WaTech
Washington Technology Solutions
Washington's Consolidated Technology Services Agency

Office of the Chief Information Officer

Quarterly Best Practices Summary

January 1, 2022

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Executive Summary

Section 151(1)(a) of the 2021-23 operating budget provides 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 under oversight from the OCIO. This report:

- Summarizes key accomplishments from October 1 through December 31, 2021.
- Presents selected best practices shared with state agencies during this same reporting period.
- Provides a summary of lessons learned shared by state agencies with IT projects that have been completed since September 30, 2021.

The project management partner (PMP) team is pleased to update the stakeholder community on accomplishments over the last quarter, and to share best practices and key lessons learned.

Key accomplishments

Key accomplishments during this reporting period include:

- **Ongoing support for the IT project management (PM) community of practice (CoP) program:** During the past quarter, the CoP presented one learning session and sponsored two peer networking events.

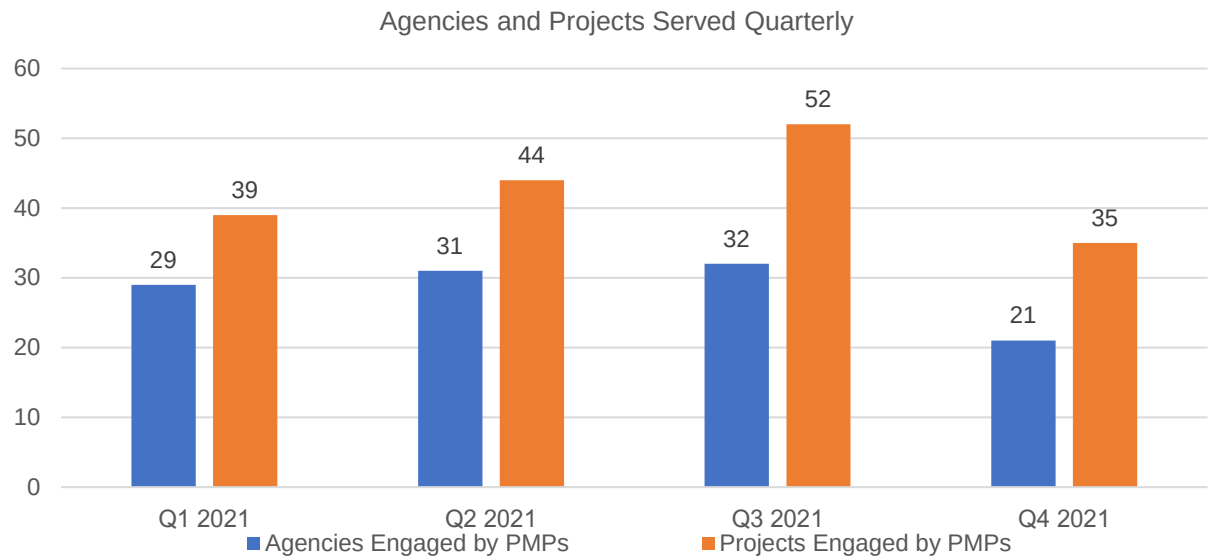
Month	Topic	# of Participants	Agencies Represented
September	Peer Networking Event	38	17
October	Agile Project Management	82	22
November	Peer Networking Event	41	20

  The CoP is guided by an advisory board that consists of four active members representing four different state agencies. The CoP uses Microsoft Teams as its collaboration platform where the community can share advice, best practices, tools, resources and become involved in discussion boards. Membership of this site is nearing 180 individuals representing 36 agencies.

