

# Mitigation of Sequestration Impacts on Project Management<sup>1</sup>

by

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June 12, 2013

How you respond to the impacts of Federal sequestration on ongoing projects will be at least partly determined by how "mature" your project management practices are.

Gartner's [PPM Maturity Model](#) is useful to review here. Gartner describes 5 levels of "maturity, with 1 being low and 5 being high:

1. Level 1: Reactive
2. Level 2: Emerging Discipline
3. Level 3: Initial Integration
4. Level 4: Effective Integration
5. Level 5: Effective Innovation



Gartner's model describes variation across these levels in terms of five dimensions: people, PPM practices and processes, financial management, technology, and relationships. My impression of the various descriptions of these levels and dimensions is fairly simple and can be expressed as follows:

- *The more organized your organization is about project and program management, the more flexibility you'll have in responding to challenges such as those posed by*

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<sup>1</sup> This continues my series on the impacts of sequestration on Federal project management practices. Previous articles include [A Project Manager's Perspective on the Cost Impacts of the "Sequester"](#) and [More Thoughts on the Budget Sequester's Impact on Project Budgets](#).

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*sequestration.*

This may seem counterintuitive if your organization has tradition of resisting some of the formalisms, documentation, and reporting often associated with program management and PMO operations. I wouldn't blame you for being skeptical. But think about the following:

- You lose a key staff member with an important technical skill. How do you locate a replacement? More importantly, how do you locate a replacement who is available?
- A key review milestone must be delayed due to absence of a key stakeholder whose schedule you don't control. Does the entire project screech to a halt, or can you quickly juggle schedules and assignments to maintain productivity across projects?
- Your entire project portfolio has to shrink by 5%. How do you know where to cut to minimize damage to your agency's legal responsibilities?
- Your oversight board doesn't believe you when you tell them that stretching the project out by 5% might actually increase costs by 10-20%. Prove it.

Having an infrastructure in place beforehand facilitates the response you have to make to a sudden change to or loss of resources.

How complex and formal does this infrastructure have to be for it to be useful in situations such as sequestration? In my opinion, the single most important "infrastructure" element is the ability of project and program staff and stakeholders to regularly communicate, collaborate, and share information about who is doing what in relation to basic program goals, objectives, and schedules.

Granted, there will always be formal components underpinning this ability such as availability of project budgets and schedules and the reporting that go along with them. Helping people stay current about what's happening now and what needs to happen in the future can go a long way to mitigating problems that arise along the way.

Project staff must be able to quickly communicate and share information. While there are many technological tools that enable this, technology itself will not guarantee that people will share information. Leadership needs to show the way so that, when a crisis such as sequestration occurs, a project manager can pick up the phone to call a colleague about the problem, regardless of department, division, or agency. You shouldn't have to wait until a crisis to find out that the manager down the hall might be able to help you replace a missing resource!

These are some of the themes I'm exploring in my research. If you are able to share with me how you are coping with the effects of sequestration on your project, please let me know!