



## Client-side PMO

### A new archetype to add value and flexibility

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Failed IT can cost the federal government billions of dollars annually. In fact, according to the non-profit Program Management Institute's 8th Global Project Management Survey results, titled [Pulse of the Profession®](#), government organizations waste \$101 million for every \$1 billion spent on project and programs. For Federal IT projects, these failures not only represent wasted taxpayer funding but, more importantly, result in the inability to serve constituents, advance the public good and maintain the public trust. Large and small government agencies are struggling to keep up with the IT infrastructure needed to compete for taxpayer funding, to connect to the community and to accommodate the vast amount of data generated amid rapidly evolving citizen demand and against the backdrop of aging of technology, much of which was acquired long before things like increased mobility, end-point security and cloud-hosted access revolutionized how information is managed and accessed. Federal IT systems face an ever-increasing risk of obsolescence, requiring upgrades in technology infrastructure, modernization of legacy application platforms, integration of disconnected enterprise-wide systems, and related endeavors. Failed projects might include things like delay in operations or cost overruns, poor training, inability to access legacy data, denial of service, inability to connect enterprise systems or to transform to the cloud, poor security allowing unauthorized access to sensitive data—the list is long. Federal IT project failures could be attributed to many potential factors: it could be due to poor workmanship, lack of adherence to standard System Development Lifecycle (SDLC) methodologies, perhaps a lack of robustness in the tool sets used. The list of reasons why IT projects might fail is even longer.

#### **Inadequate Project Management Leads to Failure**

It is widely accepted that the vast majority of IT project failures can be traced back to poor collaboration/communication between vendor and client, and are a result of missing or inadequate Project Management. Project Management (PM) is more than just a set of activities, it is a methodology. This methodology is outlined in the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK) which is developed and maintained by the Project Management Institute (PMI). The PMBOK lays out various phases of a project and discusses in detail the activities and assumptions that should be followed in order to reduce the inherent risk associated with any complex project.

Given the existence of robust methods like those put forward in the PMBOK, why do so many projects still fail? Consider the following short list:

- Some clients fail to mandate that only certified Project Managers may lead mission-critical and complex projects (this may be a result of Low Cost Technically Acceptable compromise, or failure to understand the need for certified PM's to lead critical projects).

- Some PMs don't adequately utilize the steps and tools they learned to become certified.
- Some PMs over-manage a project, resulting in a loss of momentum or unnecessary cost increase.
- Some projects fail due to poor product application or bad execution, despite being managed properly.

### **Client Side Project Management is an Intrinsic Requirement**

One point of potential failure that is rarely discussed is the propensity of government clients to require their IT Integrator to provide adequate and robust Project Management, but pay little attention to the oversight needed on the receiving end. What client-side acquirers fail to recognize is that the Project Management oversight by the Integrator is put in place for that vendor's purposes; the vendor pays little to no attention to the labor requirements that will be required on the client side. The vendor is typically not concerned with the time constraints on the client, nor the human and non-human resources required by its customer to supervise the project. This propensity is so common that the Office of Management and Budget insists that federal CIOs downgrade the documented health of a project if it does not have an adequately trained, certified and experienced project manager supervising a project. [This mandate](#) clearly acknowledges the importance of project management on the client side. Furthermore, the President recently [signed legislation](#) that seeks to boost accountability and best practices in project and program management functions across the federal government, under the *Program Management Improvement and Accountability Act of 2015*, which recognizes the need for agencies to develop a standards-based program management policy and assign leadership to oversee program management.

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Another misconception is that the purpose of client-side project management is to simply keep track of what the vendor is doing. Some client-side project managers feel that their job begins and ends with accepting, reviewing and approving vendor deliverables. Nothing could be further from the real need. In fact, for the vast majority of activities conducted by the vendor, there are corresponding activities that need to be managed on the client side. A good example is what occurs during the testing phase of the project. While vendors are responsible for unit, systems, integration, and performance testing, clients have a huge simultaneous responsibility that may go overlooked. For example, if clients aren't involved with developing test scripts for each of these phases, the all-important User Acceptance Testing (UAT) phase could fail. This same relationship exists for the vast majority of the phases in the System Development Lifecycle (SDLC).

Very seldom, if ever, will a client have the necessary staffing to support ongoing operations, *and simultaneously* support a large complex system implementation. Organizations can rarely afford to assign their best-and-brightest staff to a project on a full-time basis. The Catch-22 is that if quality staffing is not assigned to IT projects, the risk of failure rises. If high-quality staff are assigned to these projects and pulled from other areas, productivity in other areas may suffer and costs could become unsustainable.

The answer to this dilemma may be found by reexamining traditional approaches to project management.

