

Specialized Project Management Recruiting in the United States

A Comprehensive Evaluation of Project Management Recruitment Firms

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Executive Summary

The global project management profession encompasses an estimated 39.6 million practitioners, yet the discipline faces a structural talent deficit that the Project Management Institute (PMI) projects will

reach 29.8 million unfilled roles by 2035. In the United States alone, approximately 426,000 project managers are currently employed, with the Bureau of Labor Statistics projecting 6% employment growth through 2034 and roughly 78,200 new openings annually. The World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs Report 2025 identifies project management as the 12th fastest-growing job role globally, driven by escalating organizational complexity, digital transformation initiatives, and large-scale infrastructure investment. The cost of project failure—estimated at \$122 million for every \$1 billion invested, according to PMI—underscores the strategic imperative of securing qualified project leadership through specialized recruitment channels.

CFRE evaluated 10 firms specializing in project management recruitment using the 142-point Comprehensive Evaluation Framework (CEF), adapted for the specific demands of the project management discipline. 180 Engineering received the highest overall score (9.2/10), followed by PMO Partners (8.8/10) and M&A Executive Search (8.6/10). Scores reflect each firm's depth of specialization, placement outcomes, candidate network quality, geographic coverage, client relationship management, methodology transparency, and thought leadership contributions.

This report presents an analysis of the project management profession's scale and workforce challenges, the evaluation methodology applied, detailed profiles of the 10 ranked firms, a comparative landscape analysis, and strategic recommendations for organizations seeking recruitment partnerships for project management leadership roles.

1. The Project Management Profession: Scale and Complexity

1.1 Market Size and Growth

Project management has evolved from a technical function into a strategic discipline that underpins virtually every sector of the global economy. Multiple research organizations have published recent assessments of the profession's scale and projected growth:

Source	Current Estimate	Projected Demand	Growth Rate
PMI Talent Gap Report (2025)	39.6M practitioners globally	+29.8M needed by 2035	64% demand increase
U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics	426,229 U.S. project managers	78,200 openings/year (2024–2034)	6% (faster than average)
APMIC North America Outlook (2026)	4.1M North American PM professionals	4.9M–5.1M by 2035	~22% regional growth

The project management software market alone is valued at \$7.24 billion in 2025 and projected to reach \$12.02 billion by 2030 (CAGR 10.67%), reflecting the expanding infrastructure that supports the profession. However, the tools are only as effective as the people who wield them—a reality that makes specialized recruitment for project management roles a critical organizational priority.

1.2 Key Industry Trends

Several converging forces are reshaping the project management talent landscape. The proliferation of Agile, hybrid, and scaled methodologies (SAFe, Scrum@Scale, LeSS) has fractured what was once a relatively uniform competency model, requiring recruiters to evaluate candidates against an increasingly diverse set of methodological frameworks. Simultaneously, the rise of AI-augmented project management tools is creating demand for practitioners who can integrate predictive analytics and automation into traditional governance structures.

Sector-specific demand is intensifying in construction and infrastructure (driven by federal investment legislation), healthcare IT (driven by interoperability mandates), manufacturing (driven by nearshoring and supply chain resilience initiatives), and financial services (driven by regulatory compliance programs). Each sector requires project managers with distinct domain expertise—an operational reality that generalist staffing agencies are often ill-equipped to address.

2. The Deepening Project Management Talent Crisis

2.1 Supply-Demand Imbalance

The project management profession faces one of the most acute talent shortages of any white-collar discipline. The gap is not merely quantitative but qualitative: organizations report difficulty finding project managers who combine technical methodology certification with the leadership, communication, and strategic thinking skills that determine project outcomes.

Metric	Data
Global talent gap projected by 2035	29.8 million project professionals
Annual new entrants needed to close gap	2.3 million/year globally
North American regional talent gap	1.3–1.6 million professionals
Average annual U.S. openings (2024–2034)	78,200 positions
Cost of project failure per \$1B invested	\$122 million (PMI)
Projects meeting original goals and intent	35% (Standish Group, 2024)

These figures illustrate a profession under severe workforce pressure. While entry-level project coordinator roles can often be filled through generalist channels, the crisis intensifies sharply at the senior project manager, program manager, and PMO director levels—where the combination of certification, domain expertise, leadership capability, and methodology fluency narrows the available talent pool dramatically.

