



## Project Management in the Public Sector

### Five challenges and trends affecting how project management works in today's public sector.

In the public sector, political and economic climates can change rapidly. Elected officials often come and go, as sentiment over public works projects rises and falls.

Through it all, project managers must keep essential government initiatives on track and deliver on politicians' promises. Whether you work in the public sector or not, you can learn from these five trends affecting the public sector project manager today:

**1. Managing Multiple Stakeholders:** "The project manager in the public sector usually works with several stakeholders from other agencies. [Because] they [may] lack governance in their projects, they need to use a lot of negotiation, conflict resolution, communication and leadership skills," says Margareth Fabiola dos Santos Carneiro, PMP, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, vice chair of marketing for the [PMI Government Specific Interest Group \(GovSIG\)](#).

**2. Adapting to a Political Landscape:** A particular challenge in Brazil, Ms. Carneiro says, is the lack of project continuity because of political cycles and elections every two years. And when the leaders change, usually the first couple tiers of leadership underneath them change. "With those changes, usually, are a lot of changes in different positions, so it is not rare for new people to stop old projects and start over again," Ms. Carneiro says.

**3. Understanding Local Politics:** Directives, policies, procedures and statutes may affect projects, notes Linda Salac, an IT business system analyst and software license administrator for the Department of Health and Human Services for the State of Nebraska, USA. Once project managers get a handle on it all, they will then need to use people skills with teams, negotiation and contracting, and business analysis, she says.

**4. Dealing With Public Scrutiny:** "There is a great deal of interest in what you do, because it affects a lot of people," Michael A. Dean, PMP, an IT audit manager for Clifton Gunderson LLP in Austin, Texas, USA, who has worked with public sector organizations in Texas. "Failures get a lot of attention because they harm a lot of people. Open records and open government laws mean governments can't conceal information the same way private entities can, and your successes don't necessarily get trumpeted to the same level."

**5. Dealing With a Pay Cut:** Public sector project managers will rarely get paid as well as private sector counterparts, and this can contribute to frequent turnover of skilled people. On the other hand, both Ms. Carneiro and Ms. Salac note that benefits packages for public sector employees are often better than in the private realm. And a focus solely on the bottom line can be very unsatisfying to many people, Mr. Dean adds. "Knowing that you have the opportunity to make life better for thousands or millions of people is worth a few salary dollars," he says.

### Learn More

The [Government Extension to the PMBOK® Guide Third Edition](#), published in 2006, provides an overview of the key project governance processes used in most public sectors, defines key terms, describes atmospheres where government projects operate and reviews the management life cycle of government programs.

The [PMI Government Specific Interest Group \(GovSIG\)](#) advances the principles and practices of project management while promoting the exchange of information among government professionals.

[PMI Government Events](#) can help educate government leaders about the profession and provide opportunities for government project managers to learn more about issues, challenges and lessons learned from the public sector. Contact the [PMI Manager of Government Relations](#) for more information.