



WA · Office of the

Chief Information Officer

Quarterly Best Practices Summary

Office of the Chief Information Officer
November 24, 2020

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	3
Key Accomplishments	3
Best Practices	5
1. Articulating a clear business case	5
2. Establishing strong governance	6
3. Selecting a right-fit project manager	6
4. Managing a remote project team	7
5. Managing organizational change	8
6. Leading the go/no-go decision	9
7. Conducting procurements that protect the state's investment	10
Lessons Learned	12
Expert Project Management Team	16

To obtain this publication in alternative format, please contact the Washington Technology Solutions (WaTech) ADA coordinator, Chris Britton, at 360.407.8437 or via email at chris.britton@watech.wa.gov.

Executive Summary

The 2020 supplemental operating budget (Section 149(1)(a)) provided the Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO) funding for experienced information technology (IT) project managers to provide critical support to agency IT projects that are subject to gated funding project provisions. The project managers:

- (i) Provide master level project management guidance to agency IT stakeholders;
- (ii) Consider statewide best practices from the public and private sectors, independent review and analysis, vendor management, budget and timing quality assurance and other support of current or past IT projects in at least Washington state and share these with agency IT stakeholders and legislative fiscal staff at least quarterly, beginning July 1, 2020; and
- (iii) Beginning December 31, 2019, provide independent recommendations to legislative fiscal committees by December of each calendar year on oversight of IT projects.

The OCIO team of master level project managers have been serving as project management partners to support state agency gated funding information technology projects¹ since July 2019. This report provides a summary of key accomplishments from July 1 through September 30, 2020 as well as best practices and lessons learned shared with agency IT stakeholders during this same time period.

Key Accomplishments

Key accomplishments this reporting period include:

- **Project Management Guidance.** Expert level project managers spent nearly 700 hours working with individual state agencies, providing master level project management guidance to 39 gated funding projects representing 31 state agencies from July 1 through September.
- **Risk Management and Mitigation.** OCIO assessed risk status was reduced from red to yellow or yellow to green for 61% of gated funding projects engaged with expert level project managers during this reporting period – compared to 29% during the March 1 to June 30, 2020 time period.

Expert level project managers spent nearly 700 hours working with individual state agencies, providing master level project management guidance to 39 gated funding projects representing 31 state agencies from July 1 through September 30, 2020.

¹ Projects subject to the gated funding requirements of Section 701 of the 2020 supplemental operating budget or Section 701 of the 2019-21 transportation budget.

- **Statewide best practices.** Master level project managers worked one-on-one with agency project teams to share industry best practices and lessons learned including:
 - Executive sponsorship and project governance
 - Project management/project controls
 - Scope management
 - Project schedule planning and management
 - Investment planning and management
 - Technology budgeting
 - Project team/human resource management
 - Risk and issue management
 - Procurement
 - Contract and vendor management
 - Implementation approach and methodology
 - Organizational change management
- **Positive impacts on state agency IT projects.** Executive sponsors and project teams reported positive impacts that the master level project managers are having on their projects. In their own words:

“I wanted to take a moment and thank you for all the work you’ve done with this project team. They just had their first steering committee meeting and presented their monthly report, and it was flawless. A great start for this project and I know you contributed a great deal toward their success.”

“[We appreciate] all of the work you’ve done with [the team] in securing a quality assurance vendor, a project manager, completing the technology budget and gate application, and other project management pieces that led to a great kickoff.”

“Thanks for being such great partners and assisting us in getting this completed! Appreciated more than you know!!!”

The master level project managers also are working closely with the OCIO to publish new best practice project management resources by the end of this year. These include:

- Project manager’s handbook.
- Selected project management best practice tools and templates (included in the project manager’s handbook).
- Selected best practice quick tips and process guides (included in the project manager’s handbook).

Additionally, the master level project managers are working to develop a statewide community of practice (CoP) for state and agency project managers, to be launched in 2021. The CoP will facilitate discussion and the exchange of best practices and lessons learned among project managers as well as provide resources and a peer network of support.

