Building the Case
To Optimize Project Intake, Approval, and Prioritization

INFO~TECH
RESEARCH GROUP

IAG
CONSULTING

Our understanding of the problem

This Research Is Designed For:

- ✓ Portfolio managers or PMO directors who have trouble driving the throughput of the highest-value projects in the portfolio.
- ✓ CIOs who want to defend their project portfolios from the malinvestment of resources.

This Research Will Help You:

- ✓ Reduce or eliminate portfolio waste
- ✓ Align project intake and prioritization with resource capacity
- ✓ Balance proactive (high value) and reactive (high urgency) demand
- ✓ Manage and influence stakeholders more successfully

This Research Will Also Assist:

- ✓ Product owners, steering committee members, or other senior executives who want to become more involved in intake, approval, and prioritization processes.

This Research Will Help Them:

- ✓ Understand IT processes and capabilities and set more realistic expectations for their project requests.

Executive Summary

Situation ⚠️

- As a portfolio manager, you do not have the authority to decline or defer new projects—but you also lack the capacity to realistically say yes to more project work.
- With your staff constantly being pulled into reactionary support roles, you not only have trouble completing all the projects currently underway, but you also have trouble starting any of the projects in your ever-growing backlog.

Complication ❓

- Stakeholders have unrealistic expectations of what IT can deliver. Too many projects are approved, yet no one understands why their project is delayed or in a state of suspended animation.
- Ad hoc or "off the grid" projects frequently circumvent the formal intake processes that you have in place, robbing your already in-flight projects of precious resources and threatening your portfolio's strategic alignment with business goals.

IAG Insight ⚙️

Give yourself the voice to say "no" (or at least "not yet") to new projects by aligning intake, approval, and prioritization with the defining constraints of strategic objectives, portfolio capacity, and stakeholder needs.

With intake processes geared toward these ends, you can ensure that the PMO is always driving the throughput of the highest-value projects in the portfolio and that the business side has visibility into IT's capacity and processes.

Resolution ✔️

- Building a centralized process that funnels requests into a single intake channel, and that eliminates confusion and doubt for stakeholders and staff, is the first step to defending your portfolio against off-the-grid initiatives.
- Developing practices that incorporate the constraint of resource capacity to cap the amount of project approvals to that which is realistic will help improve the throughput of projects through the portfolio.
- Establish an effective scorecard to create transparency into IT's capacity and processes. This will help set realistic expectations for stakeholders, eliminate "squeaky wheel" prioritization, and give primacy to the highest value requests.

Three ways to get started:
Do-It-Yourself, Guided Implementations, or Onsite Workshop

Best-Practice Toolkit	**Download and customize IAG's tools and templates** to develop your project deliverables.	Use this do-it-yourself Best-Practice Toolkit to help you complete this project. The slides in this Blueprint will walk you step-by-step through every phase of your project with supporting tools and templates ready for you to use.
Guided Implementations	**Speak to an IAG PPM Advisor** for advice throughout the project.	**Arrange to speak to an IAG expert** at key milestones to ensure maximum project value. **Watch for this icon** at key opportunities to speak with an IAG analyst for additional insight and advice. **Call 1-800-209-3616** or email gm@iag.biz.
Onsite Workshop	**Accelerate your project** with an onsite, expert IAG facilitator to run a workshop for you.	**To inquire about or request a workshop:** **Call 1-800-209-3616,** contact your account representative or email gm@iag.biz for more information. Your account representative and workshop coordinator will follow up to help determine the cost, timing, and other details of the workshop.

IAG Engagement Options to
Optimize project intake, approval, and prioritization

|	1. Assess Current State	2. Optimize Processes	3. Communicate Processes
Best-Practice Toolkit	**1.1 Make the Case** **1.2 Assess Current State**	**2.1 Streamline Intake to Control Stakeholder Expectations** **2.2 Factor Resource Capacity when Approving Projects** **2.3 Prioritize Projects to Support Business Objectives**	**3.1 Institute Intake Process Change**
Guided Implementations	📞 Scoping Call. 📞 Discuss the results of the current state assessment and/or PPM assessment.	📞 Establish an intake workflow and configure project request for your organization. 📞 Determine approval scorecard and define stage gates for approvals process. 📞 Define a progressive prioritization framework.	📞 Develop a stakeholder management plan for the implementation of your optimized processes. 📞 Prepare a communications document to help sell the benefits to the organization and enforce discipline on stakeholders and staff.
Onsite Workshop	**Module 1:** Assess current intake, approval, and prioritization capability.	**Module 2:** Develop optimized intake, approval, and prioritization processes.	**Module 3:** Implement and communicate new processes.
	Phase 1 Outcome: • An overview of your intake capability level current state, target state, and gap analysis.	**Phase 2 Outcome:** • Clearly defined workflow and customized tools for intake, approval, and prioritization.	**Phase 3 Outcome:** • Define standard operating procedures and create a communications document to achieve stakeholder buy-in.

Workshop overview

This workshop can be deployed as either a four or five day engagement depending on the level of preparation completed by the client prior to the facilitator arriving onsite.

	Day 1	*Day 2*	*Day 3*	*Day 4*	*Day 5*
	Preparation	**Workshop Day**	**Workshop Day**	**Workshop Day**	**Working Session**

Preparation	**Workshop Day**	**Workshop Day**	**Workshop Day**	**Working Session**
Workshop Preparation Define goals and success criteria. Finalize agenda. Gather information: intake and prioritization artifacts, project and resource lists, and a list of items currently in the backlog.	**Morning Itinerary** Assess current state (including a review of current intake prioritization artifacts). Discuss and analyze SWOT around intake, approval, and prioritization. **Afternoon Itinerary** Define target state. Create an intake charter to govern your optimization efforts.	**Morning Itinerary** Review and configure project request form. Define standards / Playbook / processes for intake. **Afternoon Itinerary** Develop an approval and prioritization scorecard. Define standards / Playbook / processes for approval.	**Morning Itinerary** Configure prioritization tool. Define standards / Playbook / processes for prioritization. **Afternoon Itinerary** Prepare communications template to convey your new processes to business stakeholders. Review best practices for organizational change management.	**Workshop Debrief** Plan for ongoing evaluation and improvement. **Next Steps** Pilot new intake and prioritization processes. Evaluate and refine processes as needed.
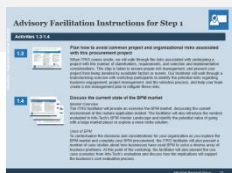
The light blue slides at the end of each section highlight the key activities and exercises that will be completed during the engagement with our analyst team.

