

PMI’s purpose is to “maximize project success to elevate our world”; our Social Impact Programs are a demonstration of that!

Interview with Dr. Ashley Forsyth, PMP¹

Director of Social Impact Programs,
Project Management Institute (PMI), USA



Interviewed by Yasmina Khelifi

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Introduction to the interviewee

Ashley is the Director of Social Impact Programs, serving as the Executive Director of the PMI Educational Foundation (PMIEF) and Project Managers Without Borders (PMWB) – charitable supporting organizations to PMI. While each organization has a different mission, at the core, this is the intersection of project management and social impact to accelerate social good in the world.

She has been in the Director role for the past five years, prior to this role, she served for seven years as an Academic Programs Specialist at PMI, helping to connect college and university students with PMI through membership, certification, and the academic sponsored research grant program. Prior to PMI, Ashley spent more than ten years working in higher education, her last role as a Dean of Students at a private college in Philadelphia, PA, USA. She holds a doctorate in Higher Education, specializing in

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curriculum development. She achieved her PMP in 2025. Ashley lives in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA with her husband, son, and elderly cat.

Interview

Q1: How did you come to work at the Project Management Institute (PMI)?

Ashley Forsyth (Forsyth): I was completing my doctorate in higher education and moving from student affairs to curriculum development. PMI was launching the undergraduate curriculum project to work with colleges and universities around the world to implement project management into their programs – either as degrees, majors, minors, or concentrations. This was part of a broader strategy to engage not just faculty, but the students studying project management. After a few years of working with higher education institutions around the world, I joined PMI's sponsored research program, which awards grants to doctoral students or faculty conducting groundbreaking research in project management.

When the role at PMI Educational Foundation (PMIEF) opened, it was a natural fit. I used my curriculum skills to implement project management in secondary education through youth-serving nonprofits serving up to age 24, and I helped award our grants and endowed scholarships. Project Managers Without Borders (PMWB) became part of the PMI family in 2024 and provides a holistic portfolio of how PMI creates positive social impact.

Q2: As the director of social impact programs, can you elaborate on the projects in your portfolio?

Forsyth: The social impact portfolio at PMI focuses on using project management as a force for positive change. Our work centers on three primary areas: First, expanding access to project management education through the PMIEF, aligned with UN SDG 4 – Quality Education. Second, strengthening nonprofits and NGOs through PMWB by equipping them with project management capabilities and supporting initiatives aligned with global development priorities.

Through PMIEF, which focuses on bringing project management skills to youth, educators, and underserved communities around the world, we achieved over 4.6 million learning experiences in 2025 alone.

Through PMWB, we collaborate with nonprofit organizations and community initiatives that benefit from structured project practices but may not traditionally have access to them.

We do this work by connecting closely with PMI chapters and volunteers to deliver local impact. These grassroots partnerships are essential because they translate global strategy into real-world results – whether that's helping a nonprofit manage a

community health initiative, save wildlife, build a recreation center, or build capacity in regions where project management skills can significantly improve development outcomes.

Q3: How can project management make a social impact in our world?

Forsyth: Project management provides a structured way to turn ideas and intentions into measurable outcomes. Many of the world's most pressing challenges – from public health and climate resilience to education and infrastructure – are implemented through projects.

When organizations adopt strong project management practices, they are better equipped to deliver initiatives efficiently, transparently, and sustainably. This is particularly important in the social and nonprofit sectors, where resources are often limited, and the stakes are high. The landscape of the nonprofit sector has changed dramatically in the past few years, and many nonprofits are trying to do more with less. Having a process behind their grant applications, identifying and mitigating risks, and donor management through what we know as stakeholder management can help nonprofits thrive, even in challenging times.

For the youth we serve, it's about providing skills to transform communities and solve global challenges, as well as skills that can translate into economic mobility for the next generation.

Q4: Has PMI aligned itself with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals? How does PMI balance support of the UN's SDGs with geopolitics?

Forsyth: Yes, PMI's social impact program aligns closely with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs represent a global framework for addressing critical issues such as poverty reduction, quality education, sustainable cities, and climate action.

