In government, program management requires coordinating multiple projects while considering cost, schedule and performance — and the pandemic made this job even more challenging. Program team members were working remotely and communication with industry partners was disrupted. So, the Office of Management and Budget issued guidance to help acquisition offices cope with these challenges.

Four government experts gathered at a recent FedInsider webinar to discuss how they’re using cross-functional teams on shared platforms to manage programs and increase visibility for agency leadership.

The following are some of the most important aspects of those efforts.

**Program Data Accessibility for Senior Leadership Decision Making**

When Jason Martin took on his current position as the Defense Information Systems Agency’s director of the development and business center and component acquisition executive, he began reshaping how DISA does program management.

Martin focused on acquisition guidance and governance, and how to keep leadership and the workforce informed.

DISA has about 130 active programs within the agency. “It’s a lot of information that we really need to have a good handle on. We need to ensure we’re constantly messaging, tracking metrics and having stakeholder feedback on a very regular basis that keeps us informed and ready to provide any relevant information,” Martin said.

He set up a weekly interactive forum across leadership with program managers and workforce members to share program background, updates, challenges and funding. This is done both virtually and in-person when appropriate.

The Army Corps of Engineers is also focusing on data visibility. Dovarius Peoples, its chief information officer, said ensuring quality and accessible data is key to informed decision making. “We emphasize the visualization piece of data, being able to display it,” Peoples said.

The Army Corps of Engineers builds solutions in dealing with the nation’s toughest challenges like COVID-19 and disaster relief, and leaders must have access to data to make those informed decisions. "We have enabled them to do so by pulling data from many different sources and having one operating picture,” Peoples said.

**Data & Transparency Are the Foundation of Program Management**

Ted Okada, chief technology officer for FEMA, recognizes that silos within a department can be natural due to cross-functional teams with multiple appropriates and mission sets. “The question is, how do we build trust?” Okada said.

**FEATURED EXPERTS:**

- **Dovarius Peoples**
  Chief Information Officer, Army Corps of Engineers

- **Jason Martin**
  Director, Development & Business Center & Component Acquisition Executive, DISA

- **Joe Puckett**
  Chief of Performance Management & Governance, USAF

- **Ted Okada**
  Chief Technology Officer, FEMA
The challenge is creating an informal set of conversations and communication outlets within the formal structure of governance. To facilitate this within FEMA, Okada said the agency has started communities of practice that cut across program lines. They don’t rely on rigid structures, but instead are built around transparency and trust so team members and program managers can discuss common mission elements.

“Recognizing that silos exist... but then the larger overlay is building those islands or communities of trust through our communities of practice — that is where we seem to really find greater success,” Okada said.

This approach was especially helpful during virtual COVID-19 operations, which allowed FEMA to rebalance how these communities function to ensure they support the formal structures of governance along with mission command and control. “We feel like that kind of balance will ultimately lead to the kinds of metrics that determine real outcomes for our citizens and survivors,” Okada said.

Along with transparency, DISA relies on accurate data from the inception of an idea all the way to delivery to make the right decisions and make the most of federal funding. The agency leverages data from across the department and stakeholder side to build its projects.

“As we gather, pull that data together, adjudicate it, really work — and that’s where the open collaboration comes together. Communication and effective information sharing really helps us build that solid plan,” Martin said.

Benefits to an Integrated Project & Program Management Approach
Implementing an integrated program management approach helps organizations focus on the output and mission, according to Joe Puckett, chief of performance management and governance in the office of the deputy chief management officer for the Department of the Air Force.

“In the operational domain in the Department of Defense, you see that out in the field, that everyone is very focused on mission. I think as long as everyone on the project understands what the overall objective is, it helps the ‘why’ question of, ‘why would I do this, and why would we integrate?’” Puckett said.

A lack of integration makes the mission and objective unachievable, Puckett added. For instance, the Air Force needs to have trained pilots ready to fly, which its operations dictate. This requires budgeting so there’s fuel to fly the jets and spare parts in the pipeline if something goes wrong, which are in the logistics directorate. Then, the personnel department is required to recruit pilots. All these different functional areas are required to contribute to operational success.

“When those separate functional areas understand we all need to do this together to achieve that mission, it helps us integrate,” Puckett said. “Focus on capability and output.”

Leveraging Project Management Tools & Cloud Platforms for Future Project Alignment
The Army Corps of Engineers uses technology, business and category management to articulate and categorize all of its IT spending. That means that IT equipment is assigned based on end user needs and what the technicians are leveraging on the backend to make the technology operate.

“And when it comes to the billing part of that process, it allows us to clearly articulate to a customer what it is that we’re charging them for in the various categories,” Peoples said. This capability is integrated into the Army Corps of Engineers’ enterprise and has allowed the agency to understand what customers are paying for so it can properly invest and align resources.

“The modern tools of today have enabled us to be able to be more transparent as well as definitive with our costs,” Peoples said. Cloud has expanded these capabilities and enables the agency to leverage software-as-a-service, and to scale solutions as needed.

FEMA also leverages technology business management concepts for future planning, and has an IT roadmap of future technologies to onboard. Part of that future alignment is meeting end users where they are in a hybrid work environment, where personnel are working both in person and remotely due to COVID conditions. Collaboration will still be critical, and will also perhaps become the answer to ensuring productive project management.

“I think for those looking at the new merger between IT and facilities, you’re going to see greater loops of collaboration between those that manage the physical space, and those that manage the cyberspace,” Okada said.