Phase 1: Build the Case
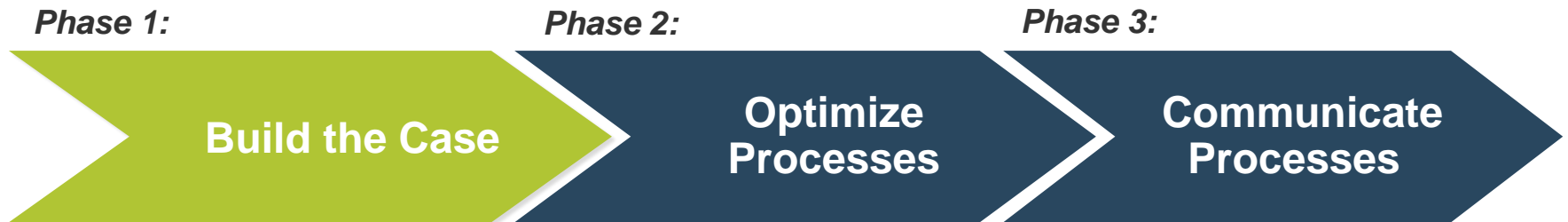
Phase 1:

Phase 2:

Phase 3:

Build the Case

Optimize Processes

Communicate Processes

Phase 1 outline

Complete these steps on your own, or call us to complete a guided implementation. A guided implementation is a series of 2-3 advisory calls that help you execute each phase of the program.

Guided Implementation 1: Build the Case
Proposed Time to Completion (in weeks): 2 weeks

Step 1.1: Make the Case	Step 1.2: Assess Current State
Start with an analyst kick off call:	**Review findings with analyst:**
• Scoping call to discuss pain points and set expectations and goals for the program.	• Discuss the results of the assessment report and Current State Assessment.
Then complete these activities…	**Then complete these activities…**
✓ Estimate the benefits of optimizing intake, approval, and prioritization.	✓ Establish your current and target states for intake and prioritization.
✓ Perform an Estimated Value Assessment.	✓ Conduct a SWOT analysis.
✓ Gauge the effort required to implement this blueprint.	✓ Rate your satisfaction with key areas of your intake processes.
	✓ Define success factors.
With these tools & templates:	**With these tools & templates:**
🅿 Estimated Value Assessment (Activity 1.1.2 within this blueprint)	🅿 SWOT Analysis (Activity 1.2.3 within this blueprint)
	🅿 Intake Satisfaction Survey (Activity 1.2.4 within this blueprint)
	🅿 Define Success Factors (Activity 1.2.6 within this blueprint)

Step 1.1: Make the case

Description Much of the waste that occurs around delayed and cancelled projects could be eliminated through better project intake. In this section we define the nomenclature around project intake and demonstrate how optimized project intake, approval, and prioritization can drive portfolio success.

Outcome A measured value assessment that will help you establish the benefits of optimized intake and prioritization for your organization.

Activities in this Step

✓ **Activity 1.1.1:** Estimate the benefits of optimizing intake, approval, and prioritization

✓ **Activity 1.1.2:** Perform an Estimated Value Assessment for optimizing your intake processes

✓ **Activity 1.1.3:** Gauge the effort required to implement this blueprint

IAG Insight

Ensure IT is executing on the right things. Focus on projects that align with business goals and available resource capacity. With optimized intake, approval, and prioritization you can set the portfolio up for success by ensuring that you are spending time and resources on the most valuable projects.

Prioritize the right projects by streamlining the intake process

All project offices perform intake, approval, and prioritization, whether they have formal structures in place or not. These processes are the means by which PMO directors decide what to work on and through which project requestors submit ideas and wait—patiently or otherwise—for those ideas to be validated.

The benefits of doing intake and prioritization well read like a litmus test of portfolio success itself: *more successful, high-value projects*, *less portfolio waste* and *strong stakeholder relations.*

Anyone who has ever waited in an inefficient waiting room will understand the costs of poor intake: *bad decisions, wasted resources, and disgruntled stakeholders.*

> *Waiting is frustrating, demoralizing, agonizing, aggravating, annoying, time consuming, and incredibly expensive.*
>
> - 1980's Federal Express Advertisement
>
> *Source: Maister*

Renovate your portfolio's waiting room to ensure portfolio success.

Key Definitions:

Intake is the process by which project requests are submitted, received, triaged, and scoped in preparation for approval and prioritization. Some business case development begins in the intake phase.	*Approval* is the process by which business cases are evaluated and selected (or declined) for investment, based on estimated value and feasibility. Approvals should be aligned with business goals and resource capacity.	*Prioritization* is the process by which work is scheduled to begin, based on relative value, urgency, and availability of resources. Prioritization is an ongoing process for both approved and active projects.

Most organizations are good at approving projects, but bad at starting them—and even worse at finishing them

Most organizations approve more projects than they can finish. In fact, many approve more than they can even start, leading to an ever-growing backlog where project ideas—often good ones—are never heard from again.

The appetite to approve more runs directly counter to the shortage of resources that plagues most IT departments. This tension of wanting more from less suggests that IT departments need to be far more disciplined in choosing what to initiate.

Establishing intake discipline should be a top priority from a long-term strategy and near-term tactical perspective. IT departments that remain stuck in a near-term operational perspective will continue to "approve"—and fool themselves into thinking they've actually started— too many projects.

76%

76% of organizations say they have too many projects on the go and an unmanageable and ever-growing backlog of things to get to.

Source: Cooper

Establishing intake discipline is easier said than done. Intake, approval, and prioritization are multifaceted practices involving the **coordination of various departments** and requiring **buy-in and compliance from multiple stakeholders and senior executives.** Establishing intake discipline requires a great degree of cooperation and conformity that must be cultivated through strong processes.

Further, **many PMOs and IT departments simply lack the ability to decline or defer new projects,** making this as much an issue of stakeholder management as a matter of establishing discipline.

Don't weigh your portfolio down by starting more than you can finish

Focus instead on what you can deliver and what will deliver value to the organization.

Most of the problems that arise during the lifecycle of a project can be traced back to issues that could have been mitigated and excised during the initiation phase.

More than simply a means of early problem detection at the project-level, optimizing your initiation processes is also the best way to ensure the success of your portfolio. With optimized intake processes you can better guarantee:

- *The projects you are working on are of high value*

- *Your project list aligns with available resource capacity*

- *Stakeholder needs are addressed, but stakeholders do not determine the direction of the portfolio*

80%
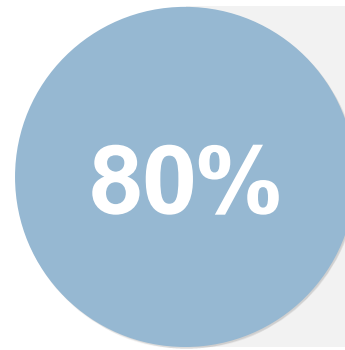
80% of organizations feel that their portfolios are dominated by low-value initiatives that do not deliver value to the business.

Source: Cooper

" *(S)uccessful organisations select projects on the basis of desirability and their capability to deliver them, not just desirability.* "
- John Ward, *Delivering Value from Information Systems and Technology Investments*

Info-Tech Insight

Optimized intake is not about making it easier to request and approve more projects; it's about improving the throughput of projects in the portfolio. This is done by making sure that what you are working on provides value to the business and can be completed in a reasonable timeframe.

Give yourself the ability to enforce discipline on stakeholders and say "no" to new projects

Manage stakeholders by establishing clear, consistent prioritization processes with visibility into portfolio capacity.