Best Practices

Expert level project managers identified several opportunities to bring industry best practices to gated funding projects. Here are seven instructive themes shared with agency IT stakeholders.

1. Articulating a clear business case.

A clear business case is foundational to a project. This is the justification for the project. It provides decision makers, stakeholders and the public with a tool for evidence-based and transparent decision making.

A clear business case provides the following:

- A tool for decision makers as issues and obstacles arise on projects.
- Common goals, objectives and boundaries for the project team.
- Awareness and desire for change for stakeholders.

Every project team member, at every level, should truly understand and be prepared to communicate the “Why?” of the project.

Best practices for articulating a clear business case.

1. Ensure the project manager works with the executive sponsor to develop a clear business case for the project. Share this business case with the authorizing environment, project team and key stakeholders. In Washington state, business cases are often included in:
 - Budget requests/decision packages.
 - Concept briefs.
 - Project charters.
 - Investment plans.
2. As part of the project kickoff, include tools or exercises that provide project team members with a clear understanding of the business case they can use going forward. Tools teams have used include:
 - An “elevator speech” for the project. This is 30 second to two-minute story about the project used to create interest in the initiative and the benefits it will deliver.
 - A “magazine cover” for the project. This is a visually interesting one-page summary of the project that looks like a magazine cover, highlighting the planned outcomes, benefits and stakeholders impacted.
 - A product vision box. This is literally a box that contains representations of project deliverables that can be reviewed and revised as needed throughout the project as needed. It can be posted in a central location when complete. The front of the box can include the project name, logo, slogan or tagline and a few of the most

Foundational to a project is the underlying business case—the justification for the project, the value proposition, the reason it is being undertaken. It provides decision makers, stakeholders and the public with a tool for evidence-based and transparent decision making.

significant benefits. On the back, in details about objectives and planned outcomes. On the side, list ingredients for success.

2. Establishing strong governance.

Project governance is not easy. It requires strong leadership, adherence to the selected structure and practice. Lack of effective project governance increases the risk of late delivery, overspending, lack of adoption due to poor quality decisions, delays in decision-making, and lack of stakeholder involvement.

Project governance provides a decision-making framework to ensure accountability and alignment among the project team, executives and the rest of the organization. Adhering to a structure helps deliver the project on-time and within budget.

Principles of good project governance include:

- Establish a single point (or body) of cross-functional accountability.
- Get the right people on the bus.
- Consider an advisory or stakeholder working group.
- Implement the right systems and processes (e.g., rules for making decisions).
- Set and keep regular monitoring and reporting schedules.
- Maintain focus on delivery.

Best practices for establishing strong governance.

1. Identify an executive sponsor responsible for providing leadership, understanding cultural norms, developing the business case and keeping the project aligned with the agency's and state's strategic objectives. Generally, the executive sponsor is also responsible for funding and resourcing the project. For larger, more complex projects, a business sponsor may also be assigned. The business sponsor is deeply involved in the day-to-day activities of the project and is well-aligned with the executive sponsor to get decisions made quickly.
2. Establish an executive steering committee that serves as an advisory body comprised of senior stakeholders that provide guidance to the project team and recommendations to the executive sponsor and address escalated issues.
3. Establish processes for identifying, documenting and communicating key decisions.
4. Develop a RACI matrix (responsible, accountable, consulted and informed) for clarification on roles and responsibilities around decision-making.

3. Selecting a right-fit project manager.

Project managers' roles are key to a project's success. The lack of a skilled project manager is frequently listed in the top 10 reasons that projects fail. Project managers plan, coordinate, implement, lead and report out to organization leaders and stakeholders. It is a key role on most projects.

As the complexity of IT projects increase, so must the skills set of project managers.

What makes a competent and reliable project manager?

- Previous project management experience. Consider the type of projects they have worked on including similar project size, complexity, duration and outcome.

- Ability to plan effectively and act efficiently.
- Ability to manage and lead.
- Ability to build and support a team and manage and influence people who are not direct reports.
- Mastery of project management processes and tools.
- Attention to detail.
- Obsession with achieving objectives on-time and on-budget.
- Ability to communicate verbally and in writing.
- Ability to juggle multiple responsibilities.
- Flexibility, tenacity and patience.
- Education and certifications.