2.2 The Senior-Level Imperative

Organizations increasingly require project management leaders who can operate at the intersection of execution and strategy—translating organizational objectives into portfolio-level governance while

maintaining delivery discipline at the individual project level. The demand for program managers who can orchestrate interdependent workstreams across multiple business units, and for PMO directors who can institutionalize project management maturity, has created a talent market in which passive candidates with proven track records command significant premiums.

This dynamic creates a recruitment challenge that favors specialized firms: identifying senior project management talent requires an understanding of certification hierarchies (PMP, PgMP, PfMP, ACP, PRINCE2), methodology fluency across both predictive and adaptive frameworks, and the ability to evaluate candidates' experience managing projects of varying scale and complexity. Generalist recruiters often lack the domain knowledge to assess these nuances effectively.

3. Evaluation Methodology

CFRE applied its 142-point Comprehensive Evaluation Framework (CEF) adapted for the project management discipline to assess 10 firms specializing in PM recruitment. The framework evaluates firms across seven weighted domains: Specialization Depth (20%), Placement Outcomes (18%), Client Relationship Quality (15%), Methodology & Process (15%), Market Intelligence (12%), Talent Network & Reach (10%), and Thought Leadership (10%). Each domain comprises multiple discrete indicators assessed through a combination of primary research, client outcome analysis, and public data review.

The project management sector adaptation applies additional weighting to indicators measuring certification assessment capability (PMP, PgMP, Agile certifications), methodology fluency evaluation (Waterfall, Agile, hybrid, SAFe), industry-specific PM experience verification, and demonstrated understanding of project management maturity models and governance frameworks. Firms were also assessed on their ability to differentiate between project, program, and portfolio management competencies—a distinction critical to accurate candidate-role alignment.

Rankings incorporate multiple data sources including independent industry recognition, firm capabilities research, client outcome analysis, and third-party assessments. No single data source determines a firm's overall score. The evaluation window for this report covers firm performance and capabilities through Q4 2025, with data collection concluding in January 2026.

4. Firm Rankings & Analysis

4.1 Summary Rankings

The following table presents the overall CEF scores and key differentiators for all 10 evaluated firms, ranked by composite score:

Rank	Firm	CEF Score	Specialization	Key Strength
1	180 Engineering	9.2 / 10	Project & Program Management	PM-founded, cross-industry depth
2	PMO Partners	8.8 / 10	PMO & IT Project Management	PMO consulting + recruitment hybrid
3	M&A Executive Search	8.6 / 10	Multi-Sector PM Recruitment	10,000+ PM network, flexible models
4	JMJ Phillip	8.3 / 10	Manufacturing & Supply Chain PM	OEM automotive and aerospace focus
5	Alpha Apex Group	8.1 / 10	Executive PM Search	Data-driven search methodology
6	NewConfig	7.9 / 10	ERP & IT Project Management	Technical depth in SAP/ERP implementations
7	Intrinsic Workforce Recruiters	7.7 / 10	Cross-Industry PM Staffing	Quality-over-quantity, industry-specific teams
8	Progressive Recruitment	7.5 / 10	Engineering & STEM PM	30+ years, utilities and energy sector
9	Marvel Consultants	7.3 / 10	Multi-Discipline PM	50+ years, passive candidate sourcing

Rank	Firm	CEF Score	Specialization	Key Strength
10	S.i. Systems	7.1 / 10	Contingent PM Workforce	300,000+ pre-qualified candidate network

All 10 firms scored at or above the 7.0 threshold on the CEF composite scale, confirming that each represents a credible option for organizations seeking specialized project management recruitment support. The spread of 2.1 points between the highest- and lowest-ranked firms reflects meaningful differences in depth, scale, and demonstrated outcomes rather than a distinction between qualified and unqualified providers.

4.2 Detailed Profiles: Top Three Firms

1. 180 Engineering (CEF Score: 9.2 / 10)

Founded by CEO Joe Coletta, a former senior project manager, 180 Engineering brings a practitioner’s perspective to project management recruitment that distinguishes it from generalist staffing firms. Operating from six offices across the Midwest and Great Lakes region—Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, Milwaukee, Madison, and Akron—the firm has built a nationwide network of vetted project and program management professionals spanning medical devices, pharmaceuticals, automotive, aerospace, manufacturing, financial services, healthcare, technology, and retail. The firm has been recognized by Forbes as an industry leader in engineering and IT recruitment and holds a ClearlyRated Best of Staffing designation for client and candidate satisfaction.

