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Federal Agencies Are Turning To CM Agency: Here's Why

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Federal agencies are under increasing pressure to deliver complex capital programs in a challenging environment. Projects are larger, more visible, and often tied to critical missions. At the same time, agencies are navigating staffing constraints, evolving procurement requirements, and heightened expectations for project delivery speed and cost.

In response, many agencies are taking a closer look at how projects are delivered and how to leverage private-sector construction management firms to execute their capital programs. Hiring a Construction Manager as Agent (CM Agency) is not a new method of private sector support to federal programs, but it is being leveraged by more agencies looking to respond to growing complexity and tighter constraints.

A MODEL FEDERAL AGENCIES ALREADY USE

CM Agency is a model that has long supported a wide range of federal programs for agencies such as the General Services Administration, the National Institutes of Health, and the Architect of the Capitol. These agencies have seen how structured oversight can be applied to complex project delivery within a federal framework. These agencies have used CM Agency across multiple project delivery methods, including design-build, design-bid-build, CM at Risk, and others. Federal agencies are familiar with the CM Agency model and understand its value. The question now becomes: how can CM Agency be even more useful in this far more demanding delivery environment?

WHY CM AGENCY IS BEING REVISITED

Several forces are driving renewed attention to CM Agency, particularly increased pressure to deliver projects faster and more efficiently alongside ongoing workforce constraints. As agencies look for ways to respond to these challenges, CM Agency offers several advantages. Here are a few examples:

1. Workforce Constraints Are Not Temporary

Federal agencies continue to face hiring limitations, retirements, and competition for talent, which makes it difficult to build and maintain the internal teams needed to support large capital programs. Even when funding is available, bringing on permanent staff can be slow or restricted, leaving agencies to manage complex efforts without the depth of resources required to fully support them internally. Bringing in outside industry professionals to support agencies through the CM Agency model provides much-needed relief from workforce constraints.

2. **Moving Beyond Staff Augmentation**

Staff augmentation is an effective approach when the owner possesses strong management and oversight capacity, and the requirements are temporary and well-defined. However, for large, complex, or high-visibility programs, it often falls short because filling individual roles does not create alignment, establish processes, or provide the continuity and support that complex programs require. CM Agency does.

3. **Improved Speed, Flexibility, Cost Savings, Efficiencies, and Risk Reduction**

With new procurement authorities, such as the Other Transaction Authority (OTA), and project delivery methods, such as progressive design-build, federal owners have elevated expectations for project delivery time and cost. Federal projects also operate under intense public and political scrutiny, with agencies expected to demonstrate transparency, strong governance, and measurable performance. Meeting these expectations requires reliable data, structured reporting, and clear lines of responsibility throughout the program that a unified and integrated CM Agency model provides.

4. **Programs Are More Complex Than Ever**

Today's federal programs often involve multiple stakeholders, funding sources, and interdependent projects that must be managed in parallel. This level of complexity requires more than filling individual roles through staffing agencies; instead, it calls for coordinated CM Agency oversight across quality, cost, schedule, risk, and stakeholder engagement, supported by consistent processes and experienced teams.

5. **Access to Specialized Expertise**

Many programs require capabilities that are not always available in-house, including commissioning, risk analysis, governance facilitation, outfitting and transition, and claims support. These needs do not always justify the need for permanent staff at an agency, but they remain critical to successful delivery. This expertise can be made available when needed through CM Agency support.

6. **Continuity Across Long-Term Programs**

Federal programs often span years, and in many cases decades, which makes staff turnover and leadership changes inevitable. Maintaining continuity, preserving institutional knowledge, and ensuring consistent execution over time can be difficult without a dedicated structure in place to support the program. Standing up a project management office led by a CM Agency team can provide much-needed continuity and consistency.

A CM Agency approach brings together a dedicated team, optimal processes, and the ability to scale resources based on program needs, which allows agencies to manage complexity better and maintain consistency across projects.

MAINTAINING CONTROL WHILE STRENGTHENING DELIVERY

A common concern for agencies is that bringing in additional support reduces the owner's control, particularly in programs that already involve multiple stakeholders and layers of oversight. In practice, the opposite is true. Under the CM Agency model, federal agencies remain fully in charge and continue to set priorities, make decisions, and define program objectives. A structured CM Agency support model strengthens leadership by providing the information, analysis, and coordination needed to make informed decisions, helping agencies maintain control while improving overall delivery.

FINAL THOUGHTS

CM Agency models have long been part of federal project delivery. What is changing is the environment in which those programs are being delivered. Federal agencies are being asked to do more with less: deliver increasingly complex programs faster, with fewer resources, and under greater scrutiny. As those pressures increase, the need for a more structured and coordinated approach becomes more evident, and delivering successful outcomes requires more than just filling roles. It calls for the right combination of expertise, established processes, and program-level continuity, supported in a way that allows agencies to retain full control and accountability while strengthening overall project delivery.

About the Author

James Peck, PE, CCM, is the executive vice president of Client Solutions at MBP. He focuses on building and fostering client relationships both nationally and internationally. Over the course of his career, James has provided construction management services on new, renovation/repair, and build-lease projects. with construction values exceeding $1.7 billion.

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