Your ability to manage stakeholders will be strengthened considerably if you are able to align the portfolio with business goals and offer visibility into available resource capacity. With processes established around these two pieces, you will be better able to corral stakeholder requests and enforce intake discipline.

Common symptoms of a portfolio determined by overbearing stakeholders:

Symptom	Best Opportunity to Mitigate	Mitigation Strategy
Off-the-grid projects	During intake	Establish centralized intake process
PMO/IT lacks the ability to decline or defer new projects	During approval	Align approvals with resource capacity
Squeaky wheel prioritization	During prioritization	Align prioritization with business goals

" *If organizations invest the effort to understand that throughput is based on certain capacity level, then this can be used as a constraint when they get into portfolio prioritization. Otherwise, what you see is the equivalent of what happens when people go into personal debt: if you don't understand what your capacity is, you're setting yourself up for failure.* "

- Kiron D. Bondale, PPM, PMI-RMP, Senior Project Portfolio & Change Management Professional

Estimate the benefits of optimizing intake, approval, and prioritization

1.1.1   15 minutes

Implementing optimized intake processes will allow you to reduce the number of cancelled projects and other sources of inefficiency.

As a means of early problem detection, optimized intake will help you reduce and eliminate six key areas of portfolio waste:

- Waste of resources on cancelled projects

- Inefficiency (through unanticipated interruptions, duplicate assignments, etc.)

- Wrong resource assignment

- Unassigned resources (waiting for new assignments)

- Poor quality of deliverables

- Off-the-grid projects

Info-Tech Research reports that on average, organizations believe they are wasting 22% of their portfolio capacity on cancelled projects, failing to assign work, and fixing defects in previous work. They believe they may be wasting an additional 28% of their portfolio capacity on inefficient processes and assigning the wrong resources.

For help establishing the value of an optimized intake and prioritization process for your organization, call IAG to speak with an analyst.

📞 **Call 1-800-209-3616** or email gm@iag.biz to arrange to speak to an IAG PPM advisor.

Perform an Estimated Value Assessment for optimizing your intake processes

Establish your baseline and target metrics and estimate the value of reaching your target:

Estimate the percentage of resource waste from the following:	Baseline	Target	Value
A. Cancelled Projects	Example: 8%	Example: 4%	$240,000
B. Inefficiency	4%	2%	$120,000
C. Suboptimal Assignment of Resources	7%	4%	$180,000
D. Unassigned Resources	6%	2%	$240,000
E. Analyzing, Fixing, and Re-deploying	16%	10%	$360,000
F. Off-the-Grid Projects	10%	3%	$420,000

Estimate the dollar value of decreasing the waste in your portfolio by calculating the overall decrease in waste as a percentage, and applying that to your overall project HR budget. These numbers were calculated based on a budget of $6,000,000 per year.

Total Estimated Value: **$1,560,000**

Gauge the effort required to implement this blueprint

1.1.3   15 minutes

Use This To:

Develop optimized intake, approval, and prioritization processes.

DIY: 30 to 40 hours over 1-2 months

Guided Implementation: A series of weekly or biweekly 45-minute calls with an IAG analyst spread over 1-2 months

Workshop: 4 days of intensive onsite work with an IAG analyst

BY:

Completing these steps and activities:

| Assess Current State	Streamline Intake	Align Approvals with Capacity	Align Prioritization with Strategic Goals	Communicate Processes
DIY: 4 – 6 hours to prep and execute a workshop	**DIY:** 10 – 12 hours over 1 – 2 weeks	**DIY:** 6 – 8 hours over 1 – 2 weeks	**DIY:** 6 – 8 hours over 1 – 2 weeks	**DIY:** 6 – 8 hours over 1 – 2 weeks
Guided Implementation: A series of weekly or biweekly 45-minute calls with an IAG analyst spread over 1 – 2 weeks	**Guided Implementation:** A series of weekly or biweekly 45-minute calls with an IAG analyst spread over 1 – 2 months	**Guided Implementation:** A series of weekly or biweekly 45-minute calls with an IAG analyst spread over 1 – 2 months	**Guided Implementation:** A series of weekly or biweekly 45-minute calls with an IAG analyst spread over 1 – 2 months	**Guided Implementation:** A series of weekly or biweekly 45-minute calls with an IAG analyst spread over 1 – 2 months

OR:

Accelerate your intake, approval, and prioritization optimization with a **4-day IAG workshop.**

Make a go/no-go decision about optimizing your intake processes

Organizations in this situation have three mutually exclusive options.
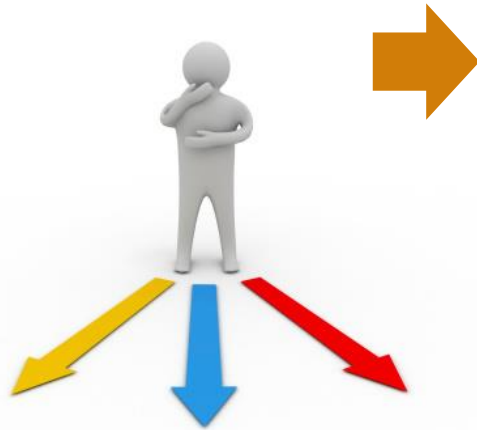
1. Implement a proper process to align intake, approval, and prioritization with business goals, resource capacity, and stakeholder needs.

2. Introduce appropriate resourcing to complete the number of approved projects and to accommodate the continuing influx of off-the-grid, stakeholder pet projects.

3. Do nothing and trust that projects will naturally, in time, align themselves with business goals and resource capacity and that stakeholders will, on their own, stop trying to deal in ad hoc initiatives out of respect to the PMO.

This blueprint will help you with the first option: implementing proper processes to better ensure that project activity is tracked by the PMO and that the projects in your portfolio are high-value initiatives that can be delivered relatively uninterrupted and within reasonable timeframes.

If you want to make a business case for introducing and enforcing more intake discipline throughout your organization, this blueprint will help you establish a credible baseline.

Step 1.2: Assess the Current State of your intake, approval, and prioritization processes

Description
Perform our current state assessment to determine areas of waste and other constraints in your portfolio. Define an achievable target state for intake success to help ensure that you have the organizational backing and resource capacity to deliver what you approve.

Outcome
An evaluation of your current intake capabilities and a feasible target state for intake optimization.

Activities in this Step

✓ **Activity 1.2.1:** Complete the PPM assessment (strongly recommended)

✓ **Activity 1.2.2:** Map your current intake workflow to identify inefficiencies

✓ **Activity 1.2.3:** Perform a SWOT analysis

✓ **Activity 1.2.4:** Rate your satisfaction with key areas of your intake processes

✓ **Activity 1.2.5:** Establish your current and target states for intake and prioritization

✓ **Activity 1.2.6:** Decide what success will look like

IAG Insight

Project intake, approval, and prioritization need to be mindful of three defining constraints: strategic alignment, resource capacity, and stakeholder needs. It's not enough only to ensure you have the resource capacity to deliver what you approve. You also need to ensure you have a strategy for accommodating ad hoc, mandated projects that stakeholders impose without sacrificing strategic objectives.

