

CONSULTANT OR CLIENT PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Developed by:



**BUILT
ENVIRONMENT
CAREER
STREAMS**

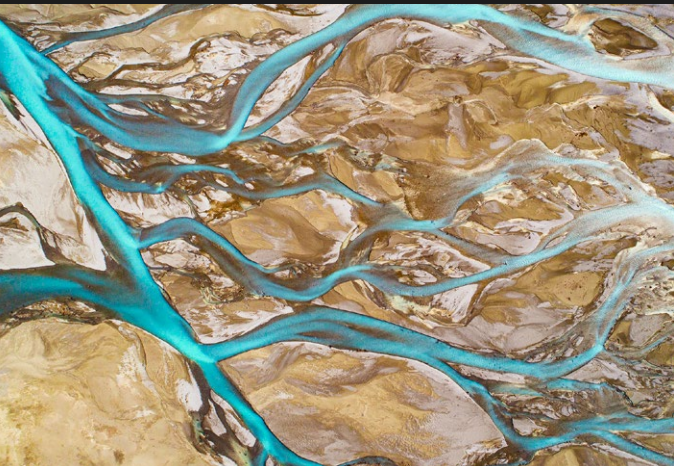
Ngā ara rerekē o te ao
hanga taiao

He ara whiria
A braided river



CHOOSING THE RIGHT CAREER STREAM FOR YOU

Inspired by Aotearoa New Zealand's many braided rivers, this helpful guide has been created for anyone entering or changing careers in the construction industry. Like a river, your chosen career stream may twist and turn throughout your career, but all streams can lead to rewarding and impactful roles – enabling you to make a tangible impact on New Zealand's built environments.



CONSULTANT OR CLIENT PROJECT MANAGEMENT

This guide gives you an overview of the opportunities and expectations within consultant and client project management – including typical career pathways, key skills required, what the role looks like day-to-day, and how to get started.

Consultant and client project management roles span the complete building lifecycle, including:

- Strategic planning and initiating projects for client organisations
- Project establishment and Project Execution Plan (PEP) development
- Design coordination and consultant team management during design phases
- Construction procurement and contract administration
- Construction delivery oversight and stakeholder coordination
- Refurbishment, renovation, and building upgrade projects during building operations

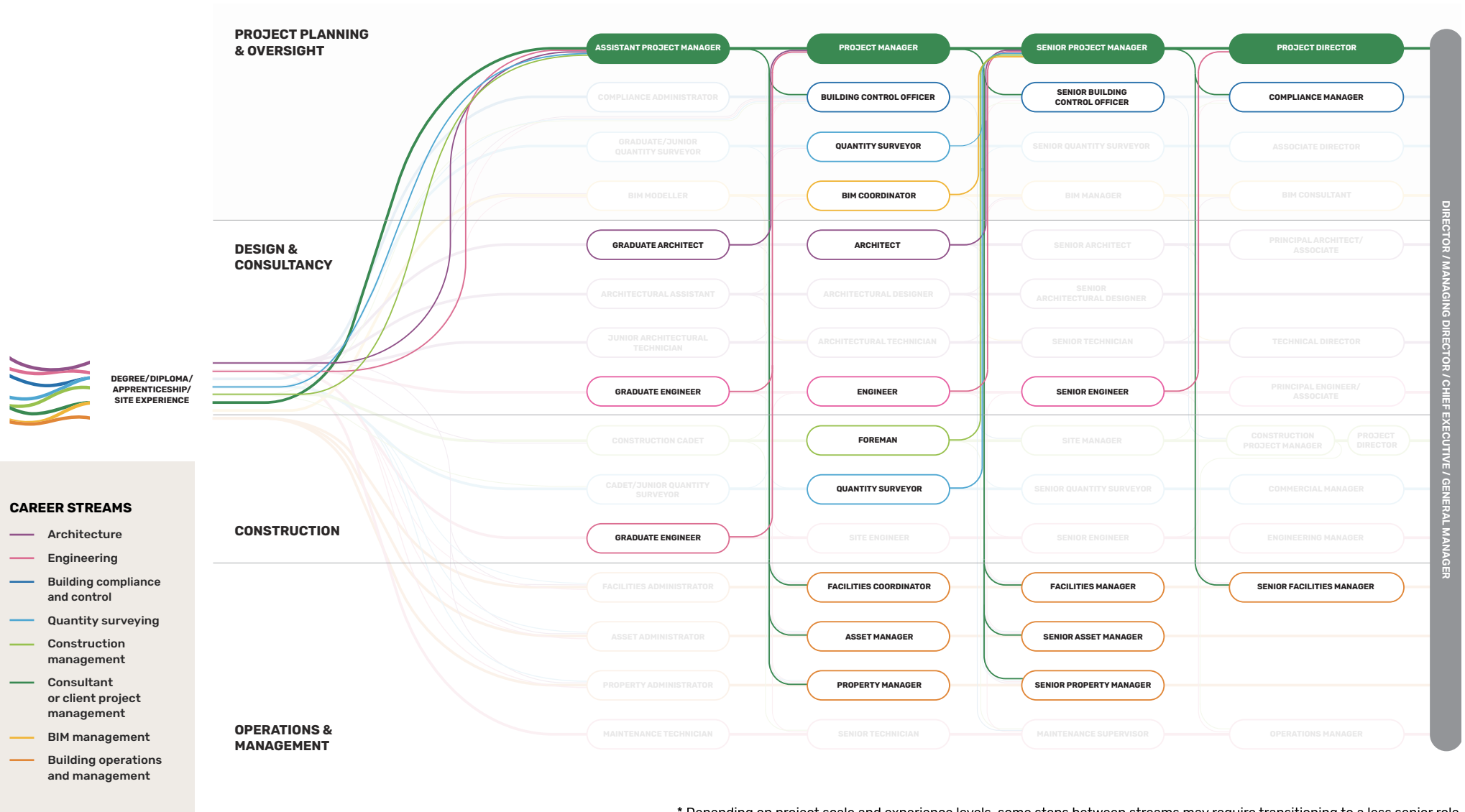
Consultant Project Managers represent the owner's interests throughout construction projects, focusing on value delivery for the asset owner. They coordinate design teams, contractors, and stakeholders to ensure projects are delivered on time, within budget, and to required standards.

