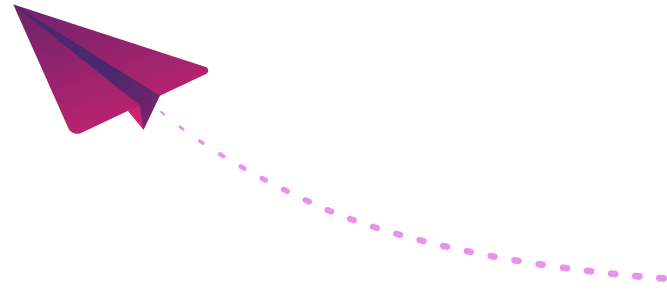




**The Administrative Partnership Model:
Rethinking the approach to administrative
services in government**

A holistic model tailored to each agency



The increasingly dynamic government landscape continues to pressure many agency to find better ways to work. Leaders at universities and colleges often experience ongoing demands to increase service, optimize technology, improve accuracy, reduce risk, and better organize administrative processes. Simultaneously, many administrators face continual pressure to reduce administrative spending and redirect funding toward academic missions. These competing goals—greater administrative effectiveness and increased efficiency—can create a structural tension that requires rethinking the way administrative services are provided to faculty, staff, and students both in the short and longer term. agencies grapple with questions such as:

- ❓ How can administrative processes be simplified?
- ❓ How can we provide even greater levels of support for our stakeholders while controlling costs?
- ❓ How can we reduce the duplication in roles and responsibilities across the agency to direct more focus toward our mission?
- ❓ How can we better leverage the technology we have, or use new technology, to further support our agency?
- ❓ How can we track and analyze data for greater insights?
- ❓ How do we support better compliance without increasing administrative burden?
- ❓ How can we address our agency's needs without alienating stakeholders?

In response, some government agencies have moved, with varying degrees of success, to a “shared services” model in an effort to increase service levels and reduce the costs associated with processing routine administrative transactions. While there are several clear and compelling examples of implementation success

across the sector, there are also examples of agencies that have struggled with and even failed in their efforts. This struggle is not due to an inherent lack of value in shared services. Instead, it is often due to negative perceptions of shared services being too “corporate” for a government setting (which can derail an initiative before it even starts) or inadequate involvement of institutional stakeholders in the design, implementation, and fine-tuning of the new shared services model, which can exacerbate or even create new frustrations with administrative processes and services after launch. This is particularly pervasive when agencies deploy a central-focused “inside-out” approach to shared services development, failing to effectively incorporate the needs of units and departments through collaborative end-to-end process analysis and process improvement, organizational planning, metrics tracking, and feedback loops.

Despite the potential implementation obstacles with traditional shared services models, there continues to be a pressing need to rethink ways to provide administrative service at agencies. For many universities and colleges, current models are unsustainable due to budget shortfalls, workforce retirements and staffing shortages, regulatory compliance issues, or a combination of all of these factors. At other agencies, leaders recognize the need to better organize processes and optimize technology to allow more direct investment in the agency's mission, and proactively seek ways to better utilize their resources in both the shorter and longer term. In either case, a thoughtful, flexible, well-designed model for providing administrative services is critical for satisfying a wide variety of stakeholder needs while also meeting institutional goals.

With this in mind, we see a new way to incorporate the value of shared services into a more holistic model tailored to each individual agency's needs. This structure, which we call an **Administrative Partnership Model (APM)**, uses an approach to better administrative functioning through a customized model designed by, and for, institutional stakeholders.

As opposed to a traditional approach to shared services in which development is often focused on meeting the needs of the central administration and where schools and units are sometimes tangential players in shared services development (an “inside-out” approach), the APM approach allows each agency to thoughtfully examine the work currently conducted across central administrative areas and units, incorporating the needs of both perspectives more fully. Using the APM approach, an agency can determine what is working well and should be preserved versus what needs to be improved. Then the agency can develop a customized model based on the optimal organizational structure, job roles and responsibilities, processes, policies, financial structure, and technology that support their needs. The result is often a flexible, sustainable, cost-effective APM fully tailored to the entire agency, allowing the benefits to be shared by all.