Through PMIEF, PMI contributes directly to SDG 4 (Quality Education) as well as many of the sub-targets and indicators of that goal such as equal access to education through our grants, relevant skills for financial success, global citizenship, and expanding scholarships for higher education.

Through PMWB, we are addressing whatever UN SDG that nonprofit or NGO is focused on, with some partners dedicated to life below water, gender equality, or sustainable cities and communities. We meet them where they are and help support them for the impact they are trying to make.

While discussions around sustainability can sometimes become politicized, PMI approaches these issues through the lens of project success and professional practice. Sustainability is about more than climate change – it also includes long-term economic value, social responsibility, and environmental stewardship. Our research shows that

projects aligned with these principles are often more successful and create stronger long-term outcomes.

That perspective is reflected in PMI's broader strategy. Last year, PMI formed a joint venture with Green Project Management, reinforcing the idea that sustainability is increasingly a business imperative in project management, not simply a "nice-to-have." PMI is also a member of the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC), which aligns us with the broader objectives of the SDGs.

At the same time, PMI operates in a global environment with diverse political, economic, and cultural perspectives. While policies or views may differ, organizations around the world still rely on projects to implement initiatives, develop infrastructure, and deliver services. Our role is to provide the tools, knowledge, and professional community that help organizations deliver positive outcomes responsibly and effectively.

We also see strong momentum from the next generation. Many PMIEF grantees already embed sustainability into their teaching, projects, and competitions, reflecting a growing desire among young people to help solve some of the world's biggest challenges through practical, project-based solutions.

Q5: The PMI Education Foundation has been very visible to PMI members in recent years, with some notable successful initiatives related to educating young people about project management. What are some of the more successful PMIEF programs, and some that our readers might not know too much about?

Forsyth: I am so proud to be leading PMIEF into its 36th year! PMIEF's most successful programs all share a common goal: helping young people develop durable skills – such as problem-solving, teamwork, and structured thinking – through the lens of project management. We achieve this in two ways. The first, grant making to youth-serving nonprofits focused on embedding project management into programs or competitions they already run. And second, promoting PMIEF Skills for Life, which is a free resource for parents, educators, or facilitators to use with youth to increase their awareness, understanding, and application of project management.

We support 18 global organizations that integrate project management into youth development and education programs in regions around the world through financial grants. These partners adapt the concepts to their local contexts, reaching millions of young people each year. Some of these initiatives may be less visible to PMI members but have a tremendous impact at the community level.

For example, we've partnered with Special Olympics, where young people with intellectual and developmental disabilities learn project management skills as part of leadership and life-skills programs. It's inspiring to see how structured planning and teamwork can empower these athletes to lead initiatives within their communities, especially in programs around inclusion.

We also collaborate with programs such as STEM Racing – formerly F1 in Schools – where students design, build, and race miniature Formula One cars. In that environment, project management becomes a natural framework for coordinating engineering, marketing, budgeting, and team leadership. Students are required to produce project portfolios as part of the competition's overall components. Not surprisingly, the teams that win the Project Management Award also find themselves on the overall podium. From STEM Racing, we have also seen a number of youth go on to study project management at university.

Another important partnership is with Aflatoun International, a global nonprofit focused on social and financial education for young people. By integrating project management concepts into their programs, young participants learn how to transform ideas for community improvement into actionable projects in highly underserved areas. This gives young people, particularly women, the ability to achieve financial freedom, build a business in their community, and not be reliant on marrying at a young age to be financially secure.

Together, these initiatives demonstrate that project management can transform lives. When young people learn how to plan, collaborate, and deliver meaningful outcomes, they gain capabilities that benefit them throughout their careers and communities.

Q6: What are some of the key factors driving successful PMIEF programs and initiatives?

Several factors consistently contribute to the success of PMIEF programs. First, strong partnerships are essential, whether with educators, youth-serving nonprofit organizations, or PMI chapters. These partnerships help ensure that programs are locally relevant and sustainable.