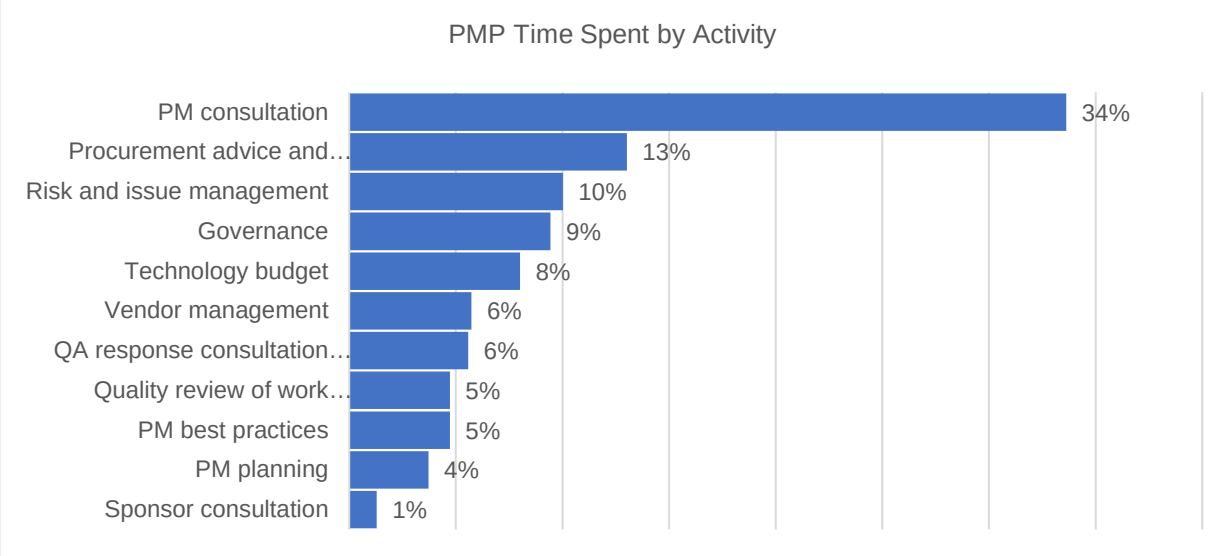
- **Project management guidance:** The PMPs continue to provide project management guidance to projects subject to oversight. Current experience informs these recommendations and the highest-impact topics have been selected for deep analysis and strategic recommendations to the state. The PMPs track all projects completed during each quarter and collect lessons learned for incorporation into the OCIO lessons learned repository. PMP efforts and advice help shape the success of state projects in several ways, including:
    - Providing major business transformation projects with viable performance measures, deliverable reviews, vendor management and status reporting.

- Assisting major business transformation projects with governance structure and leadership coaching.
- Helping smaller agencies with project budgeting, procurement strategy, vendor contracting and technology budgets.

In Q4, project management partners spent over 800 hours working with individual state agencies, providing project management guidance to 35 projects representing 21 state agencies. The charts below provide a view of PMP impact and engagement by quarter and by service category.



The following chart shows time spent, by category, during this quarter by PMPs.



- **Expanded consulting and advisory services:** The scope of the PMP role was modified to enable support for non-gated funding projects as well as gated funding projects, subject to the conditions, limitations and review requirements of Section 701 of the operating budget. In addition, the PMPs, in collaboration with the OCIO, made a strategic decision to begin engaging earlier with projects (before they turn red on the dashboard) to assist with planning and initiation activities such as creating an effective governance structure. Because of this adjustment, PMPs will be proposing new metrics for the first quarter of 2022 to better assess impact. For example, we might want to track a decrease in projects that do not increase in risk rather than (or in addition to) projects that decrease in risk.
- **Project risk reduction:** In Q4, approximately 26% of projects assigned a project management partner realized a reduction in OCIO-assessed risk during the last reporting period. This means a project's risk was reduced from red (high risk) to yellow (moderate risk) or from yellow to green (low risk) on 26% of projects that were assigned a PMP. This result is down from a 40% average risk reduction during the Q3 reporting period.
    - Bottom line: this metric will not be tracked or reported in 2022 because it isn't meaningful; the measure isn't valid. A project could decrease in risk for a variety of reasons and a PMP could spend every minute working on a high risk (red) project and it may never decrease in risk. The original hypothesis that PMP engagement on a project will directly correlate to a reduction in risk is false.

Best Practices

The most common best practices shared by project management partners with state agency projects in September through November 2021 include:

- Governance: Amplify stakeholder voices in project steering.
- Vendor management: Contract strategically to enhance project performance.
- Quality assurance: Maximize the value of the QA readiness assessment.
- Integrated project plans: Build and use the schedule as a management tool.