As the complexity of IT projects increase, so must the skillset of project managers.

Best practices for selecting a right-fit project manager.

1. Require senior-level project expertise for any external project manager acquired to perform the role and consider requiring PMP® certification.
2. Develop a Washington state community of practice for project managers that provides webinars, handbooks, guides, templates, best practices and other opportunities to support professional development, exchange lessons learned and provide collaboration opportunities.
3. Provide training and mentoring to project managers who struggle in key areas or who fail to deliver projects on time, within budget time/budget/quality as planned.

4. Managing a remote project team.

With the shift of most state agencies to remote work due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the Governor's Stay Home, Stay Healthy and Safe Start directives, agencies quickly pivoted to virtual meetings and communication. Remote work is becoming the new standard for agencies and projects.

With remote work becoming the new normal, some team members are already reporting early benefits, including:

- Increased autonomy.
- Greater levels of efficiency.
- Higher quality work products without office distractions.

However, with the new environment come important new challenges to address:

- Maintaining human connection.
- Watching for cues regarding mental health or a lack of ability to focus.
- Advising staff on appropriate telework tools to support optimal productivity.
- Developing synergy in a virtual environment.
- Addressing the limitations of each employee's virtual environment (e.g., bandwidth, connectivity, office setup, ergonomics, childcare or other interruptions).

Best practices for managing a remote project team.

1. Develop a reliable, secure and well-equipped infrastructure to support seamless collaboration and effective remote work. Utilizing technology and software can help teams perform at their peak, no matter where they work.
2. Focus on onboarding and training to manage remote teams, it is important to clarify expectations right from the beginning, such as work schedules, communication expectations and collaboration methods. Make sure virtual teams understand project goals; each project should offer a consistent onboarding and training process.
3. Require all gatherings and events to have a clear agenda and identify key roles (leader, scribe, process checker, timekeeper) before each meeting. There is no opportunity for “drive-by” hallway talk when working remotely, so optimizing communication and accountability is a must.
4. Accommodate flexible work schedules and work hours.
5. Make time to gather in person as team, if permissible. Face-to-face connections build trust and strengthen relationships within the team (video calling helps here too). Best practices recommend team gatherings at least twice a year.
6. Reinforce the company culture. Organizations that foster an inclusive virtual environment are the ones that get the best out of every team member.
7. Make collaboration and communication simple. A crucial element in remote environments is clear communication. Best practices suggest communicating three different ways, for example: chat, email and town hall.

5. Managing organizational change.

Information technology projects, especially enterprise projects, introduce changes to processes, procedures and/or policies throughout an organization. These changes bring uncertainty, confusion and perhaps resistance. Without buy-in and support from impacted staff, user adoption will be at risk and a project’s objectives may not be realized. Including organizational change management (OCM) on enterprise IT projects increases the likelihood of meeting project objectives. Therefore, it is essential that OCM be included in the scope of enterprise-wide projects.

OCM provides the process, tools and techniques to manage the people side of change to achieve the desired outcome. It helps ensure the new processes are firmly adopted by the people impacted.

Best practices for managing organizational change.

Establish a vision for each transformation. The change must have a purpose that staff identify with and can embrace. The vision should allow shared ownership at all levels of the organization. “Effective visions are clear, unambiguous, personally relevant, simple and vivid.”²

1. Engage senior leadership. It is critical that senior leadership commit to and involve themselves in the design, communication and implementation of the OCM initiative. Leaders and influencers should communicate that the change represents a positive development for the organization. Conversely, a lack of leadership commitment reduces the chances of sustained change adoption.
2. Develop a change management plan. Key components of the plan include vision and goals (specific to OCM), stakeholder analysis, stakeholder impact, key messages, change and communication tools and strategies, specific milestones, resource requirements, metrics, roles and responsibilities.
3. Engage stakeholders, both champions and resisters.
4. Communicate at all levels repeatedly and through multiple channels. Include the opportunity for questions and feedback.
5. Establish training plans. Enterprise changes may require significant investment in training of staff, support teams and partners.
6. Measure progress. Organizations need metrics to measure progress and change. Early in the planning process, operating units should identify metrics that will appropriately demonstrate change adoption.

