

# A Vote for Project Management

## *Standardized project management helps Indra successfully deploy a high-profile automated vote-counting system in Norway*

At any given time, the portfolio at global technology solutions provider Indra includes some 10,000 projects. That lineup can range from delivering an air-traffic management system in Germany to implementing a judicial management system in Ecuador. There is one common denominator, though. No matter what the project, Indra relies on standardized project management practices throughout the company to help ensure it delivers expected benefits.

“The costs and schedules associated with that volume of projects could not be handled without an integrated approach,” says Enrique Sevilla Molina, PMP, director of the corporate project management office (PMO) at Indra’s headquarters in Madrid, Spain.

In 2011, one of those projects called for developing an intricate electronic voting information system for local elections in Oslo, Norway. With election day 10 months away, the Oslo city council tapped Indra to:

- **Create a more efficient voting system**

By streamlining manual processes, the project aimed to save time, costs and human resources, particularly important in a country with high labor costs.

- **Deliver accurate results quickly**

Norway had a reputation to maintain. It’s ranked number one among 165 countries in the Economist Intelligence Unit’s *Index of Democracy 2011*, in which a country’s level of democracy is strongly tied to its electoral processes. Indra was tasked with delivering accurate advance vote results in seven hours and election-day vote results in 10 hours.

- **Keep stakeholders satisfied**

After poor voting management left the 2000 U.S. presidential election in limbo for 36 days, all elections projects faced greater stakeholder scrutiny. And the Oslo project team was dealing with a large number of especially vigilant stakeholder groups: the Oslo city council, 15 district boards, an array of government agencies, political parties—and hungry media outlets looking for a hook.

To deliver the expected benefits, Indra did what it has done successfully for two decades: It implemented the project using its own project management methodology based on PMI’s *A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK® Guide)*.



Indra's company-specific project management methodology is encapsulated in its custom-built information system, which stores real-time data on individual projects, including goals (both financial and strategic), work breakdown structures, budgeting, milestones, issues, risks and progress.

Broad use of standardized project management practices across the company lets Indra take a comprehensive view of each project and the portfolio as a whole.



"Before we adopted an integrated approach, part of the group would take care of the project schedule and scope, and another part would take care of cost," Mr. Sevilla says. But that made it difficult to identify and handle trouble spots early in the process. For example, if a project ran into a delay, the project manager couldn't easily see the potential impact of the holdup on costs or, consequently, the effect on deliverables.

"Our integrated approach helps by providing a precise and complete view of the status of the project itself—not only with the regard to the planned performance, but also with regard to its impact in the strategic allocated goals in accordance with the portfolio budget," says Mr. Sevilla.

### Added Scope Means Added Risk

The €2.1 million Oslo election project was much larger in scope than previous Indra elections projects in Norway. The company typically provided e-counting, an automated process that electronically detects each vote. This time around, Indra was tasked with developing and implementing a solution for the entire election process, including pre-election processes, advance voting and elections management, says Cristina Frutos López, PMP, the Indra project manager who led the Oslo elections project.

Indra was responsible for:

- Design, printing and distribution of all paper ballots
- Operator training
- Calculation, scrutiny, storage and transmission of results

The company also had to upgrade its process for managing the increasingly popular advance voting, which occurred one month prior to election day.

The project team set up 23 advance-voting polling stations in Oslo and created a centralized processing method to avoid the risk of people voting early *and* on election day. The system included printing a unique serial number on every ballot. In case of duplication, both ballots were referred for review by adjudicators.

Advance voting (either in polling centers, by mail or from abroad at embassies) accounted for 27 percent of the total voter turnout, compared with 13 percent in previous local elections.

Those numbers suggested a high turnout on election day. To deal with the added influx and still meet its deadline, the company brought in extra equipment from its warehouses. However, that decision had implications for other areas of the project, including:

- **Support:** The team had to request additional spare parts from the manufacturer to service the extra equipment.
- **Technical:** The team had to configure the equipment and complete testing prior to using it.
- **Human resources:** Extra personnel were required to operate the additional equipment.

“Once the decision was made, we had to maintain internal project meetings to coordinate the responsibilities of all those areas,” Ms. Frutos says.

Indra’s project management information system kept the team on track. “Everything is integrated into our project management platform, so it gives us the full perspective of the project,” Mr. Sevilla says.

Every expense had to be allocated to specific activities, with no way to enter a generic cost in the system, helping the project team stay within budget, Mr. Sevilla explains.

## Conquering Stakeholder Skepticism

Because the project was introducing a new electronic system, stakeholder understanding and acceptance was identified as the project’s greatest risk.