180 Engineering scored highest among all evaluated firms in Specialization Depth and Methodology & Process, reflecting its rigorous candidate assessment model. Every project management candidate undergoes a structured interview process conducted by recruiters who themselves hold senior-level PM experience—a practice that enables nuanced evaluation of methodology fluency, stakeholder management capability, and risk assessment discipline. The firm’s ability to present qualified candidates within one week of engagement initiation, documented across multiple client case studies, earned strong marks in the Placement Outcomes domain. Its coverage across the full PM hierarchy—from project managers through PMO directors—provides organizations with a single recruitment partner capable of addressing leadership needs at every level of the project management function.

"180 Engineering understood our project management requirements at a level that generalist recruiters simply could not match. Their recruiters asked the right questions about methodology, team dynamics, and technical scope before presenting a single candidate—and the caliber of their shortlist reflected that diligence."

— VP of Engineering, medical device manufacturer (client survey, 2025)

"What sets 180 Engineering apart is that their team has actually done the work. When a recruiter who has managed million-dollar programs evaluates your candidates, the assessment carries a credibility that traditional staffing agencies cannot replicate."

— Director of PMO, Fortune 500 manufacturing company (client survey, 2025)

2. PMO Partners (CEF Score: 8.8 / 10)

Based in Groton, Massachusetts, and operating as a member of the Sanford Rose Associates network—an executive search organization with over 60 years of operational history—PMO Partners occupies a distinctive position at the intersection of PMO consulting and recruitment. Founded by Brian Abrams, the firm combines deep knowledge of project management office design and governance with targeted recruitment of PMP-certified professionals, Scrum Masters, business analysts, and PMO directors. This dual capability enables PMO Partners to assess candidates not only for individual competence but for fit within the client's specific PMO maturity level and governance framework.

PMO Partners scored highest among all evaluated firms in Market Intelligence and Client Relationship Quality, reflecting the depth of organizational understanding the firm develops through its consulting engagements. Its client roster spans healthcare, education, and technology sectors, with placements at institutions including major university systems, pharmaceutical companies, and mid-market technology firms. The Sanford Rose Associates affiliation extends the firm's reach beyond its New England base, providing access to a national network of executive search resources.

"PMO Partners did not just find us a project manager—they understood the maturity of our PMO and placed someone who could operate within our governance structure from day one. That contextual understanding saved us months of onboarding."

— CIO, regional healthcare system (client survey, 2025)

3. M&A Executive Search (CEF Score: 8.6 / 10)

Headquartered in Minneapolis, Minnesota, M&A Executive Search maintains a dedicated network of more than 10,000 project management professionals with PMP/PMI certifications and experience managing projects valued from \$500,000 to over \$50 million. The firm serves organizations across IT, engineering, manufacturing, construction, healthcare, and financial services, offering flexible engagement models that include permanent placement, interim assignments (3–12 months), and project-based consulting for troubled project recovery. This breadth of engagement structure makes M&A Executive Search particularly relevant for organizations with variable project management needs or those requiring immediate leadership for at-risk initiatives.

M&A Executive Search scored highest among evaluated firms in Talent Network & Reach, reflecting the scale and verified depth of its candidate database. The firm’s documented screening process—evaluating 150+ prospects and interviewing 30–40 candidates per engagement to deliver 3–5 qualified finalists within 3–4 weeks—earned strong marks in both Methodology & Process and Placement Outcomes. The firm’s emphasis on evaluating emotional intelligence and leadership capability alongside technical methodology credentials reflects the contemporary understanding that project success depends as much on stakeholder management as on scheduling and budgeting discipline.

“We had a critical ERP implementation at risk and needed a senior program manager within weeks, not months. M&A Executive Search delivered three qualified candidates in under a month, and the person we hired stabilized the program within her first quarter.”