Governance: Amplify stakeholder voices in project steering.

In Q3, a best practice was added to address the importance of a strong project executive steering committee (ESC) and its vital role in project success. This quarter, an additional best practice emerged to explore alternatives to the problem of inadequate stakeholder representation on an ESC. Every project has stakeholders. However, external stakeholders are often underrepresented on steering bodies. Examples of external stakeholders include retired state worker, a firearms dealer, or a person recovering at home from a work injury. Here are some ways agencies can turn up the volume on stakeholder voices.

When to consider engaging an external stakeholder?

Agencies may want to consider the addition of an external stakeholder if the project output will be consumed by external parties: teachers, citizens, voters, firearms dealers, county workers or elected officials, etc.

Project examples include:

- The vehicle licensing system which impacts all counties and vehicle owners across the state.
- An agency's modernization of its public-facing website.
- A new state service to centralize firearm background checks – impacting all firearm owners and dealers across the state.
- A new workers' compensation benefit solution.
- A new portal for families to apply to become foster parents.

Certainly, external stakeholder engagement may (and should) take many forms:

- A seat at the executive steering table. On the One Washington project, agency stakeholders comprise the majority of project executive steering committee membership, and that of a subgroup (the business transformation board or BTB).
- A seat on an advisory board. Because the nature of external stakeholder engagement can be time-intensive, it can be effective to gather multiple stakeholders on an advisory board and contain their contributions to a focused hour every now and then.

- A seat at a focus group or listening session where feedback can be systematically captured and delivered to the project team – a strategy employed by the Department of Health for its practice transformation hub.
- A user experience design review where external stakeholders can view prototypes or designs and provide input. On the Secretary of State's VoteWA elections modernization project, the project hired a user experience design firm to reach out to persons with disabilities to test a new voter portal.

Finding the right stakeholder(s)

It can be challenging to identify one or two external stakeholders who can speak for an entire category of impacted individuals. Generally, the old maxim is true: if you've heard from one county you've heard from one county. Inviting members of the citizenry (as one example) to join a project steering committee requires orientation, education, time and a keen awareness of the sub-population represented by the external stakeholder (and, by extension, the sub-populations they do NOT represent).

Methods agencies can use to find external stakeholders include use of advertisements, GovDelivery invitations and surveys to educate members of the public about the project and ask for their involvement. In addition, customer service representatives know who might be either disgruntled or very passionate about improving the status quo and willing to participate.

Regardless of how these key representatives are located, it is important to ensure they have a vested interest in the project's success and can commit to meeting attendance and required preparation. Agency projects may benefit from an external stakeholder at the table for the entire project duration, or perhaps a focus group or two can adequately ensure stakeholder satisfaction.

Best practices

1. Consider whether there is room for external stakeholder participation. Project managers and sponsors should think through whether there is a need for external stakeholder participation and how frequent that input should be received. If there is a need, don't shy away from it. Ask how stakeholders can amplify project successes – or help avoid messy issues? The benefits of external stakeholder involvement must be clear to all.
2. Be clear about what you want the external stakeholders to do – and what they can't do. Tell them exactly who they are expected to represent. (They may need to gather additional data from other impacted stakeholders to do so.) The orientation and/or education of these steering members must be thoughtful, intentional and, above all, manage their expectations.
3. Communicate with external stakeholders. Let community members know what value they are providing. Let people know which of their ideas or contributions were adopted – or not. And why. Leverage these stakeholders and turn them into champions, message distributors, testers or quality auditors.

Vendor management: Contract strategically to enhance project performance.

Generally, an agency project lead will work with the agency's contracts office (or a contract specialist) to develop procurement documents, a sample contract and a statement(s) of work. Many contracts are boilerplate templates that are modified to meet a current business need – which requires each subsequent statement of work be specific, in-depth and tailored to achieve unique project goals. Ideally, this process would create a high-functioning partnership between a contract specialist and the future contract manager (who may or may not be the project manager). When the highest scoring vendor is announced, all parties would then closely collaborate on contract language, refinements to the SOW and procedures for how changes and difficulties will be handled throughout the contract period.