Second, our initiatives emphasize practical learning. Project management is most effectively learned through experience, so many of our programs encourage participants to apply project concepts to real-world challenges in their communities.

Finally, volunteer engagement plays a crucial role. PMI's global network of professionals contributes financially, with expertise, mentorship to teams and youth, and impact to these initiatives. Their involvement significantly expands the reach and impact of PMIEF programs.

Q7: How are PMI's social impact programs affecting other PMI products and services? Isn't social impact another term for social responsibility, and, if so, what else is PMI planning in this regard? In other words, how does social responsibility fit into PMI's long-range strategic plans?

Forsyth: PMI's purpose is to "maximize project success to elevate our world." I believe that our Social Impact Programs are a demonstration of that. Our initiatives influence PMI's broader strategy by demonstrating how project management skills

elevate our world. Insights from social impact work often inform content, thought leadership, professional development resources, and community engagement strategies.

Social impact and social responsibility are closely related concepts, but PMI approaches social impact through the lens of our core expertise – project management. Our grants at PMIEF are not to keep organizations operational, but are very specific to embedding project management into core programs, as we believe that understanding project management can be a catalyst for social impact.

From a strategic perspective, PMI recognizes that project managers increasingly operate in environments where sustainability, social responsibility, and stakeholder impact are central considerations. Our goal is to equip professionals with the tools and perspectives needed to deliver projects responsibly and effectively in that context.

Q8: Considering the UN's SDGs, the nonprofit sector that is the focus of Project Managers Without Borders, and project management in education and other PMIEF initiatives, there are thousands of projects. Is PMI planning any products or services specifically aimed at those areas under your purview? In many parts of the world, those projects are critically important. What is PMI's thinking on serving project stakeholders?

Forsyth: In addition to PMIEF Skills for Life, there are a number of thought leadership pieces about sustainability available on the [PMI website](#).

Through PMWB we recognize that many nonprofit and development leaders are already managing complex projects – coordinating teams, launching initiatives, and delivering programs, often with limited resources – even if they don't formally call it project management. PMWB recognizes this reality and is working to make project management tools and resources more accessible and practical for these sectors.

Our goal is to provide guidance that simplifies, rather than complicates, their work. For the nonprofit sector, we have a free resource entitled "Project Management Tools for Nonprofit and NGO Leaders." This is a 20-page guide that helps nonprofits by offering adaptable frameworks and learning resources to help organizations plan effectively, align stakeholders, and maintain continuity even when teams or circumstances change. Ultimately, PMI wants to ensure that organizations delivering critical social and community initiatives have the capabilities they need to manage projects successfully and maximize their impact.

We are continuing to iterate on this guide and provide more tools as we continue to learn the needs of the nonprofit sector and what is moving the needle on their missions the most.

Q9: In that same vein, PMI has been very active in the global south in recent years, with significant PMI events held in African, Asia Pacific, India, and Latin American

regions in particular. What role are your social impact programs and the PMIEF playing in support of that growth?

Forsyth: Many regions in the global south are experiencing rapid development and increasing demand for skilled project professionals. Social impact programs play an important role in supporting that growth by expanding access to project management education and training. As the proverb says, “Necessity is the mother of invention.” Some of the most creative and relevant inventions and innovations come from areas where there is necessity. We see this with our PMIEF partnerships in under-served areas, and in regions where access to education is not as accessible as others. There is also a strong cultural tie to social impact. LATAM and Sub-Saharan Africa have the strongest adoption of social impact frameworks because, culturally, people support and look after each other, rather than the individualism we see in other areas.

PMIEF programs often serve as entry points for young people and emerging professionals to learn project management skills. In many cases, these programs are delivered in partnership with local educators, nonprofits, and PMI chapters, ensuring that they address regional needs and priorities. By building local capacity, we hope these initiatives help strengthen professional communities and contribute to sustainable development efforts across those regions.

Q10: One of your office's most successful initiatives appears to be chapter outreach. How can PMI chapters and local leaders support your social impact programs and the PMIEF? Maybe provide one or two examples to highlight a few chapters.