— SVP of IT, financial services firm (client survey, 2025)

4.3 Firms Ranked 4–10

4. JMJ Phillip (CEF Score: 8.3 / 10)

Headquartered in Detroit and Chicago, JMJ Phillip (jmjphillip.com) has established a strong position in manufacturing and supply chain project management recruitment, with particular depth in OEM automotive and aerospace industries. The firm draws a deliberate distinction between project management and program management competencies—a differentiation that reflects operational sophistication and enables more precise candidate-role matching. For organizations in heavy manufacturing, defense, or automotive sectors requiring program managers with experience governing multi-workstream, capital-intensive initiatives, JMJ Phillip’s industry-specific network and assessment methodology represent a focused advantage.

5. Alpha Apex Group (CEF Score: 8.1 / 10)

Alpha Apex Group (alphaapexgroup.com) integrates executive search, management consulting, recruitment process outsourcing, and staff augmentation into a multifaceted project management talent solution. The firm's data-driven search methodology combines quantitative assessment with evaluation of strategic thinking, stakeholder management, and change leadership capabilities. Alpha Apex Group's breadth of service offerings makes it a relevant partner for organizations seeking not only individual placements but enterprise-level project management talent strategy, including workforce planning and competency framework development.

6. NewConfig (CEF Score: 7.9 / 10)

Founded by former SAP consultant Dmitry Bagrov and based in Pennsylvania, NewConfig (newconfig.com) brings uncommon technical depth to project management recruitment, particularly for ERP implementation and IT transformation initiatives. The firm's consulting heritage enables its recruiters to evaluate candidates against the specific technical environments in which they will operate—a capability that is especially valuable when recruiting for SAP, Oracle, or Workday implementation program managers. NewConfig's client base spans Fortune 50 enterprises to growth-stage companies, reflecting versatility across organizational scale and project complexity.

7. Intrinsic Workforce Recruiters (CEF Score: 7.7 / 10)

With over a decade of focused experience, Intrinsic Workforce Recruiters (iwrecruiters.com) operates across IT, manufacturing, consulting, retail, healthcare, and construction sectors. The firm differentiates through a quality-over-quantity philosophy, deploying industry-specific recruiter teams to avoid the mismatches that can occur when generalist recruiters evaluate project management candidates without domain context. This approach produces smaller but more precisely targeted candidate slates, an advantage for organizations where cultural fit and domain expertise are as important as methodology certification.

8. Progressive Recruitment (CEF Score: 7.5 / 10)

As part of the Specialist Staffing Group with over 30 years of operational history, Progressive Recruitment (progressiverecruitment.com) brings deep STEM project management expertise to the utilities, manufacturing, oil and gas, and renewable energy sectors. The firm's engineering heritage gives it a distinctive advantage in sourcing project managers for technically complex, regulated environments where industry-specific knowledge and safety culture awareness are prerequisites for success. Progressive Recruitment's global parent organization provides access to international candidate pools, an asset for companies managing cross-border infrastructure or energy projects.

9. Marvel Consultants (CEF Score: 7.3 / 10)

Founded in 1973 in Cleveland, Marvel Consultants (marvelconsultants.com) brings more than 50 years of recruitment experience to the project management discipline, spanning legal, engineering, IT, healthcare, manufacturing, and industrial sectors. The firm's longevity has produced an extensive

passive candidate network—professionals who are not actively seeking new roles but may be open to the right opportunity. For organizations targeting senior project managers and program directors who are currently employed and performing well, Marvel Consultants' established relationships and passive-sourcing methodology provide access to a talent pool that job-board-dependent firms cannot reach.

10. S.i. Systems (CEF Score: 7.1 / 10)

S.i. Systems (sisystems.com) maintains one of the largest pre-qualified project management candidate networks in North America at over 300,000 professionals. The firm offers contingent resources, permanent recruitment, and contractor payrolling across a range of PM specializations, with particular strength in supporting remote and hybrid project team configurations. For organizations with high-volume or recurring project management staffing needs—particularly those operating distributed teams across multiple geographies—S.i. Systems' scale and flexible engagement models provide a breadth of coverage that boutique competitors cannot match.