Client Project Managers work directly within organisations to manage their internal construction programmes and asset development portfolios.

Both of these roles combine strategic thinking, stakeholder management, and technical expertise. They suit professionals who want to have influence over project direction, variety in project types, and involvement in business decisions. Project managers need to be effective communicators who work well under pressure, solve problems systematically, manage competing stakeholder interests fairly and diplomatically, and are comfortable with taking accountability for significant financial and delivery outcomes.



CONSULTANT OR CLIENT PROJECT MANAGEMENT CAREER STREAM



* Depending on project scale and experience levels, some steps between streams may require transitioning to a less senior role.

KEY PARTS OF THE ROLE

- **Managing competing stakeholder interests** – Construction project managers navigate relationships between clients, design teams, contractors, and regulatory bodies with conflicting priorities. You need diplomatic skills to align diverse groups on project objectives whilst maintaining delivery focus.
- **High responsibility with financial exposure** – You'll carry accountability for project outcomes, budget performance, and programme delivery. This includes managing substantial project budgets and making decisions with lasting financial and legal implications.
- **Continuous learning across disciplines** – The construction industry constantly evolves with new technologies, regulations, and delivery methods. You'll need to maintain current knowledge across project management methodologies, contract administration, building codes, digital collaboration tools, and industry practices.
- **Complex stakeholder communication under pressure** – your role will involve facilitating difficult conversations between parties with conflicting interests, explaining technical and commercial issues to non-technical stakeholders, and maintaining professional relationships during challenging project situations.
- **Strategic involvement from project inception** – Unlike site-based roles, consultant and client project managers influence project direction from early stages, including feasibility studies, procurement strategy development, and delivery methodology selection.

ALTERNATIVE CAREER PATHS

After you've gained experience in project management, other roles that become possible include:

- **Movement within project management** – Switching between specialist project management firms, multi-disciplinary consultancies and client organisations
- **Property development and investment** – Applying project management expertise to property development, feasibility assessment, and investment portfolio management
- **Asset management and facilities management** – Managing building portfolios, life cycle planning, and major refurbishment programmes
- **Corporate strategy and business development** – Strategic planning roles within large organisations, using project management experience to drive business transformation and capital investment programmes
- **Project management education and training** – Tertiary education, corporate training, or professional development roles

"To be a good project manager, you've got to be able to communicate, problem solve and think on your feet... but you've also got to be very process-focused and good at keeping records, paperwork, schedules and spreadsheets. I think having that balance between the EQ and the IQ is what makes a really good project manager."