Instead, what often happens is a generic contract gets created by the contract specialist, a statement of work is added by the project lead and there is seldom a vendor management strategy identified prior to procurement or contract signing. It can be a fragmented process that leads to a poorly written contract, an insufficiently detailed SOW and a fractured vendor relationship when things don't go as planned. This approach risks the success of the project.

Contrast either of those scenarios with one in which a buyer and a bevy of vendors have multiple conversations before a procurement is issued. Vendors can be educated about the agency's goals and can ask questions about the proposed solution. Relationships can be built and the request for proposals (RFP) responses will be robust, creative and competitive. A signed contract would represent a principled, clear agreement about who will do what work and when – and specify what process or remedy will be applied in the event of a failure (of either party) to perform or deliver. This process or remedy will be well-understood by the vendor because they will have participated in the development of the approach and methods.

Best Practices

1. Create a contract management plan. Best practice would dictate that the contract owner and the procurement coordinator put a contract management plan in place. The goal is to answer the question: how will the contract manager and contractor work together to complete the statement of work? What are the steps that should be taken when things aren't going well?

   Once a contract is signed, the contract manager becomes the one managing the work of the contractor and all communications should include the right parties and relationship owners – as specified in the contract management plan.

   If the project manager (PM) is not the contract manager, the PM must know the terms and the deliverables and have copies of all relevant documentation.

2. Design a process for accountability and exception handling. We all want to trust each other (and it generally starts out that way), but things do go wrong in any relationship. To protect all parties and incentivize accountability, agencies must adhere to the contract management plan. What does the plan say about moving forward with change requests that are not fully approved? About payments for late tasks and deliverables? About a delay or slippage of a go-live date? About vendor invoices that the state is late to pay?

A process requires specific steps be taken when an issue arises. For example, a contract management plan may specify that the first attempt to resolve an issue should occur at the peer level, then be escalated to a contract manager, the contracts office, or an attorney. There is no one-size-fits-all, but a process must be established.

3. Leverage project quality assurance to monitor contract management performance. If possible, engage a quality assurance (QA) expert (or experts) to provide feedback on vendor performance, vendor contract compliance and the efficacy of the process for handling contractual matters when issues emerge. These practitioners often have a wealth of unexploited experience available if invited to contribute. They may also have more time and available bandwidth.

Quality assurance: Making the most of a readiness assessment.

What is a QA readiness assessment?

Projects that are subject to OCIO oversight are required to contract for a quality assurance practitioner to measure the effectiveness of the project's management strategies. A set of standard quality assurance deliverables are specified and required for policy compliance. One of these is a QA readiness assessment which measures the readiness of the agency, the project team and its stakeholders to execute the project and achieve planned project outcomes. These assessments take anywhere from two to eight weeks and cost anywhere from $5,000 to well over $20,000 to complete. The readiness assessment has great potential to validate project assumptions, evaluate estimates, review people/engagement strategies for suitability and vet the overall approach.

Benefits

The readiness assessment, used wisely, can offer many value-added elements. It can:

- Provide an independent assessment of the project's charter, project management plan, budget and critical success factors (CSFs) - and provide suggestions to improve project design.
- Identify project strengths and areas that need focused attention.
- Evaluate the project's anticipated list of risks and issues and provide targeted recommendations to mitigate risks and avoid issues.
- Apply a seasoned perspective to the planned work, approach and strategy.
- Identify resources or potential contacts in other organizations that have completed projects of similar size and complexity; contacts can help with planning, estimating and problem solving.
- Communicate early indicators of project team and leadership issues – and suggestions for improvement or intervention before the project gets started.
- Provide a way to collaborate with executive-level stakeholders as risk advisors who may have a different vantage point than that of other project participants.
- Build trust, promote frank and open dialogue and foster an environment that embraces identifying, validating and mitigating risks and issues.
- Establish requirements for the quality assurance plan.

