

CM Agency Services: An Alternative Solution for Construction Owners' Staffing Challenges

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Owners today are managing large, complex programs that span multiple years, funding sources, and delivery methods. Getting the right expertise and resources in place is critical, and for many years, owners have turned to outside staffing firms to fill their gaps. However, this staff augmentation approach has become more challenging recently because of labor shortages, hiring freezes, and federal policy restrictions. Considering these, it may be a good time for owners to consider Construction Management as Agent (CM Agency). Sometimes referred to as CM Advisor, CM Agency involves the owner retaining a professional firm to manage the execution of their project in its entirety, while maintaining their authority as outlined by contract and applicable laws and regulations.

CM Agency goes beyond simply filling roles within an owner's organization. It provides a dedicated team with specialized expertise, proven processes, and reachback support to guide programs and projects from start to finish. Acting as the owner's representative, the CM Agent works in the owner's best interest to manage schedule, cost, quality, safety, and scope while actively identifying and mitigating risks.

The CM Agent approach has a long history of success in the public and private sectors. In fact, the federal government has relied on CM Agency since the 1960s to deliver projects and large-scale programs. Its principles can and have been applied to other markets, such as higher education institutions and health systems facing similar staffing challenges.



WHEN CM AGENCY IS THE RIGHT FIT

Staff augmentation can be useful when the need is simply to temporarily fill a role. However, this is often not an option for owners facing hiring freezes or restrictions that prevent bringing on staff even when funding exists. A CM Agency contract offers owners an effective alternative, giving immediate access to qualified professionals without adding permanent headcount. Even without hiring restrictions, when industry labor shortages limit the pool of candidates for an owner to hire, the CM Agency approach provides an owner with access to the resources of a professional firm without the risk and administrative burden inherent to the hiring process.

CM Agency is also particularly effective because the owner has access to an entire firm that specializes in project and program management. This can include specialized expertise, from building commissioning and acceptance to risk management, claims analysis, and others that most owners do not have in-house. Also, because the CM Agent will have experience supporting similar projects and programs, they are equipped to coordinate scope, budget, and schedule with the needed level of oversight and reporting. They can navigate highly visible and politically sensitive programs and provide stakeholders with the transparency, accountability, and progress they expect. The CM Agent has provided these same functions for other clients and will be poised to support. Finally, because the CM Agent is a professional project management firm, and not a single individual, they can provide stability in the face of staff turnover by retaining project history and implementing systems to deliver knowledge transfer.

THE ADVANTAGES CM AGENCY BRINGS

CM Agency delivers advantages that go far beyond what staff augmentation alone can offer:

- » **Construction Management Expertise** – Individuals and a team with deep experience in delivery methods, risk management, project controls, and specialized technical areas.
- » **Reduced Administrative Burden** – Staff who are already trained, licensed, and certified, avoiding the time and expense of onboarding and compliance management.
- » **Reduced Risk** – An experienced, skilled team can identify more risks and mitigation strategies before they cause costly delays, accidents, or quality issues.
- » **Flexibility** – To adjust resources as program and project demands rise and fall.
- » **Efficiency** – Through a firm that brings industry best practices, and their lessons learned and successes from prior projects.
- » **Continuity** – That carries through an owner's leadership changes or staff turnover.
- » **Reachback expertise** – That taps into specialists within the firm as unique issues arise.

These benefits translate into optimized performance, reduced exposure to risk, and ultimately, better program and project outcomes.

OWNERS STAY IN CONTROL

One common misconception is that bringing on a CM Agent means losing control. In reality, the CM Agent reinforces the owner's leadership role. The owner remains the program or project lead and final decision-maker. The CM Agent provides the data, analysis, and recommendations needed to make decisions faster and more confidently. In this way, the CM Agent enhances, not replaces, the owner's authority.

BOTTOM LINE

Staff augmentation solves short-term staffing shortages and will remain a useful tool. However, CM Agency is far and away the better choice when programs are large, complex, and under pressure to deliver, and when owners face hiring freezes, labor shortages, executive mandates, or heightened stakeholder scrutiny. By combining construction management expertise and scalable resources, CM Agency strengthens the owner's ability to deliver on time, within budget, and meet client expectations. 



About the Author

James Peck, PE, CCM, executive vice president, client solutions, MBP, has 47 years of experience in all areas of construction program and project management including technical design and coordination review, progress review, change order management, quality assurance, facilities planning, building commissioning, LEED, cost estimating, safety management, and claims analysis. 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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