– Simone Sharp, Director, Rubix

SALARY BANDS*

	Assistant project manager	Project manager	Senior project manager	Project director	Regional/national director
Minimum time in role	2-3 years	3-5 years	4-7 years (destination role)	5-10 years (destination role)	(destination role)
Salary range	\$65,000 - \$95,000	\$70,000 - \$100,000	\$110,000 - \$130,000	\$130,000 - \$180,000	\$160,000 - \$320,000+

*Salaries and time in roles is indicative only and can vary significantly based on experience, performance, firm size and structure, regional location, specialisation, and market conditions.

ROLE OVERVIEW

KEY DAILY ACTIVITIES

- Preparing and maintaining project execution plans including roles, responsibilities, and delivery strategies
- Monitoring design development
- Managing procurement processes including tender evaluation, contractor negotiations, and contract execution
- Coordinating consultant approvals, inspections, and timely responses to contractor RFIs (Requests For Information)
- Conducting regular site visits and obtaining progress, quality, and health and safety reports
- Facilitating stakeholder meetings

WHERE YOU COULD WORK

Multi-disciplinary consultancies – Firms that provide project management services as part of a wider suite of services such as architectural and engineering design

Project management consultancies – Specialist firms that focus on project delivery expertise and client advisory services

Client organisations – Direct employment within organisations with ongoing construction needs (such as healthcare providers, retail chains, government agencies)

WHO YOU'LL WORK WITH

Design consultants (architects, engineers, quantity surveyors), contractors and subcontractors, client senior leadership teams, regulatory bodies and territorial authorities, project sponsors and end users, as well as specialist advisors

TYPICAL WORK ARRANGEMENTS

- Primarily office-based
- Meeting-intensive role, often online but with possible travel requirements for site visits and stakeholder meetings
- High level of stakeholder engagement through email, phone and in-person interactions
- Documentation-heavy – with extensive reporting, approval processes, and compliance requirements

WHAT TO EXPECT

REWARDS AND SATISFACTION

- Influence over project direction from inception through strategic planning and delivery methodology selection
- Variety in project types and stakeholders across different sectors, building types, and client organisations
- Strategic involvement in business decisions
- Opportunities for international work and career advancement

WORK-LIFE BALANCE

- More predictable hours compared to contractor roles, with standard business hours and flexibility for project demands
- Project deadline pressures can create concentrated periods requiring extended hours and weekend work
- Meeting-intensive schedule requires time management and stakeholder coordination skills
- Increasing flexibility with hybrid working arrangements for office-based activities



“The part of engineering and construction that I liked best was that you designed things, and then they turned into real things.”

– Karissa Hyde, Project Manager,
Meridian Energy Limited

GETTING STARTED

Starting out in construction project management requires relevant qualifications, and practical construction industry experience is an advantage. The role demands understanding of both technical construction processes and commercial project delivery.

IMMEDIATE ACTIONS

- **Gain relevant qualifications** – Typical degree pathways include Engineering, Architecture, Construction Management, Quantity Surveying – or a Bachelor of Building Science with a major in Project Management
- **Develop construction industry knowledge** – Gain experience in construction-related roles to understand design and construction processes, building systems, and contractor relationships
- **Develop stakeholder management skills** – Essential for managing relationships across design teams, contractors, and client organisations

HOW TO GET INTO A PROJECT MANAGEMENT ROLE

- Cross-over from quantity surveying, architecture, or engineering consulting roles with additional project management training
- Transition from site or project management roles with a construction contractor
- Progress from technical roles such as building surveying or design management with additional business skills development
- International construction experience is highly regarded and can accelerate career progression

ESSENTIAL SKILLS

- Project management methodologies and contract administration principles
- Construction methodology and building systems knowledge across different project types
- Financial management, budgeting, and procurement processes for construction projects
- Risk management and quality assurance systems specific to construction delivery
- Digital collaboration tools and understanding of Building Information Modelling (BIM)
- Stakeholder engagement and diplomatic negotiation skills
- Legal frameworks including NZS 3910, Construction Contracts Act, and building consent processes
- Health and safety management and compliance throughout project phases, including safety by design

CAREER STORY



Karissa Hyde – Project Manager,
Meridian Energy Limited

“Everything is a learning opportunity and it all helps build you towards these big jobs. You don’t start out working on Antarctic projects – you start out checking precast steel.”

Karissa Hyde’s construction career illustrates how saying “yes” to opportunities can lead to professional and personal growth. Her journey began with a Keystone Trust scholarship that introduced her to engineering, but she never imagined it would lead to managing parts of a \$500 million Antarctic construction project.