Use IAG's Assessment Program for an initial review of your current PPM processes

1.2.1 30-40 minutes

This step is highly recommended but not required. Call 1-800-209-3616 to inquire about or request the *PPM assessments.*

IAG's *Project Portfolio Management Assessment* provides you with a data-driven view of the current state of your portfolio, **including your intake processes.** Our *Current State Scorecard* measures and communicates success in terms of best practices for PPM, which are derived from COBIT, feedback from our members, and the experience of our analysts.

Benchmarking / Project Portfolio Management / Project Portfolio Management Assessment

Project Portfolio Management Assessment

Analyze your Project Portfolio Management practices on an in-depth and tactical level to achieve comprehensive improvement and optimization

Use the assessment program to:

- Assess resource utilization across the portfolio.

- Determine project portfolio reporting completeness.

- Solicit feedback from your customers on the clarity of your portfolio's business goals.

- Rate the overall quality of your project management practices and benchmark your rating over time.

This step is highly recommended but not required. If you are unable to perform the assessment at this time, complete the satisfaction survey in *Activity 1.2.4* of this blueprint to cover key areas of project intake from the assessment.
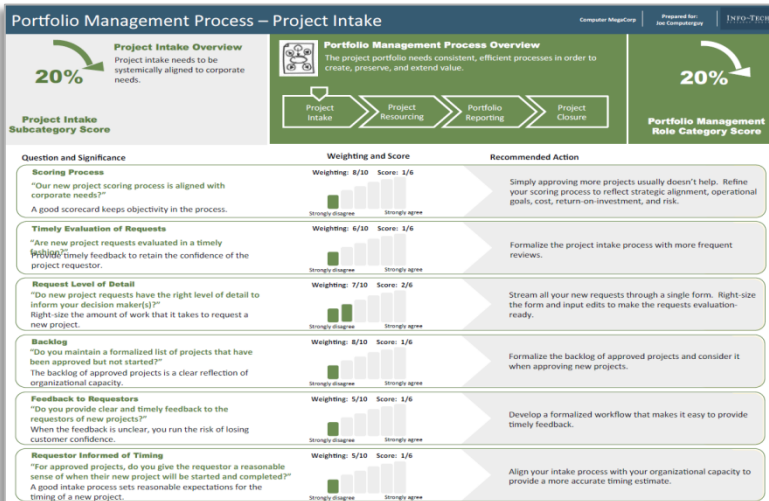
An excess number of intake channels is the telltale sign of a low capability level for intake

Excess intake channels are also a symptom of a portfolio in turmoil.

If you relate to the graphic below in any way, your first priority needs to be limiting the means by which projects get requested. A single, centralized channel, with review and approval done in batches is the goal. Otherwise, with IT's limited capacity, most requests will simply get added to the backlog.

" The golden rule for the project documentation is that if anything during the project life cycle is not documented, it is the same as if it does not exist or never happened. Phone conversations, verbal agreements, and promises do not substitute for documentation, since management or clients will never remember their undocumented requests or their consent to do something. "

- Dan Epstein, "Project Initiation Process: Part Two"

Info-Tech Insight

The PMO needs to have the authority—and needs to exercise the authority—to enforce discipline on stakeholders. Organizations that solicit in verbal requests (by phone, in person, or during scrum) lack the orderliness required for PPM success. In these cases, it needs to be the mission of the PMO to demand proper documentation and accountability from stakeholders before proceeding with requests.

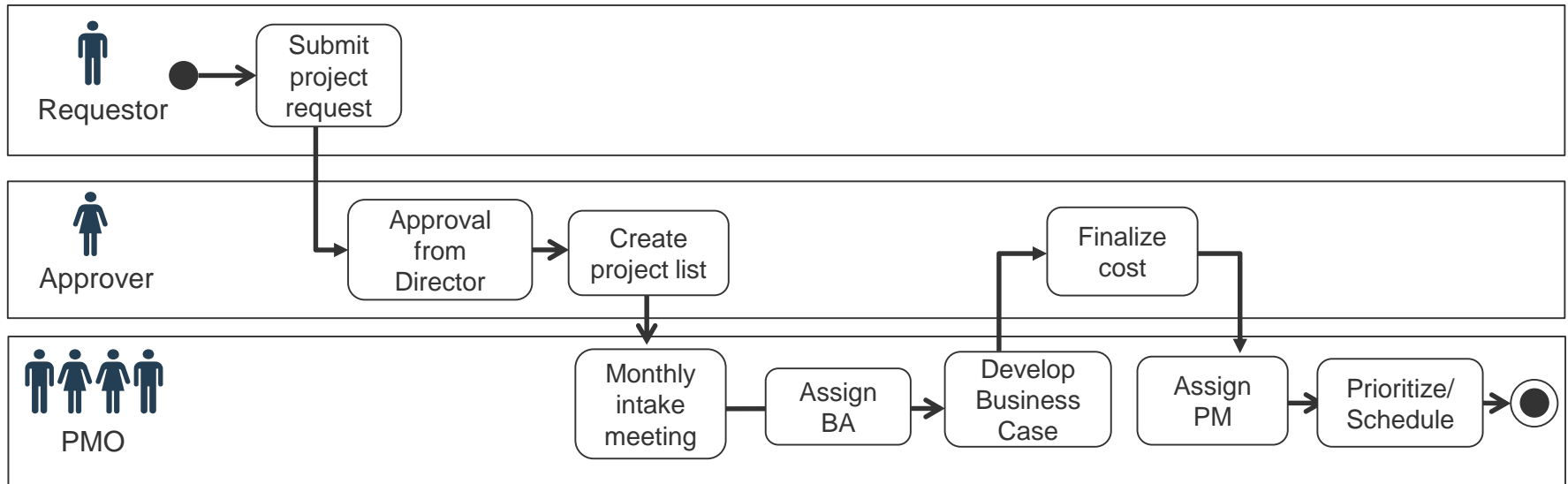# Map your current intake workflow to identify inefficiencies

1. As a group, create a process flow map for your current processes.

2. Use index cards or sticky notes to quickly map these to help identify wasteful or unnecessary steps.

3. Use a critical eye when reviewing your current processes to help identify opportunities for optimization. For instance, consider causes of delay, causes of poor prioritization, and causes of poor process compliance (i.e. "cutting the line").

IAG Insight

While minimizing the amount of back-and-forth between the key players is ideal to some extent, if there is no communication between sponsors and the individual(s) developing the business case, the request is doomed to fail. If your intake workflow does not foster collaboration between requestors, approvers, and BAs, time will be wasted on the development of business cases that will never reach the charter phase.

Requestor → Submit project request

Approver → Approval from Director → Create project list → Finalize cost

PMO → Monthly intake meeting → Assign BA → Develop Business Case → Assign PM → Prioritize/Schedule

Perform SWOT Analysis

The purpose of the SWOT analysis is to begin to define the goals of this project/workshop by cultivating alignment around the most critical opportunities and challenges.

Follow these steps to complete the SWOT analysis:

1. Have workshop participants discuss and identify Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats.

2. Spend roughly 30-60 minutes. Use a whiteboard, flip chart, or PowerPoint slide to document results of the discussion as points are made.