- Review project deliverables for quality and adherence to specifications.

Best practices

1. Provide a robust list of stakeholders and team members to the QA team so that they can cast a wide net for interview candidates. Some stakeholders may speak more openly with a third party.
2. Take recommendations seriously and formulate thoughtful responses. Recommendations are intended to promote project success, not highlight individual failings. Respond to QA recommendations with who is going to do what by when to catalyze accountability.
3. Provide ample opportunity for QA to participate in meetings/discussions. Invite QA to make a recommendation about where their limited capacity would be best served and engage in a meaningful conversation about how they can best contribute to the project.
4. Provide an opportunity for QA to share its readiness assessment findings with the project team and steering committee.

Integrated project plans: Building and using the schedule as a critical management tool.

Many state IT projects don't make time to fully configure an integrated project plan (IPP) for maximum value. These projects often encounter avoidable risks and issues. They might run into vendor management issues because project participants lack clarity about dependencies, task ownership or scope. They also may encounter resource gaps due to a failure to plan for vacations, holidays or periods of heavy resource utilization. The downside of a failure to plan is avoidable.

What is an IPP?

IPPs identify all relevant tasks and activities required to complete a project. A well-crafted IPP should highlight the critical path (e.g., the shortest duration between dependent tasks; if one slips, the rest slip regardless of resources assigned). It should contain all project tasks above a certain threshold of work effort and/or duration and should cover the entire scope of work from initiation through closeout; it also identifies assigned resources and dependencies or successors for each task.

Integrated project plans are designed to bring together the scopes of work from all project participants to ensure that all elements of the work are well defined, resourced, and managed in concert.

Benefits

- A good IPP creates predictability and a reliable baseline. Cost overruns and project failures can be avoided with effective coordination and control.
- Integrating plans and schedules from all task owners allows the project manager to monitor and control what happens on the project. For example, if a vendor has identified a risk that their resources may be insufficient and are likely to delay delivery of an important milestone, then the project manager can develop a risk mitigation plan to identify the potential consequences of the risk and plan to handle them. A project manager may choose to: avoid it, mitigate it, transfer it, or accept it.

- The IPP allows a project manager to have a holistic view of the planned work, increasing the quality and timeliness of communication, managing expectations and assessing and mitigating risks before they become issues.
- An IPP contributes to more useful project reports that are predictive, actionable and cross-functional.
- An IPP empowers a project manager to monitor vendor performance.

Best Practices

1. Engage the entire project team in schedule creation. Have each team member identify the work that they need to do to meet the objective and scope. Have each team member specify what inputs they need to begin or complete their task. This allows team members to identify and visualize the importance of timely hand-offs.
2. Follow a proven process for creating a holistic integrated project plan[1].
    a. List tasks, work items, and user stories.
    b. Sequence work items, tasks, or user stories. Try to use 'auto scheduled' (in MS Project) to allow the software to flexibly adjust dates based on early or late predecessor completion.
    c. Group related tasks for rational roll-up and reporting.
    d. Assign resources (by name) to each line item. Tasks and task groups must have a single owner (responsible party) but note that this may or may not be the same person assigned to complete the task. Unless you are an expert in resource leveling, tasks should be resource loaded, not resource-leveled. For each work item, task, or user story make sure resources are named and that the named resources contribute to (or agree to uphold) estimates of work effort and dependencies. Do not assign resources to roll-up/summary tasks or milestones.
    e. For each task, estimate the duration and/or work effort.
    f. Avoid entering dates in Start or Finish date fields; using predecessor and successor relationships enables the plan to contract and extend dynamically.
    g. Review any task constraints created during schedule creation. Constraints like "must start by, finish no earlier than, or finish with task X." These limit the ability of your schedule to reflect true impact when linked tasks are delayed (or finish early). But if the constraints are correct and essential, keep them.
    h. Rinse/repeat these steps for an agile project.
    i. The project's IPP should be referred to as the "single source of truth." Ensure the IPP contains nothing that isn't firmly in scope.