Involve senior leadership. It is critical that senior leadership involve themselves in the design, communication and implementation of the OCM initiative and communicate that the change represents a positive development for the organization.

6. Leading the go/no-go decision.

After months, perhaps years of work, projects lead up to an important decision point: the go/no-go decision to implement a new system or process. Generally, the decision is made by the executive sponsor and the executive steering committee with input from critical stakeholders. This is typically performed as a formal meeting and often includes additional ad hoc committee members or project team members who are prepared to share their expertise in support of a big decision.

This meeting could yield several outcomes:

- Go: The project can proceed to go live.
- No go: The project cannot proceed to go live. Reasons are identified and when these are addressed another meeting needs to be scheduled to reconsider the go/no-go decision.

² *Communications for Governance and Accountability Program, Change Management.* The World Bank, 2009.

- Go, with caveats: The project can proceed to go live if specific issues or concerns are addressed by a set date or time. In these cases, another meeting is generally not needed.

Best practices for leading the go/no-go decision.

1. Establish readiness criteria that is approved by the steering committee at least three months prior to the planned go live date. This allows the steering committee to assess and track progress toward readiness early and periodically. A best practice is to establish at a minimum a 30-, 60- and 90-day assessment plan. This can vary for projects of different size, complexity and duration.
2. Create a readiness dashboard updated by the key accountable owner prior to each steering committee meeting and the final go live meeting. For example, the testing lead would update the testing status. The project manager may want to have the readiness dashboard updated more frequently (e.g., weekly) beginning one month prior to go live to allow enough time to address issues prior to the formal go live meeting.
3. Conduct a formal go live meeting as close to go live as possible, but before any go live activities take place, such as training staff or freezing legacy system environments. The purpose is to review the readiness dashboard. Meeting participants should include the project sponsor, steering committee members and other key project stakeholders who will make the go/no-go recommendation to the sponsor. At the end of the meeting, lead a voting exercise and ask each member for their go/no-go decision. Typically, though not always, the executive sponsor is the final vote and ultimate decider.
4. Record the final go/no-go decision and communicate to stakeholders.

7. Conducting procurements that protect the state's investment.

Many state information technology projects include procurements that result in goods (products, material or equipment) or services (labor, work or analysis) or both. The goal of these procurements is to find the best solution, at the best price while mitigating the risks to the state.

Understanding the different type of procurements, contract options available and resources needed to support the processes is critical both to successful project implementation and ongoing operations.

The focus of the following best practices is related to competitive procurements (requests for proposals or RFPs).

Best practices for conducting procurements that protect the state's investment.

1. Find a good procurement lead/coordinator. This is generally someone from the organization's contracts office who have run similar types of procurements and are well-versed in Washington state procurement laws.
2. Engage Department of Enterprise Services (DES) early in the planning of the procurement.
3. Engage the Attorney General's Office early in the planning for the procurement.

4. Clearly define your business requirements and expectations for a solution. For instance: Are there any specific deadlines you are trying to meet? Is your agency looking to include maintenance and operations of the solution after implementation?
5. Before spending a lot of time conducting a competitive procurement, review project needs against available state master contracts, agency convenience contracts, qualified cooperative purchasing agreements and existing solutions throughout the state.
6. Include key stakeholders in the development, review and evaluation of the requirements and RFP.
7. Structure the RFP evaluation to focus on meeting priority requirements. For instance, if cost is the driving factor for the RFP, weight the scoring for the cost section higher than other evaluation criteria.
8. Develop a procurement plan defining the process, timeline, evaluation criteria and evaluation and selection team. Establish multiple gates or phases for the selection process, including: a written evaluation, solution demonstrations and vendor interviews, hands-on sandbox assessment and reference checks.
9. Conduct a site visit to where the top vendor(s) conducted similar implementations.
10. Conduct a workshop with the apparent successful vendor to review each requirement and expected deliverables prior to a best and final offer and contract negotiations.
11. Spend quality time with the selected vendor to develop the statement of work. This will be one of the primary control documents used during project implementation.
 - Establish solid entrance and exit criteria for each phase of the work.
 - Establish clear responsibility for both vendor and state.
 - Ensure clarity around expectations of scope and of staff provided by the vendor for each phase of the project.
 - Establish firm metrics for expectation. For instance, for defects determine what would be acceptable to begin system integration testing.
12. Establish hard limitations before contract negotiations. Do not negotiate away essential state protections (e.g., security, performance standards, right of refusal for key staff, data ownership, exit strategy, performance bond, liquidated damages).