A standard way of viewing a project is by its Lifecycle. Regardless of method used (Waterfall, Agile, Scrum, etc.), projects still go through the following steps: Planning, Analysis, Design, Implementation, Maintenance. Of course, in an Agile approach, many of these phases will occur simultaneously. As mentioned, most clients regard project management as simply tracking vendor activities. As a result, many clients award Project Management Office (PMO) contracts and tasks that provide for this superficial oversight, failing to take into account the other resources (especially on the client-side) that are essential to lower project risk, and improve quality, while continuing to support normal business operations.

**A New Template is Needed for the Client PMO – Client-side Advocacy**

What if a vendor were to include in the PMO contract the ability to provide additional, traditionally client-side services, such as User Acceptance Testing (UAT) support for the project? This would mean that the PMO vendor would need to bid labor categories that included subject matter expertise, in addition to providing labor categories with only basic project management experience. The client’s ability to access additional resources needed at critical stages in the project lifecycle would help client-side PMs struggling with resource issues. Additionally, offering these resources in an “ala carte” method would provide both resource *and* funding flexibility to oftentimes painfully lean project budgets.

**Table I** below compares a traditional view of client-side project management activities compared to a newer model that offers the PM client-side advocacy, with more flexibility and greater access to expanded capabilities.

Traditional PMO Services	New Vision of PMO Services
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Manage PMO Structure</li> <li>➤ Track Overall Project Schedule</li> <li>➤ Manage Client-Side Project Schedule</li> <li>➤ Track Project Spending</li> <li>➤ Manage Review of Project Deliverables</li> <li>➤ Manage user communication</li> <li>➤ Support Risk Review and Mitigation</li> <li>➤ Provide Project Status &amp; Progress Reports to Project Sponsors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Plus</li> <li>➤ Provide Pre-Implementation Assessment</li> <li>➤ Manage PMO Structure</li> <li>➤ Track Overall Project Schedule</li> <li>➤ Manage Client-Side Project Schedule</li> <li>➤ Track Project Spending</li> <li>➤ Review of Project Deliverables</li> <li>➤ Manage user communication</li> <li>➤ Support Risk Review and Mitigation</li> <li>➤ Provide Project Status &amp; Progress Reports to Project Sponsors</li> <li>➤ Provide Verification &amp; Validation</li> <li>➤ Provide Technical Oversight (Review delivered code, technical artifacts, etc.)</li> <li>➤ Support Requirements Analysis Phase</li> <li>➤ Track Requirement Traceability Matrix</li> <li>➤ Support Development of Test Scripts</li> <li>➤ Support User Acceptance Testing</li> <li>➤ Support Train the Trainer approach</li> <li>➤ Support initial Production operations</li> <li>➤ Provide deskside user support</li> <li>➤ Support Development of Procedures</li> <li>➤ Provide Data Conversion support</li> <li>➤ Provide Data Clean-up support (pre and post) Provide Legacy System retirement activity</li> <li>➤ Perform Post Implementation Assessment</li> </ul>

**Table I** above illustrates a new archetype for project management that provides many additional capabilities to the client-side project manager. Additionally, when the contract is written with these tasks as ala carte, the PM can pick and choose what is needed, when needed. The vendor awarded such a contract will commit to providing subject matter expertise for each of these tasks in a timely manner, advocating for client-side PMO success.

### **Flexibility and Cost Savings**

The true benefit of this new model lies in its flexibility and cost savings features. This approach allows PMs to select *only the services they need* by quickly issuing a task order.

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Serving this need is a sweet spot for small businesses that can nimbly participate by providing junior and senior analysts that have experience in serving multiple roles. In turn, clients benefit from an expanded talent pool, but with attractive hourly rates typically provided by small businesses. The true value of this support lies in the early warning signals that come out of robust scrutiny of all facets of the IT project, not just the scheduling and funding reviewed by Project Managers.

### **Conclusion**

Remember, Project Management is a two-headed beast. The PM on the vendor side is single-mindedly focused on the vendor’s responsibility. The PM responsibility on the client side must be just as robust, if not more so, in order to lower risk and maintain total visibility into project throughout its execution, and on the roadmap to successful implementation. Is it prudent to hypothetically spend a million dollars to avoid risk to a twenty million dollar project? Most learned government decision makers would say yes.

Zenius Corporation has embraced this new Program Management offering and specializes in providing ala carte Program Management services for Federal, State, and Higher Education clients.

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### **About Zenius:**

*Zenius Corporation (Zenius) is an SBA certified HUBZone company, Minority-Owned Small Disadvantaged Business (SDB) firm comprised of highly experienced and exceptionally knowledgeable industry experts. As trusted advisors to our clients, we offer expertise in solving complex and multi-dimensional operational and technical challenges. Headquartered in Leesburg, VA, Zenius Corporation’s management and technology consulting services include IT*

*Infrastructure and Modernization Support, Cloud Transition Support, Business Intelligence and Analytics, Cybersecurity Support, and Program Management. For more information go to <https://www.zeniuscorp.com>.*

To further discuss how our methodology can support you in assessing your Program Management needs, please contact Zenius Corporation at [info@zeniuscorp.com](mailto:info@zeniuscorp.com).