3. Make sure results are recorded and saved, either using the template provided in the next slide or by taking a picture of the whiteboard or flip chart.

Strengths	Weaknesses
• Knowledge, skills, and talent of IT managers and staff. • Motivation to get things done when priorities, goals, and action plans are clear.	• IT-business communication and alignment. • Too many options for intake. • Our current prioritization practices don't keep up with constantly changing priorities. • No standards; unsure which templates to use and how/when/why to use them. • IT is too ready to serve. Intake is done all day, every day. • There is no forced discipline on requestors.
Opportunities	Threats
• Establish portfolio discipline to improve IT-business communication through more effective and efficient project intake, prioritization, and status reporting. • Stronger initiation processes should translate to smoother project execution. • Establish more disciplined and efficient daily/weekly project coordination to facilitate more effective communication and closure.	• Risk of introducing burdensome processes and documentation that takes more time away from getting things done. • Success depends on buy-in of project managers and stakeholders, and ongoing discipline – at least for core/minimal pieces of the process.

Use the *SWOT Analysis Template* on the next slide to document results.

Use the examples provided in the SWOT analysis to kick-start the discussion.

Rate your satisfaction with key areas of your intake processes

1.2.4   30 to 60 Minutes

Scoring Process

"Our project scoring process is aligned with corporate needs."

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |

Strongly Disagree — Strongly Agree

Timely Evaluation of Requests

"Project requests evaluated in a timely fashion."

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |

Strongly Disagree — Strongly Agree

Request Level of Detail

"New project requests have the right level of detail to inform your decision maker."

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |

Strongly Disagree — Strongly Agree

Backlog

"We maintain a formalized list of projects that have been approved but not started."

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |

Strongly Disagree — Strongly Agree

Feedback to Requestors

"We provide clear and timely feedback to the requestors of new projects."

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |

Strongly Disagree — Strongly Agree

Requestor Informed of Timing

"When projects are approved, we give the requestor a reasonable sense of when their new project will be started."

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |

Strongly Disagree — Strongly Agree

Most organizations have low to medium maturity around intake and prioritization

Using IAG's Maturity Model and Info-Tech's Intake Capability Framework to help define your current and target states for intake, approval, and prioritization.

Capability Level	Capability Level Description
Capability Level 5: Optimized	Our department has effective intake processes with right-sized administrative overhead. Work is continuously prioritized to keep up with emerging challenges and opportunities.
Capability Level 4: Aligned	Our department has very strong intake processes. Project approvals are based on business cases and aligned with future resource capacity.
Capability Level 3: Engaged	Our department has processes in place to track project requests and follow up on them. Priorities are periodically re-evaluated, based largely on the best judgment of one or several executives.
Capability Level 2: Defined	Our department has some processes in place but no capacity to say no to new projects. There is a formal backlog, but little or no method for grooming it.
Capability Level 1: Unmanaged	Our department has no formal intake processes in place. Most work is done reactively, with little ability to prioritize proactive project work.

Refer to the subsequent slides for more detail on these capability levels.

After you have reviewed each level in the framework, document your current and target states in *Activity 1.2.1.*

Level 1: Unmanaged

Use these descriptions to place your organization at the appropriate level of intake capability:

Intake	Projects are requested through personal conversations and emails, with minimal documentation and oversight.
Approval	Projects are approved by default and rarely (if ever) declined. There is no definitive list of projects in the pipeline or backlog.
Prioritization	Most work is done reactively, with little ability to prioritize proactive project work.

Symptoms

- Poorly defined—or a complete absence of—PPM processes.
- No formal approval committee.
- No processes in place to balance proactive and reactive demands.

Long Term

PMOs at this level should work to have all requests funneled through a proper request form within six months. Decision rights for approval should be defined, and a scorecard should be in place within the year.

Quick Win

To get a handle on your backlog, start tracking all project requests using the "Project Data" tab in IAG's *Project Intake and Prioritization Tool*.

Level 2: Defined

Use these descriptions to place your organization at the appropriate level of intake capability:

Intake	Requests are formally documented in a request form before they're assigned, elaborated, and executed as projects.
Approval	Projects are approved by default and rarely (if ever) declined. There is a formal backlog, but little or no method for grooming it.
Prioritization	There is a list of priorities but no process for updating it more than annually or quarterly.

Symptoms

- Organization does not have clear conception of project capacity.
- There is a lack of discipline enforced on stakeholders.
- Immature PPM processes in general.

Long Term

PMOs at this level should strive for greater visibility into the portfolio to help make the case for declining (or at least deferring) requests. Within the year, have a formal PPM strategy up and running.

Quick Win

Something PMOs at this level can accomplish quickly without any formal approval is to spend more time with stakeholders during the ideation phase to better define scope and requirements.

Level 3: Engaged

Use these descriptions to place your organization at the appropriate level of intake capability:

Intake	Processes and skills are in place to follow up on requests to clarify project scope before going forward with approval and prioritization.
Approval	Projects are occasionally declined based on exceptionally low feasibility or value.
Prioritization	Priorities are periodically re-evaluated based largely on the best judgment of one or several executives.

Challenges

- Senior executives' "best judgement" is frequently fallible or influenced. Pet projects still enter the portfolio and deplete resources.

- While approval processes "occasionally" filter out some low-value projects, many still get approved.

Long Term

PMOs at this level should advocate for a more formal cadence for prioritization and, within the year, establish a formal Steering Committee that will be responsible for prioritizing and re-prioritizing quarterly or monthly.

Quick Win

At the PMO level, employ IAG's *Project Intake and Prioritization Tool* to start re-evaluating projects in the backlog. Make this data available to senior executives when prioritization occurs.

Level 4: Aligned

Use these descriptions to place your organization at the appropriate level of intake capability:

Intake	Occurs through a centralized process. Processes and skills are in place for follow-up.
Approval	Project approvals are based on business cases and aligned with future resource capacity.
Prioritization	Project prioritization is visibly aligned with business goals.

Challenges

- The process of developing business cases can be too cumbersome, distracting resources from actual project work.

- "Future" resource capacity predictions are unreliable. Reactive support work and other factors frequently change actual resource availability.

Long Term

PMOs at this level can strive for more accurate and frequent resource forecasting, establishing a more accurate picture of project vs. non-project work within the year.

Quick Win

PMOs at this level can start using IAG's Business Case Template (Comprehensive or Fast Track) to help simplify the business case process.

Level 5: Optimizing

Use these descriptions to place your organization at the appropriate level of intake capability:

Intake	Occurs through a centralized portal. Processes and skills are in place for thorough follow-up.
Approval	Project approvals are based on business cases and aligned with future resource capacity.
Prioritization	Work is continuously prioritized to keep up with emerging challenges and opportunities.

Challenges

- Establishing a reliable forecast for resource capacity remains a concern at this level as well.

- Organizations at this level may experience an increasing clash between agile practices and traditional waterfall methodologies.

Manage an Agile Portfolio
Improve project oversight without imposing old-school command-and-control.

PMOs at this level should also look at IAG's *Manage an Agile Portfolio* for comprehensive tools and guidance on maintaining greater visibility at the portfolio level into work in progress and committed work.