Establish hard limitations before contract negotiations. Do not negotiate away essential state protections.

Lessons Learned

On July 1, 2020 the expert level project managers in conjunction with the OCIO published an online repository of lessons learned from Washington state IT projects under OCIO oversight. It provides a tool for project managers to learn from the experiences of others to reduce project risk and reinforce positive outcomes. It is searchable by project type, project phase and category. Lessons learned categories include:

- Agency readiness.
- Communications and stakeholder management.
- Cost management.
- Executive sponsorship and governance.
- Implementation approach and methodology.
- Organizational change management.
- Procurement and contract and vendor management.
- Project management and project controls.
- Project team and human resource management.
- Schedule management.
- Scope management.

This quarter 15 projects under OCIO oversight completed, completed a major phase or release or were cancelled. Ten of these projects provided formal lessons learned reports; 74 new lessons learned were added to the online repository.

This [IT Project Lessons Learned Repository](#) has been updated to include lessons learned compiled from July 1 through September 30, 2020 and is available online. This quarter, 15 projects under OCIO oversight were either completed, completed a major phase or release or were cancelled. Ten of these projects provided formal lessons learned reports and 74 new lessons learned were added to the repository.

The following table provides a sample of these newly added lessons learned.

Category	Lesson Learned
Agency readiness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If a business program executive is not demanding a new business system and leading the efforts to secure the funding and resources needed to secure the new system, the project will struggle. Successful projects must be driven by the business staff who will use the system to accomplish their work. • Define for participants what the goals and expected outcomes are up front. • Ensure there is adequate time in the legacy contract for knowledge transfer before beginning procurement.

Category	Lesson Learned
Communications and stakeholder management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure all stakeholders are identified early. Include the entire project team and stakeholder community on regular communications. • Stakeholder involvement is key to project success. Develop appropriate communication plans and strategies to build trust and interest in the projects early. • Communicate decisions such as out of scope items to all stakeholders. For example, integration with other systems and data migration.
Executive sponsorship and governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a visible, dedicated leader who explains what is happening to agency staff and isn't afraid to accept some of the responsibility for project conditions and results. • Ensure there is an effective governance framework that considers project priority and urgency, scope, timeline, complexity, risk and stakeholders. • Consider increasing the frequency of executive committee meetings as go live nears, more timely decisions are required and critical issues are escalated.
Implementation approach and methodology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On very large, complex projects, make it a program and create projects within the program with planned start and end dates. • Ensure understanding of the Agile methodology at all levels of the project to support the development process and use of consistent language. This helps with clarity in process and expectations. • Establish a prioritized, groomed backlog of user stories, in sufficient quantity to support multiple development teams for multiple sprints and avoid unnecessary lags or under-utilization of development capacity. The time necessary to achieve this requires significant work at the beginning of a project and consistently throughout.