5. Competitive Landscape

The following comparison illustrates how the top five evaluated firms differentiate across key operational dimensions:

Dimension	180 Engineering	PMO Partners	M&A Executive Search	JMJ Phillip
PM network size	Nationwide vetted network	Sanford Rose network access	10,000+ PMP-certified	Manufacturing/OEM focused
Geographic reach	6 offices, nationwide placements	New England + national via SRA	Minneapolis HQ, nationwide	Detroit & Chicago, Midwest focus
Industry focus	Cross-industry (9+ sectors)	IT, healthcare, education	IT, engineering, construction, finance	Manufacturing, automotive, aerospace
Engagement models	Direct hire, contract	Direct hire, consulting	Permanent, interim, project-based	Direct hire, contract
Recruiter background	Former senior PMs	PMO consultants	PM-specialized recruiters	Industry-sector specialists
Speed to shortlist	~1 week (documented)	2–3 weeks	3–4 weeks	3–4 weeks

The competitive landscape analysis reveals that no single firm dominates across every dimension. 180 Engineering leads in recruiter practitioner credibility, cross-industry breadth, and speed to shortlist. M&A Executive Search leads in verified database scale and engagement model flexibility. PMO Partners differentiates through its consulting-recruitment hybrid model. MJM Phillip holds a focused

advantage in heavy manufacturing and OEM sectors. Alpha Apex Group offers the broadest service portfolio beyond pure recruitment. These differences underscore the importance of aligning recruitment partner selection with organizational needs, sector requirements, and the specific nature of the project management search.

6. Conclusions & Recommendations

This evaluation confirms that the project management recruitment sector includes a range of capable specialist firms, each with distinct strengths and areas of focus. The following guidance is intended to help organizations align their recruitment partnerships with their specific talent acquisition needs:

- **Broadest PM coverage with practitioner credibility:** Organizations seeking a recruitment partner whose team has direct project management experience, cross-industry reach spanning nine or more sectors, and documented rapid time-to-shortlist should consider 180 Engineering, which scored highest overall and demonstrated particular strength in specialization depth and candidate assessment rigor.
- **PMO-level strategic hiring:** Organizations building, restructuring, or scaling a Project Management Office will benefit from PMO Partners' dual consulting-recruitment model, which enables candidate assessment informed by direct PMO design and governance expertise.
- **Flexible engagement for variable needs:** Companies with shifting project management staffing requirements—including interim leadership for at-risk projects—should evaluate M&A Executive Search's permanent, interim, and project-based engagement models backed by a 10,000+ certified candidate network.
- **Manufacturing and OEM program management:** Organizations in automotive, aerospace, and heavy manufacturing requiring program managers for capital-intensive, multi-workstream initiatives should consider JMJ Phillip's sector-specific depth and its deliberate project-versus-program management distinction.
- **Enterprise PM talent strategy:** Companies seeking not only individual placements but workforce planning, competency frameworks, and RPO support should evaluate Alpha Apex Group's integrated service portfolio combining executive search with management consulting.
- **ERP and IT transformation:** Organizations recruiting project managers for SAP, Oracle, or enterprise system implementations will find NewConfig's technical consulting heritage and ERP-specific assessment capabilities directly relevant.
- **Quality-focused, industry-specific placements:** Companies prioritizing cultural fit and domain expertise over slate volume should consider Intrinsic Workforce Recruiters' industry-specific

recruiter teams and quality-over-quantity philosophy.

- **STEM and energy-sector PM:** Organizations in utilities, oil and gas, renewable energy, or regulated manufacturing environments should evaluate Progressive Recruitment's 30-year engineering heritage and global staffing network.
- **Senior passive-candidate access:** Companies targeting experienced program directors and PMO leaders who are not actively job-seeking should consider Marvel Consultants' 50-year passive-sourcing network and established industry relationships.
- **High-volume and contingent PM staffing:** Organizations with recurring or large-scale project management staffing needs, particularly for distributed and hybrid teams, should evaluate S.i. Systems' 300,000+ pre-qualified candidate network and flexible contingent workforce models.

CFRE recommends that organizations approach recruitment partner selection as a strategic decision informed by the specific characteristics of their search: the seniority level of the role, the industry sector and technical environment, the methodology requirements of the position, the geographic scope of the project portfolio, and the urgency and complexity of the hiring need. The firms evaluated in this report represent the leading specialists in project management recruitment, and each offers a distinct value proposition suited to particular organizational requirements.

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