Forsyth: PMI chapters are essential partners in delivering social impact at the local level. Chapters often have strong relationships with community organizations, schools, and nonprofits, which allows them to identify opportunities where project management expertise can make a difference. We encourage all our PMI Chapters to establish a chapter-level Social Impact Coordinator position. Some regions have regional Social Impact Leads as well. This allows our team to connect the Chapters with global partnerships already in the works, and/or to support them in their work with youth or nonprofit organizations.

Many chapters support PMIEF initiatives by organizing volunteer programs, donations, mentoring youth, or introducing project management concepts in schools and community programs.

We have seen inspiring examples from chapters around the world that have partnered with educational institutions or local nonprofits to implement community projects. These efforts demonstrate how the PMI community can translate professional expertise into meaningful local impact.

A few highlights: PMI chapters play a critical role in bringing social impact to life locally. We've seen inspiring examples, such as the PMI West Bengal Chapter partnering with a nonprofit in India to establish a community library in the Sundarbans. By sharing

project management skills – such as planning, risk management, and stakeholder coordination – chapter volunteers helped the organization not only launch the library but also build the capacity to sustain it over time. The result is a community-led resource that supports literacy and education for local children. Examples like this show how chapters can apply their professional expertise to strengthen nonprofits and create lasting impact in their communities.

For PMIEF, so many of our Chapters work with youth, it's hard to pull just a few stories. PMI Pittsburgh has been using Skills for Life for nearly a decade to engage youth through the Special Olympics, Neighborhood North: Museum of Play, and various other youth-serving nonprofits. PMI Georgia has been mentoring Junior Achievement Europe teams in Georgia, specifically with the help of long-time volunteer Giorgi Lobjanidze. The teams he mentors often represent Georgia on the regional stage at Junior Achievement's Gen-E Competition.

Q11: Your team at PMI must be growing, given all the work you are doing. Would you like to mention if any of your team members share the spotlight with anyone? This all seems like very positive and essential work that PMI is sponsoring now.

Forsyth: I say this all of the time, but I have the best job at PMI. A lot of that has to do with the passionate people who serve this Social Impact area. For PMIEF Andrew Whitmire, Tim Swain, Amber Buschmann, and Aisha Beverly. On the PMWB side of the house, Julia Adams, Laura Davidson, Carol Martinez, and Allie Tidwell. Rebecca McWhorter works specifically for Social Impact Programs. I would be remiss if I didn't call out the outstanding Boards we have guiding each of these organizations as well, particularly our Board Chair for PMIEF, Connie Figley, and our Board Chairman (and Founder) for PMWB, Deanna Landers.

Q12: Do you have a last message?

Forsyth: Project management is often associated with business and infrastructure, but its potential goes far beyond those domains. The discipline provides a powerful framework for addressing complex challenges and delivering meaningful change.

Across the world, we see communities, nonprofits, educators, and volunteers applying project management principles to improve lives and strengthen societies. PMI is proud to support those efforts and to help ensure that the next generation of project leaders understands the broader impact their work can have.

About the Interviewer



Yasmina Khelifi

Paris, France



Yasmina Khelifi, PMP, PMI- ACP, PMI-PBA is an experienced project manager in the telecom industry. Along with her 20-year career at [Orange SA](#) (the large French multinational telecommunications corporation), she sharpened her global leadership skills, delivering projects with significant manufacturers and SIM makers. Yasmina strives for building collaborative bridges between people to make international projects successful. She relies on three pillars: project management skills, the languages she speaks, and a passion for sharing knowledge.

She is a PMP certification holder since 2013, a PMI- ACP and PMI-PBA certification holder since 2020. She is an active volunteer member at PMI France and PMI UAE, and a member of PMI Germany Chapter. French-native, she can speak German, English, Spanish, Italian, Japanese and she is learning Arabic. Yasmina loves sharing her knowledge and experiences at work, in her volunteers' activities at PMI, and in [projectmanagement.com](#) as a regular blogger. She is also the host and co-founder of the podcast [Global Leaders Talk with Yasmina Khelifi](#) to help people in becoming better international leaders.

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