[1] The process steps outlined work for MS Project but should be relevant to other portfolio management tools as well. Industry jargon below correlates to MS Project terminology and is quite technical in nature; it may not be accessible to the lay person.

3. Perform a thorough review of the IPP to ensure all required elements of a project are identified and monitored. This can take the form of a product backlog or a work breakdown structure, but the scope needs to be available at the beginning of the project.
4. Follow an established Organizational Change Management (OCM) framework and make sure all team members understand their role(s).
5. Regularly communicate to each work group the expectations of their group and who needs what when.
6. Ensure that milestones and key deliverables are captured in the charter – along with a definition of "done" so that the project knows when it has completed a complex deliverable or met its acceptance criteria.
7. Take deliverable review time and approval processes into consideration when building an IPP. These can easily delay a project if not anticipated.
8. Assign leads and lags to allow an activity's start or finish date to float in response to early or late completion of dependent tasks. For example, if a certification process takes 60 days, the task "Apply for deliverable certification" will be assigned the predecessor "Deliverable complete + 60 days" so that, if the deliverable completion moves left or right, the start and end of the certification process adjusts accordingly.
9. Use custom fields for unique task attributes – these can be useful for reporting. (E.g., deliverable number or name, gate number, division or department.)
10. Often there are multiple vendors delivering components of work – and they may prefer to manage to their own individual schedules. That is acceptable, but it is a best practice to integrate key milestones, deliverables or activities into one "master" IPP which is managed by the project manager.
11. Leverage the expertise of colleagues who know MS Project, another portfolio management tool, or who can vet your schedule in the tool and test its construction.
12. Make sure you formally collect a baseline of the final, approved schedule. Create new baselines as approved by project governance. Never overwrite the original baseline. You will generally use the current baseline for key performance indicators (KPI) and variance analyses, but that original baseline provides an essential record.

Lessons Learned

The IT Project Lessons Learned Repository has been updated to include lessons learned compiled from September through November 2021. This quarter. no projects under OCIO oversight completed, but two projects posted lessons learned documents and 10 additional lessons learned and best practices were added to the repository.

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

Category	Lesson Learned
Communications and Stakeholder Management	• Set the vision before development gets started. Anticipate what work needs stakeholder engagement and plan for it well in advance. Create a vision for how modules interact and work together to answer key questions. Put more effort into understanding the audience for workflows and how information is intended to be used. • Ensure expectations and outcomes are known and socialized/reviewed on a regular basis.
Implementation Approach & Methodology	• Produce proof of concepts before starting development. • Structure work in a way that enhancements/development is not started until there is active demand (either data is ready, or user needs are clearly identified). • Keep it simple where appropriate.
Procurement/Contract & Vendor Management	• Involve critical subject matter experts in writing solicitation documents and evaluating responses. • Start the process for Request for Additional Delegation of Authority early in the process to avoid delays to posting solicitation documents.
Project Management/Project Controls	• Revisit lessons learned and conduct regular retrospectives to ensure the project is following the start/stop/continue and lessons learned.
Schedule Management	• Review the project schedule routinely and involve applicable stakeholders (IT, business, administration) to review the proposed project milestones. • Plan to re-baseline the project schedule based on realistic versus optimistic timeframes.
Scope Management	• Ensure the business priorities are needs and not wants.

Contact

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Appendix A: Project Management Partners

The OCIO currently has four master-level project managers.

Project Management Partners

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

Richelle Glascock has been working with the state's smaller agencies to provide hands-on support to coach projects on how 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 a 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.

Megan Pilon [2]is a master-level project manager, PMI certified Project Management Professional (PMP) and a PMI Agile Certified Practitioner (PMI-ACP). Megan has over 30 years of information technology experience, over 25 years working with Washington state agencies and 23 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.

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.

[2] Megan Pilon transitioned to the One Washington program team in October 2021.