Establish your current and target states for intake and prioritization

1.2.5 20 minutes

- Having reviewed the intake capability framework, you should be able to quickly identify where you currently reside in the model. Document this in the "Current State" box below.

- Next, spend some time as a group discussing your target state. Make sure to set a realistic target as well as a realistic timeframe for meeting this target. Level 1s will not be able to become Level 5s overnight and certainly not without passing through the other levels on the way.
  - A realistic goal for a Level 1 to become a Level 2 is within six to eight months.
    - **For help establishing a credible target and timeline, call IAG to speak with an analyst.**

Current State:	
Target State:	

Timeline for meeting target ➤

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Decide what intake success will look like

While assessing your current state, it is important to discuss and determine as a team how success will be defined.

- During this process, it is important to consider tentative timelines for success milestones and to ask the question: what will success look like and when should it occur by?

- **Use the below table to help document success factors and timeliness.** Follow the lead of our example in row 1.
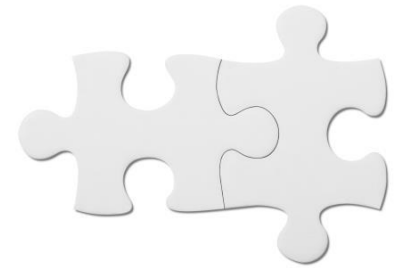
Optimization Benefit	Objective	Timeline	Success Factor
Facilitate project intake, prioritization, and **communication with stakeholders** to maximize time spent on the most valuable or critical projects.	Look at pipeline as part of project intake approach and adjust priorities as required.	July 1st	Consistently updated portfolio data. Dashboards to show back capacity to customers. SharePoint development resources.

Info-Tech Insight

Establish realistic short-term goals. Even with optimized intake procedures, you may not be able to eliminate underground project economies immediately. Make your initial goals realistic, leaving room for those walk-up requests that may still appear via informal channels. Ultimately, in time, if your intake processes are strong and user friendly, sponsors will have no cause to pursue informal channels.

Case study: PMO develops mature intake and prioritization processes by slowly evolving its capability level

Everything isn't a #1, which is what we were dealing with initially. We went through a formal prioritization period, where we painstakingly scored everything. Now we have evolved: a couple of senior managers have stepped up to make decisions, which was a natural evolution from us being able to assign a formal ranking. Now we are able to prioritize more easily and effectively without having to painstakingly score everything.

\- PMO Director, Benefits Provider

Situation	Complication	Resolution
• A PMO for a large not-for-profit benefits provider had relatively high project management maturity, but the enterprise was under-evolved at the portfolio level. • There were strong intake processes in place for following up on requests. For small projects, project managers would assist as liaisons to help control scope. For corporate initiates, PMs were assigned to work with a sponsor to define scope and write a charter.	• Prioritization was a challenge. Initially, the organization had ad hoc prioritization practices, but they developed a scoring criteria to give more formality and direction to the portfolio. However, the activity of formally prioritizing proved to be too time consuming. • Off-the-grid projects were a common problem, with initiatives consuming resources with no portfolio oversight.	• After trying "heavy" prioritization, the PMO loosened up the process. PMO staff now go through and quickly rank projects, with two senior managers making the final decisions. They re-prioritize quarterly to have discussions around resource availability and to make sure stakeholders are in tune to what IT is doing on a daily basis. • IT has a monthly meeting to go over projects consuming resources and to catch anything that has fallen between the cracks.

If you want additional support, have our advisors guide you through this phase as part of an IAG workshop

Book a workshop with our IAG advisors:

- To accelerate this program, engage your IT team in an IAG workshop.
- IAG PPM consultants will join you and your team onsite at your location to participate in an innovative workshop.
- Contact your account manager or email gm@iag.biz for more information.

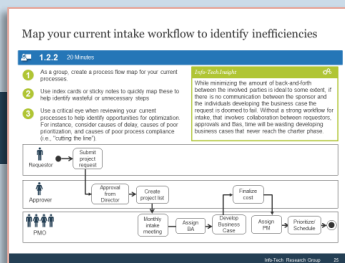## The following are sample activities that will be conducted by IAG advisors with your team:

1.1.2
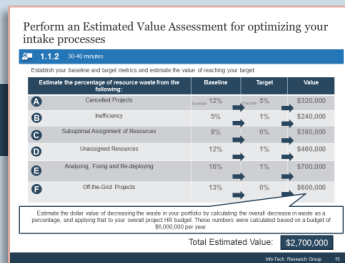
Estimated Value Assessment

Determine areas of portfolio waste related to intake, approval, and prioritization inefficiencies and deficiencies.

1.2.2

Map Current Intake Workflow

Examine current process to identify areas that would benefit from greater oversight or collaboration.

If you want additional support, have our analysts guide you through this phase as part of an IAG workshop

Book a workshop with our IAG advisors

1.2.3

Perform SWOT Analysis

Define the goals of the workshop by cultivating alignment around the most critical opportunities and challenges.

1.2.4

Rate Satisfaction with Key Areas of Current Processes

Analyze what satisfaction levels reveal about current capability level.

1.2.6

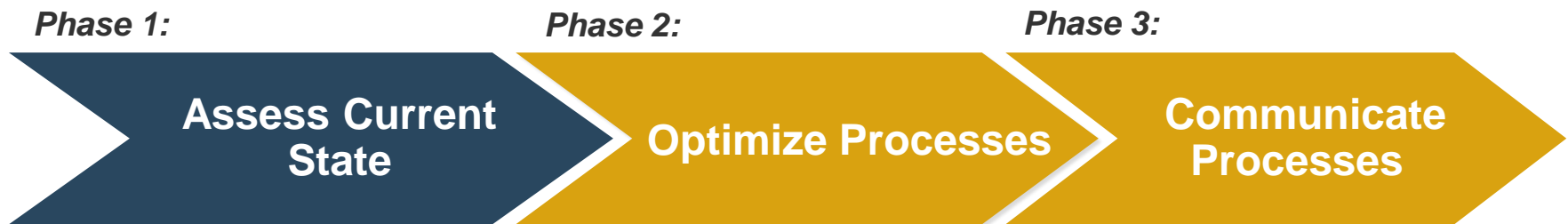### Determine Success Factors

Document benefits of optimization and establish a feasible timeline for realizing benefits.

Next Steps: Phase 2&3: Optimize and Communicate

Phase 1:	Phase 2:	Phase 3:
Assess Current State	**Optimize Processes**	**Communicate Processes**

Phase 2 outline

Complete these steps on your own, or call us to complete a guided implementation. A guided implementation is a series of 2-3 advisory calls that help you execute each phase of the program.