Category	Lesson Learned
Procurement and contract and vendor management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase contract management expertise to hold vendors accountable for deliverables needed and expected by the agency. • When selecting a vendor, verify its experience and track record for providing comparable services to other organizations similar to yours. • Implementation plans should include frequent reviews of actual deliverables from the vendor, such as demonstrations with subject matter experts, multiple releases where the state could validate work product. • Get multiple expert opinions during vendor selection process. Evaluation of how opinions will be weighted need to be clear to all stakeholders in the evaluation process. • As part of the vendor selection process include vendor demonstrations of product/service. Have vendors set up sandbox of system for further evaluation of the product or service. • Conduct in-depth business process reengineering effort for three to six months to solidify the requirement, priority and scope of pilot implementation before releasing the RFP for any commercial off-the-shelf (COTS) vendor. • Include a requirement for product and services demonstrations in the RFP. Vendors must demonstrate examples of comparable projects in sophistication and complexity, proving their competency and success in like deliveries. • Whenever there is an opportunity, use competitive solicitation process. Though time consuming, you get the best resources, best product, and competitive pricing for your project. • Structure the contract to allow for change requests during a project that would not have to amend the contract.
Project management and project controls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OCIO is a great source of templates and examples. The OCIO project consultants and other resources are there to help you. Engage with them early in the project for document templates and appropriate content before officially submitting the documents. • Develop clear, measurable process performance indicators for critical business processes. • Continue educating project team members on project controls and processes. • Reevaluate project risks and response plans on a regular cadence throughout the project.

Category	Lesson Learned
Project team and human resource management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As part of planning for the procurement and implementation, consider backfilling for subject matter experts and expanding project team size. • Consider providing increased compensation to staff to work on project. • During planning it is critical to identify when part-time and full-time resources are needed. For those identified as part-time, identify the risks associated with those resources not being full-time and develop mitigation strategies around those risks. • Do not underestimate the project management rigor or support required to manage multimillion-dollar, multi-year projects. As complexity increases, the need for stronger controls and detail must also increase. Consider usage of multiple, dual project manager roles such as deputy project manager and project manager/technical project manager for large projects. Sponsorship is not a substitution for this skillset or actual project management staff.
Schedule management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a detailed schedule with all known tasks identified, estimations of the level of effort associated with each task and assignment to a specific person. Without a detailed schedule, it is difficult to track to deliverables and assess progress. • Implement three-point estimates or a more formal task estimation process. Require validation of task estimates from resource managers or other positions of authority. • Allow for more time in the project schedule for users to learn new technology. • Allow for more time in the project schedule for business process mapping and process re-engineering. If needed, a lean event could be a good perquisite/stepping-stone into a full-blown project.
Scope management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop user stories in conversations with other agencies regarding the fit/gap of their existing system, for the request for information (RFI) and as pre-work for an RFP. • Complete the Office of Cybersecurity Services (OCS) design review earlier in the project. • Consider phasing, segmenting or otherwise compartmentalizing smaller units of scope to be achieved as part of one project. • Operate using a single requirements traceability matrix and apply the change control process to any modifications • Confirm requirements prior to project start.

Expert Project Management Team

The OCIO currently has four master level project managers:

Richelle Glascock has been working with the state's smaller agencies to provide hands-on support to coach projects to set up a project management framework and navigate the gated funding process. She is a Project Management Institute (PMI) certified Project Management Professional (PMP) who brings to the team experience as both project manager and independent quality assurance on state IT projects.

Shelley McDermott is a master level project manager with a BA in business from Evergreen State College and PMP certification from the PMI. Her background includes assessment and implementation of complex business initiatives, program and project leadership and strategic planning. Shelley excels at managing high-risk, high-visibility projects and leading teams, and has successfully delivered results on both public and private sector organizations.

Stacy Steck is a PMP and holds an MBA. She has served the state on several successful, long-term projects and brings more than 25 years of experience in the field of project and program management to this role. Stacy was a leader in the healthcare industry and had a leading role in implementing electronic health record systems. Additionally, she has a certification in enterprise resource planning (ERP) solution configuration and has implemented ERP modules (HR and Budgeting) as part of her consulting career.

Megan Pilon joins the OCIO as a master level project manager October 1, 2020. She is a certified PMP and a PMI Agile Certified Practitioner (PMI-ACP). Megan has over 30 years of information technology experience, 25 years working with Washington state agencies and 22 years in project management. She has extensive experience with Washington state high profile projects and understands what it takes to deliver IT projects. She has worked for the Legislature, the Office of Financial Management (OFM) and in private industry as a service delivery and consulting director.

Meet the expert project managers:

- **Richelle Glascock**
- **Shelley McDermott**
- **Stacy Steck**
- **Megan Pilon**