Pro belong to PM4NGOs. The official exam is taken and paid for only with PM4NGOs (pm4ngos.org), which sets the fee according to your situation. Always check the format and price on their website before you register.

Project, programme, portfolio and operations

A **project** is a **temporary** effort that produces a **unique** result with limited resources: rehabilitate 15 water points in 10 months, train 300 community health workers, distribute seeds to 2,000 households before the rainy season.

A **programme** brings together several related projects, managed in a coordinated way to obtain benefits that no single project would produce. A **portfolio** is all the projects and programmes of an organisation, chosen and steered to serve its strategy. **Operations** are ongoing: payroll, vehicle maintenance, running a permanent warehouse.

In the exam, the classic trap is to call an activity with no end and no unique deliverable a "project". Ask three questions: is there an end date? a result of its own? a dedicated budget?

The life cycle: five phases and decision gates

The guide organises a project's life cycle into **five phases**:

1. **Identification and definition**: understand the need, analyse the problem and the actors, choose a strategy and formalise it (logical framework, proposal).
2. **Project set-up**: obtain authorisation to start, put in place governance, the charter and the team.
3. **Planning**: detail scope, schedule, resources, budget, risks, procurement, communication and monitoring.
4. **Implementation**: do the work, monitor, control, manage changes and issues.
5. **Closure**: deliver, hand over, close contracts and accounts, learn lessons.

Between the phases there are **decision gates**: at each gate, an authorised body decides to continue, adjust, go back or stop the project. A gate is not a formality: stopping a project that no longer has a reason to exist is a good management decision.

The phases are not perfectly separate. Monitoring, evaluation and control run through the whole cycle, and a phase can be repeated, for example if security changes and forces you to re-plan.

The project manager's competencies

The guide describes four broad competency areas:

- **Project management technical**: tools and methods (logical framework, schedule, budget, risks, monitoring).
- **Leadership and interpersonal**: lead the team, negotiate, communicate, manage conflict.
- **Personal and self-management**: organisation, stress management, ethics, continuous learning.
- **Development sector specific**: know the context, donors, humanitarian principles, accountability to affected people.

An exam question may describe a technically brilliant project manager who ignores communities: the missing competency belongs to the development sector area, not the technical one.

Project constraints

Every project balances linked constraints: **scope** (what is delivered), **time**, **budget**, together with **quality**, **risks** and **resources**. If one changes, at least one other moves. Example: the donor cuts the budget by 20%; you must reduce the scope, accept a higher risk on quality, or find other funds.

Our sector adds constraints from the **context** (security, access, seasons), **donor rules** and **accountability** to the people we serve. The right exam reflex: when a constraint changes, the correct answer analyses the impact on the others and has the competent body decide, instead of silently absorbing the change.

A working method to pass

Because the exam is open book, the challenge is not to memorise everything but to **know where to look quickly** and to **understand the logic** of the guide. Simple rule: 120 minutes for 75 questions is 1 minute 36 seconds per question. A question that needs more than 3 minutes of searching should be flagged and revisited at the end.

- Download the free guide in your language and build your own one-page index (where the phases, principles, glossary and learning objectives are).
- Each day: lesson, exercise, guided reading in the guide, deliverable, then a quiz with explanations.
- Take the three mock exams in real conditions: timer, guide open, no AI.

Exercise: project or operation?

Situation. The fictitious NGO Tamani manages in Koro district: A) the monthly payroll of 40 staff; B) building 3 classrooms by June; C) a 6-week livestock vaccination campaign; D) the ongoing maintenance of a fleet of 8 vehicles; E) a set of four projects (water, nutrition, livelihoods, protection) coordinated to reduce malnutrition in the district.

Task. Classify each item (project, programme, operation) and justify in one sentence.

Answer. A and D: operations (ongoing, no planned end). B and C: projects (temporary, unique result, deadline). E: programme (related projects managed together for a shared benefit).

Key takeaways

- Foundation exam: 75 questions, 120 minutes, 65% (49 correct answers), open book, no AI, paid to PM4NGOs.
- Project = temporary and unique; programme = related projects; portfolio = strategy; operations = ongoing.
- Five phases: identification and definition, set-up, planning, implementation, closure.
- Decision gates make it possible to continue, adjust or stop: stopping can be the right decision.
- With an open book, search speed matters: about 1 min 36 s per question.

Quiz

1. For five years an NGO has run the maintenance of its central warehouse under the name "logistics project". It is rather:
   A. A project, because the activity has its own budget and manager
   B. A portfolio, because the activity supports the office's strategy
   C. A programme, because several departments take part every year
   D. An operation, because the activity is ongoing, with no unique deliverable

2. Which sequence follows the order of the guide's phases?
   A. Identification and definition, planning, set-up, implementation, closure
   B. Identification and definition, set-up, planning, implementation, closure
   C. Planning, identification and definition, set-up, implementation, closure
   D. Set-up, identification and definition, planning, implementation, closure

3. At a decision gate, the analysis shows that the need has disappeared after the displaced people returned home. The decision most consistent with the guide's logic is:
   A. Continue so as not to lose the funding
   B. Stop or redirect the project with the authorised body
   C. Go straight to implementation to save time
   D. Wait until the end of the project to tell the donor

4. A project manager masters the schedule and budget perfectly but never consults communities. Which competency area should they mainly strengthen?
   A. Project management technical, to plan field visits better
   B. Personal and self-management, to get better organised
   C. Leadership and interpersonal skills with the team
   D. Development sector specific competencies

5. The donor cuts the budget by 20% without changing the deadline. What should the project manager do first?
   A. Stop the project, as the original contract can no longer be met
   B. Analyse the impact on the other constraints, then have it decided
   C. Keep the scope and count on savings along the way
   D. Reduce the quality of materials to keep the full scope
6. During the official Project DPro Foundation exam, which of these is forbidden?
   A. Consulting your personal revision notes
   B. Using an AI assistant such as ChatGPT
   C. Going back to a question flagged earlier
   D. Consulting the downloaded Project DPro Guide
7. A set of water, nutrition and livelihoods projects, coordinated to reduce malnutrition in a province, is:
   A. A programme
   B. An operation
   C. A portfolio
   D. A phase
8. With 75 questions in 120 minutes, which strategy is safest?
   A. Answer in order and never go back to a question
   B. Check every answer in the guide, even the simplest ones
   C. Leave difficult questions blank to avoid mistakes
   D. Aim for about 1 min 30 per question and come back to the long ones

Quiz answers : 1. B · 2. C · 3. B · 4. C · 5. A · 6. C · 7. C · 8. C