Guided Implementation 1: Optimize Processes
Proposed Time to Completion (in weeks): 4 to 6 weeks

Step 2.1: Streamline Intake	Step 2.2: Align Approvals with Capacity	Step 2.3: Prioritize to Support Business Goals
Start with an analyst kick off call:	**Discuss these issues with analyst:**	**Discuss these issues with analyst:**
• Discuss and analyze intake workflow.	• Review approval and business case process.	• Establish a prioritization framework to support business goals.
Then complete these activities…	**Then complete these activities…**	**Then complete these activities…**
✓ Perform Start-Stop-Continue exercise. ✓ Configure project request templates.	✓ Define various phases of approval. ✓ Establish approval and prioritization scorecard. ✓ Determine project authority model.	✓ Define prioritization steps. ✓ Determine how strategic goals can translate into project KPIs. ✓ Configure prioritization tool.
With these tools & templates:	**With these tools & templates:**	**With these tools & templates:**
Project Request Templates Project Intake Classification Matrix Project Sizing Chart	Business Case Templates "Scoring Criteria" table in Project Intake and Prioritization Tool	Project Intake and Prioritization Tool

Understand the risks of poor intake practices

Too much red tape could result in your portfolio falling victim to underground economies. Too little intake formality could lead to the wild west.

Off-the-grid projects, i.e. projects that circumvent formal intake processes, lead to underground economies that can deplete resource capacity and *hijack your portfolio.*

These underground economies are typically the result of *too much intake red tape.* When the request process is made too complex or cumbersome, project sponsors may unsurprisingly seek alternative means to get their projects done.

While the most obvious line of defence against the appearance of underground economies is an easy-to-use and access request form, one must be cautious. Too little intake formality could lead to a wild west of project intake, where everyone gets their initiatives approved regardless of their business merit and feasibility.

Benefits of Optimized Intake	Risks of Poor Intake
• Alignment of portfolio with business goals	• Portfolio overrun by off-the-grid projects
• Resources assigned to high-value projects	• Resources assigned to low-value projects
• Better throughput of projects in the portfolio	• Ever-growing project backlog
• Strong stakeholder relations	• Stakeholders lose faith in value of PMO

IAG Insight

Intake is intimately bound to stakeholder management. Finding the right balance of friction for your team is the key to successfully walking the line between asking for too much and not asking for enough. If your intake processes are strong, purveyors in underground economies will no longer have any reason to circumvent formal process.

Review your current and target states for intake from the Needs Assessment

This section will help you move up the intake capability scale outlined during our current state assessment. As you customize the templates and processes in this section, refer back to the current and target states to help guide your progress. If you require assistance meeting your targets, call IAG for help.

Capability Level 5: **Optimized**	Occurs through a centralized portal. Processes and skills in place for thorough follow-up.
Capability Level 4: **Aligned**	Occurs through a centralized process. Processes and skills in place for follow-up.
Capability Level 3: **Engaged**	Requests are formally documented in a request form before they're assigned, elaborated, and executed as projects.
Capability Level 2: **Defined**	Processes and skills are in place to follow up on requests to clarify project scope before going forward with approval and prioritization.
Capability Level 1: **Unmanaged**	Projects are requested through personal conversations and emails with minimal documentation and oversight.

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Perform a start-stop-continue exercise to help determine what is working and what is not working

Optimizing intake may not require a complete overhaul of your existing processes. You may only need to tweak certain templates or policies. Perhaps you started out with a strong process and simply lost resolve over time—in which case you will need to focus on establishing motivation and discipline, rather than rework your entire process.

Perform a start-stop-continue exercise with your team to help determine what should be salvaged, what should be abandoned, and what should be introduced.

- *How to perform the exercise*:

    A On a whiteboard or equivalent, write "Start," "Stop," and "Continue" in three separate columns.

    B Equip your team with sticky notes or markers and have them populate the columns with ideas and suggestions surrounding your current processes.

    C As a group, discuss the responses and come to an agreement as to which are most valid.

    D Document the responses to help structure your game plan for intake optimization.

start	stop	continue
Expectations Management	Remove excess from intake form	Continue to accept walk-up requests
Centralized portal for request	Too many intake channels	with monthly prioritization meetings
Review requests in batches, monthly	Telephone requests!!!!	

Follow from the above examples and also think back to the results of your SWOT analysis. The content of this start-stop-continue activity should mirror the insights from the SWOT activity, helping to frame them in more actionable terms for the steps ahead.

Start compiling your intake Playbook

2.1.4 30 Minutes

Use IAG's *Project Intake, Approval, and Prioritization Playbook* to help establish clarity around intake process, inputs, and outputs to ensure adoption and success.

Record your standard operating procedures for intake into the "Intake Process" section of the ***Project Intake, Approval, and Prioritization Playbook*** template.

Use the *Project Intake, Approval, and Prioritization Playbook* template to:

❑ **Formalize goals and metrics** supported by your intake solution.

❑ **Clarify roles and responsibilities** for intake and approval.

❑ **Define approval stage gates and business case requirements.**

❑ **Establish scoring criteria** to be used when prioritizing projects and deciding which projects not to do.

For assistance establishing your intake workflow or documenting your new processes in the Playbook, call to speak with an IAG analyst.

Intake Process

Intake Workflow Diagram
[The below diagram is from Info-Tech's *Optimize Project Intake, Approval, and Prioritization* storyboard. Update it or replace it to match your organization's process.]

1	2	3	4
Requestor fills out form and submits the request into the funnel.	Requests are triaged into the proper queue.	BA or PM starts to gather preliminary requirements.	Requestor is given realistic expectations for approval process.

Intake Workflow

Submitting Requests
Requests can be submitted at any time throughout the year by all employees.
• The request form can be accessed via [shared drive/email/intranet/PPM tool].
• Department managers must [approve/be informed of] each request.

Request Triage Process
• The triage team is comprised of:

[List members]	[define roles, e.g. portfolio manager, etc.]	[define responsibilities, e.g. divert the request, inform requestor, etc.]

• Requestors will be notified that their request has been received [by email] within [one week/automatically] of request being submitted.
• New requests will be assessed and reviewed [every Monday/once a week/once a month/once a quarter/annually].
• Request liaisons will perform request follow up within [this timeframe] of request being submitted.
   o If the request meets concept approval and is good to proceed, the BA will provide expectations regarding an approval timeline.

3
Info-Tech Research Group

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Phase 3 outline

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Complete these steps on your own, or call us to complete a guided implementation. A guided implementation is a series of 2-3 advisory calls that help you execute each phase of the program.

Guided Implementation 3: Communicate Processes
Proposed Time to Completion (in weeks): 1 to 2 Weeks

Step 3.1: Institute Intake Process Change

Discuss these issues with an analyst:

- Review implementation strategy and develop a communication plan.

Then complete these activities…

- ✓ Develop a plan to manage stakeholder resistance to the new intake and prioritization processes.
- ✓ Develop a plan to manage staff and team resistance to the new intake processes.
- ✓ Finalize Playbook.
- ✓ Customize the *Project Intake, Approval, and Prioritization Communications Template.*
- ✓ Weigh the benefits and the costs of implementing this blueprint for your organization.

With these tools & templates:
W Project Intake, Approval, and Prioritization Playbook
P Project Intake, Approval, and Prioritization Communications Template

Insight breakdown

Executive Summary

- Give yourself the authority to say "no" (or at least "not yet") to new projects by aligning intake, approval, and prioritization with the defining constraints of strategic objectives, portfolio capacity, and stakeholder needs. With intake processes geared toward these ends, you can ensure that the PMO is always driving the throughput of the highest-value projects in the portfolio and that the business side has visibility into IT's capacity and processes.