“As in every change process, we were concerned that the users might not be convinced to buy in to our system and therefore show resistance to it,” Ms. Frutos says.



To mitigate the project’s top threat, the team maintained a risk register and issue log in a distributed system that allowed revisions and status updates for project meetings.

The team also provided detailed reports with testing and training results to council officials and political party representatives at election committee meetings.

On the technical side, the team established a communication channel with a designated person at each of the government agencies to discuss technical issues and requirements. It hosted an initial kickoff meeting with each contact to gather requirements, and discuss planning and testing.

Training sessions for system users provided another layer of assurance for stakeholders.

“In every session, there were open discussions and guidance provided in relation to election rules and regulations,” Ms. Frutos says. “This was highly appreciated by stakeholders as it contributed to clarifying doubts and provided a common understanding on how to proceed in certain situations.”



In addition, Indra provided follow-up guidance for users, a help desk and onsite technical support. It also maintained a full team on the ground for much of the project. Ms. Frutos, for example, worked in Oslo all of August, half of September and intermittently from February through July.

Finally, to further mitigate the risk of stakeholder rejection, the system leveraged an open-source platform to facilitate transparency. In recent years, groups such as the Open Voting Consortium and the Open Source Digital Voting Foundation have pushed for governments around the world to adopt voting systems open to public scrutiny as a way to ensure accuracy. By allowing the option of opening the source code to third parties, Indra's system was a way to answer this demand.

"Transparency is one of the driving requirements of elections systems," Ms. Frutos says. "The decision to go for open source fulfills that requirement."

## The Votes Are In

The Oslo project was completed on time and within the €2.1 million budget. The project team successfully streamlined an intricate process, saving time, costs and human resources. Nearly 500,000 ballot papers from 111 polling stations were counted in five and a half hours, beating the agreed-upon timeframe.

Indra also delivered on the intended outcome of accuracy. "The elections authority has to justify every single vote that is accepted or rejected for whatever reason, and the system facilitated this," Ms. Frutos says.

The all-important stakeholder groups even took notice, with Norwegian media highlighting the Oslo local election as a quality benchmark for the country's elections.

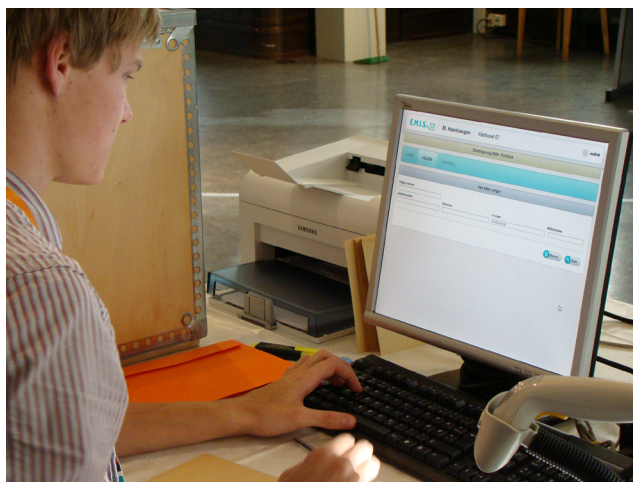
Successes such as the Oslo elections underscore Indra's commitment to building its organizational project expertise. By the end of 2012, the company aims to have 500 Project Management Professional (PMP)<sup>®</sup> credential holders—25 percent of its total pool of project managers—to manage its largest and most important projects. The company is well on its way to the goal: As of June, it boasts 425 PMP<sup>®</sup> credential holders.

"PMP credential holders at Indra are considered to have a higher-level project management capability," Mr. Sevilla says. "We identify high-potential people to be trained to get the certification."

Ms. Frutos, for example, earned her PMP credential in 2010 at the encouragement of Indra. And she says that even those in the company who have not yet acquired the credential learn from experienced credential holders.

In an effort to gain knowledge from other organizations, Indra became a member of the PMI Global Executive Council, an elite group of organizations focused on sharing excellence in the use of project, program and portfolio management to deliver a strategic advantage.

"The PMI Global Executive Council gives us the opportunity to share ideas in areas such as talent management, risk management, key performance indicators and metrics with companies that may be addressing the same



challenges,” Mr. Sevilla says. “It’s been very exciting to see how other organizations look at the same topics in different ways.”

And as the 2011 Oslo local elections show, an enterprise-wide commitment to project management is helping Indra—and its clients—achieve their strategic goals.

“Our unified approach to project management allowed us to achieve savings in timing, work effort and money, as well as a substantial improvement in communications with the customer on the Oslo elections project,” Mr. Sevilla says. “I can’t see how the company would survive without a unified approach.”