Appendix B: OCIO Project Management Resources

Additional best and leading project management practices and helpful resources are available to state agency project managers:

- **Washington state Project Management Community of Practice.** The Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO) sponsors a community of practice (CoP) for all state agency project managers. The purpose of the community is to foster the exchange of best practices and lessons learned, share helpful resources, tools, and templates, and establish a peer network of support to transform IT project delivery in Washington state.
  - PM CoP Teams Site
  - PM CoP Calendar Events for 2021
  - PM CoP Event Recordings

  To request access to the PM CoP Teams Site, including access to the links above, email the OCIO Project Management Partners.
- **Project management guidebook and templates.** The OCIO published the Project Manager's Guidebook and leading practice project management templates in 2020. These deep repositories of knowledge will continue to evolve and grow over the next two years.
- **Lessons learned.** In 2020 the project management partners, in collaboration with the OCIO, published an online repository of IT Project Lessons Learned from Washington state agency IT projects under OCIO oversight. It provides a useful repository of knowledge for project managers, who can benefit from the experiences of others to reduce project risk. 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.

Appendix C: Previously Shared Best Practices

The following table provides reference to the previously shared best practices and the date and forum it was reported (i.e., quarterly report or project management (PM) community of practice (CoP) event).

Best Practice Shared	Date	Forum
Set up project governance structures.	Jul. 1, 2020	Quarterly Best Practices Summary
Prepare for procurement.	Jul. 1, 2020	Quarterly Best Practices Summary
Have a vendor manager review vendor's progress in meeting contractual obligations.	Jul. 1, 2020	Quarterly Best Practices Summary
Establish foundational project management.	Jul. 1, 2020	Quarterly Best Practices Summary
Articulate a clear business case.	Oct. 1, 2020	Quarterly Best Practices Summary
Establish strong governance.	Oct. 1, 2020	Quarterly Best Practices Summary
Select a right-fit project manager.	Oct. 1, 2020	Quarterly Best Practices Summary
Manage organizational change.	Oct. 1, 2020	Quarterly Best Practices Summary
Lead the go/no-go decision.	Oct. 1, 2020	Quarterly Best Practices Summary
Conduct procurements that protect the state's investment.	Oct. 1, 2020	Quarterly Best Practices Summary
Share IT project management best practices through a community of practice.	Jan. 1, 2021	Quarterly Best Practices Summary
Use lessons learned to prevent repeating project failures while maximizing opportunities to implement good practices and processes on existing and future projects.	Jan. 1, 2021	Quarterly Best Practices Summary
Provide a set of best practice-based project management processes and deliverables.	Jan. 1, 2021	Quarterly Best Practices Summary
Develop a technology budget.	Jan. 1, 2021	Quarterly Best Practices Summary
Partner with the Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO) oversight consultants.	Jan. 1, 2021	Quarterly Best Practices Summary
Differentiate program management from project management.	Apr. 1, 2021	Quarterly Best Practices Summary
Use business analysts throughout a project initiative.	Apr. 1, 2021	Quarterly Best Practices Summary
Respond to QA findings and recommendations.	Apr. 1, 2021	Quarterly Best Practices Summary
Optimize project management in a virtual world.	Feb. 24, 2021	PM CoP
Effectively enable change.	Apr. 21, 2021	PM CoP
Establish a realistic project budget and spend plan.	Jun. 16, 2021	PM CoP
Establish effective executive sponsorship.	Jul. 1, 2021	Quarterly Best Practices Summary
Enable vendor relationship management.	Jul. 1, 2021	Quarterly Best Practices Summary
Plan for contingency reserve and management reserve in schedule and budget.	Jul. 1, 2021	Quarterly Best Practices Summary

Best Practice Shared	Date	Forum
Conduct effective investment planning.	Aug. 19, 2021	PM CoP
Governance part II: Use your executive steering committee.	Oct. 1, 2021	Quarterly Best Practices Summary
Vendor relationship management part II: Leverage best practices and lessons learned.	Oct. 1, 2021	Quarterly Best Practices Summary
Leverage the benefits of agile project management.	Oct. 1, 2021	Quarterly Best Practices Summary
Project estimating: Apply best practice techniques, tips and tricks.	Oct. 1, 2021	Quarterly Best Practices Summary
Leverage the benefits of agile project management.	Oct. 20, 2021	PM CoP