After completing a BE (Hons), Karissa started as a structural engineer at MWH in 2007, where she gained hands-on experience designing supporting structures and conducting site inspections. When the GFC hit and she was made redundant, she used the time to study geotechnical engineering – this opened doors to a new role at Opus where she worked on ground investigations and retaining wall designs. This technical foundation across civil, structural, and geotechnical disciplines would prove invaluable throughout her career.

The Christchurch earthquakes became a pivotal moment, transforming potential career setbacks into opportunities. Karissa found herself managing teams of engineers assessing earthquake damage, despite having only three years’ experience. “I always ended up getting roped into things,” she reflects. However, these early management experiences during the SCIRT rebuild accelerated her transition into project management.

Her progression scaled dramatically, from \$80,000 Ministry of Education projects to \$20 million council infrastructure work, then to construction management in the Antarctic. Each transition built on previous technical knowledge, giving her credibility with contractors and multidisciplinary teams. As she explains, “I can get away with saying I don’t understand mechanical engineering because they know I understand civil and structural and geotechnical.”

Karissa’s key advice is simple “If you get a job opportunity then take it, work in it, and you’ll learn something. You’ll soon work out if it’s for you, and if it isn’t, you can move on to the next thing.” However, she emphasises the importance of gaining technical experience first, noting that people who “come straight out of uni into project management may struggle”, because they lack practical knowledge and credibility with designers and contractors.

EMPLOYMENT OPTIONS

EMPLOYER TYPE

Large project management or multi-disciplinary consultancies

- Diverse project experience across multiple sectors, building types, and client relationships
- Exposure to different delivery methods and industry practices
- More structured progression paths with clear role definitions and formal advancement criteria

Small consultancies

- Broader role scope with greater variety of responsibilities and closer client relationships
- Faster decision-making processes and more flexible service delivery approaches
- Greater individual responsibility and direct involvement in business development activities
- Entrepreneurial opportunities with potential for partnership or independent practice development

Direct employment within client organisations

- Specialised expertise within specific building types or sectors (schools, supermarkets, factories)
- Deep sector knowledge but narrower project variety

REGIONAL VARIATIONS

Main centres

- Higher concentration of large consultancies and complex commercial projects
- More sophisticated multi-national projects with international coordination requirements
- Greater earning potential but higher living costs

Regions

- Closer client relationships with local businesses and government agencies
- Broader project scope combining strategic planning with hands-on delivery
- Potentially limited advancement opportunities

NEXT STEPS AND RESOURCES

BUILDING YOUR PROFESSIONAL NETWORK

Industry connections

- Participate in construction industry associations for sector-specific conferences, training and best practice sharing, site visits and technical workshops
- Build relationships with design consultants, contractors, and client organisations in the sectors that you're interested in
- Connect with consultant project managers across different firms and project types to share experience and build networks

Upskilling and continuing education

- Specific project management certification and methodology updates (such as PMP and PRINCE2)
- Construction industry knowledge including building code updates and new construction methods
- Contract administration and commercial management in NZ construction law
- Digital project management tools and Building Information Modelling (BIM)

Industry resources

- Project Management Institute New Zealand (PMINZ)
pmi.org.nz
- Building Institute Aotearoa (NZIOB)
buildinginstitute.nz
- NZ Construction Industry Council
nzcic.co.nz

MAKING YOUR DECISION

Consultant and client project management roles offer professional challenges, strategic influence, and strong earning potential. You will require both soft skills for stakeholder management and a good level of technical understanding. Consider how comfortable you are with being accountable for significant financial outcomes, your preference for office-based work, and your interest in managing multi-disciplinary projects.

This guide draws from research including in-depth interviews with construction professionals across New Zealand, industry surveys, and analysis of career progression patterns. For the complete research report and additional career pathway information, visit buildinginstitute.nz/resource/file/27



IS THIS THE RIGHT CAREER STREAM FOR YOU?

A career in **Consultant or client project management** is more than just a job. It's a pathway to professional growth, community contribution, and long-term job satisfaction. Whichever career stream you choose, you'll be playing an important role in protecting communities, contributing to high-quality construction, and making a tangible and lasting difference to New Zealand's built environment.



GET THE GUIDE

Use the QR code to download the full Built Environment Career Streams guide and explore the many rewarding pathways in the construction sector.

Or head to the website using this link:
buildinginstitute.nz/resource/file/27