Step 1.1

- Ensure IT is executing on the right things. Focus on projects that align with business goals and available resource capacity. With optimized intake, approval, and prioritization, you can set the portfolio up for success by ensuring that you are spending time and resources on the most valuable projects.

- Optimized intake is not about approving more projects. It's about improving the throughput of projects in the portfolio. This is done by making sure that what you are working on provides value to the business and can be completed in a reasonable timeframe.

Step 1.2

- Project intake, approval, and prioritization need to be mindful of three defining constraints: strategic alignment, resource capacity, and stakeholder needs. It's not enough just to ensure you have the resource capacity to deliver what you approve. You also need to ensure you have a strategy for accommodating ad hoc, mandated projects that stakeholders impose without sacrificing strategic objectives.

- The PMO needs to have the authority—and needs to exercise the authority—to enforce discipline on stakeholders. Organizations that solicit in verbal requests (by phone, in person, or during scrum) lack the orderliness required for PPM success. In these cases, it needs to be the mission of the PMO to demand proper documentation and accountability from stakeholders.

Insight breakdown

Step 1.2 (continued)

- While minimizing the amount of back-and-forth between the key players is ideal to some extent, if there is no communication between sponsors and the individual(s) developing the business case, the request is doomed to fail. If your intake workflow does not foster collaboration between requestors, approvers, and BAs, time will be wasted on the development of business cases that will never reach the charter phase.

- Establish realistic short-term goals. Even with optimized intake procedures, you may not be able to eliminate underground project economies immediately. Make your initial goals realistic, leaving room for those walk-up requests that may still appear via informal channels. Ultimately, in time, if your intake processes are strong and user friendly, executives and project sponsors should have no cause to pursue informal channels.

Step 2.1

- Portfolios can fall victim to ad hoc or off-the-grid initiatives when intake, approval, and prioritization processes are not clearly defined and well communicated. Intake processes that add unnecessary complexity and excess red tape to requesting projects lead to underground economies and project black markets that rob your already in-flight projects of precious resources and threaten the stability of your portfolio's strategic alignment with business goals.

- Intake is intimately bound to stakeholder management. Finding the right balance of friction for your team is the key to successfully walking the line between asking for too much and not asking for enough. If your intake processes are strong, purveyors in underground economies will no longer have any reason to circumvent formal process.

- The first step towards an effective centralized project intake process is eliminating the question of "where do I go to request projects?" Whatever portal you choose, make sure there is no doubt about how requesters can access the intake form.

- A simple request response will go a long way in terms of stakeholder management. It will not only help assure stakeholders that their requests are in progress, but the request confirmation will also help to set expectations and take some of the mystery out of IT's processes.

Insight breakdown

Step 2.1 (continued)

- More time spent with stakeholders defining high-level requirements during the ideation phase is key to both project and organizational success. It will not only improve the throughput of projects through the portfolio, but it will enhance the transparency of IT's capacity and enable IT to more effectively support business processes.

Step 2.2

- Intake and approval need to work in synchrony, with intake shining a light on the approval process: "You can have it, but you can't have it in 'said' timeframe." With these expectations in place, you can reframe the approval process. It's not about achieving throughput of project approval, but about improving the throughput of projects in the portfolio.

- Estimates that form the basis of business cases are often based on flawed assumptions. Use early project phases or sprints to build working prototypes to test the assumptions on which business cases are built rather than investing time improving precision of estimates without improving accuracy.

- Continue to refine your scoring criteria and weightings as needed. IAG recommends setting aside time during the year to review the effectiveness of your scoring criteria and weightings.

- Projects that are scored, but not prioritized to start, will populate the portfolio backlog. Items in the backlog will need to be rescored periodically, as scores can become outdated or obsolete for a number of reasons. Factors necessitating rescoring can include changes to business case assumptions, organizational change (e.g. a new CEO or a change in strategic objectives), or major emergencies or disruptions (e.g. a security breach).

Step 2.3

- Prioritization encompasses the entire intake process. More than simply a step that comes after approval, prioritization should additionally be thought of as an ongoing activity that everyone involved in projects is responsible for. As an ongoing activity, prioritization occurs in the form of stakeholders, project workers, project managers, and BAs considering the business value of what they are asking for or being asked to do. In other words, optimized prioritization is a collaborative effort that requires training management and staff to make sure that the activity of IT supports business processes as much as possible. While all might be responsible for it, ultimately the portfolio manager remains accountable for prioritization.

Insight breakdown

Step 2.3 (continued)

- Portfolio managers should prioritize what to finish next as opposed to what others think they should start next. Prioritization represents the best opportunity to respond to stakeholder and organizational change and to best align the portfolio with the goals of the business side.

Step 3.1

- Good initiatives fail when organizational change is mishandled. Be sure to implement your new intake processes in a way that anticipates objections and prevents those objections from gaining any organizational momentum. If your processes are strong, stakeholders will have no reason to resist change or continue to deal in underground economies. The key to a successful rollout is effectively communicating the organizational benefits of the change coupled with the enforcement of process discipline on stakeholders and staff.

- Intake, approval, and prioritization processes need to be honest about project uncertainty and set realistic expectations about what the portfolio can deliver and when it can deliver it by. In many ways, project success begins with being honest and open about limitations.

- Most people affected by an IT-enabled change tend to be fence-sitters. Small minorities will be enthusiasts, saboteurs, and skeptics. Your communication strategy should focus on engaging the skeptics, saboteurs, and enthusiasts. Fence-sitters will follow.

- Don't forget to emphasize the ongoing nature of change when discussing new processes with stakeholders. This will be especially important for organizations that are on a journey through the capability framework and have plans to make further changes in the short and long terms. Block the opportunity for future objections by planting the seeds for those changes now.

Summary of accomplishment

Knowledge Gained

- Portfolio visibility into resource capacity, coupled with the alignment of your projects with strategic goals, will give you the ability to decline low-value requests.
- More time spent with stakeholders during the ideation phase is key to project and portfolio success.

Processes Optimized

- Intake Workflow
- Approval Process
- Prioritization Framework
- Change Management

Deliverables Completed

- Project Request Form
- Business Case Template
- Project Intake and Prioritization Tool
- Project Intake, Approval, and Prioritization Playbook
- Project Intake, Approval, and Prioritization Communications Template

Related tools and research

Do you want to conduct a comprehensive assessment of your project and portfolio management capabilities and requirements?	**To conduct a comprehensive project and portfolio management assessment,** see IAG's *Project Portfolio Management Assessment Program.*
Do you not have a PMO/PPM strategy and are looking to establish a portfolio with supporting processes?	**To develop an overarching PPM strategy,** read *Develop a Project Portfolio Management Strategy in Two Days* blueprint or five-day *Portfolio Management* workshop.
Do you need an affordable, effective, and adopted PPM solution today?	**To launch a home-grown PPM solution today,** see *Grow Your Own PPM Solution*.