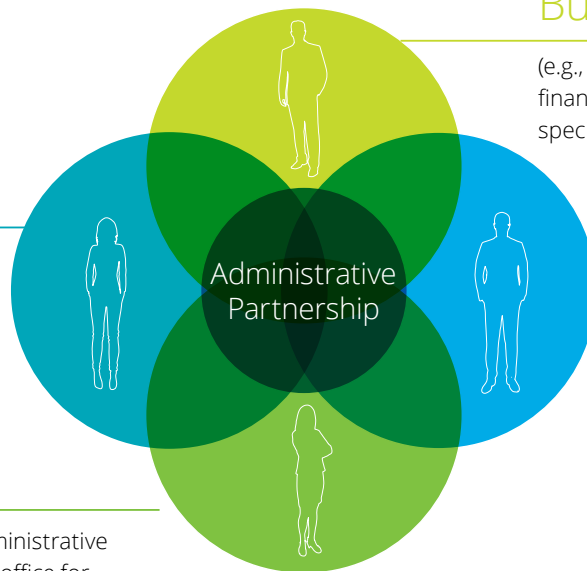
No two agencies are alike and there is not a “one-size-fits-all” template for an ideal APM. However, to maximize the value of reorganizing business processes and services, successful APM models often contain the following components:

Local units

(i.e., the “customers”)—faculty, staff, and students within schools and departments that initiate administrative requests and/or perform administrative work locally

Business center

(e.g., administrative business center, administrative business office, and service center)—an office for routine, high-volume transactions and service-oriented help desk support; supports high-quality service provisions from the initial request through completion by effective end-to-end workflow, and tracking and measuring key metrics such as turn-around times, accuracy, and customer satisfaction



Business partners

(e.g., representatives from human resources, finance, research administration, and IT)—specialized professionals working in local units

Centers of expertise

(e.g., central HR and the agency's budget office)—agency-wide support for policy, compliance, and highly complex/specialized activities across administrative areas



Working closely together, the four components of an APM are highly integrated to meet the administrative business needs of an agency. This integration allows both everyday routine tasks and specialized work to be conducted in tandem by staff fully trained in their respective areas. In this arrangement, faculty, staff, and students interact with designated staff in the local units/departments for work that requires deep knowledge of local needs and culture (e.g., coordinating school-wide events, department-specific onboarding for new hires, and greeting visitors); interact with local business partners for specialized work (e.g., handling sensitive HR topics and conducting financial planning); interact with central COEs for legal and policy matters and university-wide topics (e.g., labor relations and institutional budget reporting); and interact with an administrative business center/shared services for routine work (e.g., processing invoice payments, processing I-9s, and answering questions via a help desk).

APMs typically support some or all of the bedrock administrative functions within an agency finance, human resources, information technology, and procurement, but they can be personalized to the functional and staff needs of an agency. For instance, communications and research administration are also becoming more common within these models, and some agencies are also exploring additional areas to include, such as marketing. Each of these areas contains multiple processes, policies, enabling technologies, business requirements, and existing challenges that must be assessed during APM development. This includes determining, process-by-process, the work within each area that should stay local, and the work that could be better conducted by another entity within the APM, such as an administrative business center/shared services. By collaboratively working with a representative group of key stakeholders from across an agency, to determine how each process should fit into the new APM, and which parts of each process should be “owned” by which entity within the APM (since each end-to-end process may require involvement from multiple entities within the APM to complete specific activities), each agency is able to customize an APM that meets its different needs.

For example, one private university called on Viderity to implement shared services. What began as a centrally led shared services project became a more holistic and inclusive approach to APM development that involved deans and associate deans, a faculty advisory committee, and staff from local units working together to determine how work should be performed and by which entity within the APM (local unit, business partner, COE, or Shared Services). In addition to moving some work into a new Shared Services office, the agency used the opportunity to redesign some work within local units to allow staff to better focus on mission-driven activities. Based on this APM approach, the university now has a flexible, scalable administrative model designed by university stakeholders to provide high-quality service to faculty, staff, and students.

To illustrate, the example shown below describes how stakeholders at a large university worked together to develop an APM that improved the staff onboarding experience, reduced compliance issues, and simplified administrative processing.

Scenario: A new staff member begins work at an organization.

Old model

- Lack of standard onboarding process leads to confusion for new hires
- Large burden on local units and HR partners to guide employees throughout the process
- Process involves more than 10 discrete steps and may take upwards of a week; system access is often delayed even longer
- Employees enter the same data (e.g., name, SSN) multiple times
- Lack of compliance with I-9 verification and document collection increases institutional risk

New model

- In the new APM, shared services and local HR business partners work together to onboard new employees; new hires have clear communications and one point of contact
- Standard onboarding activities are conducted centrally, while department-specific onboarding is handled locally
- Process reduced to seven steps, a 30 percent reduction, and is completed within three days
- Paper-based processes are eliminated
- Organizational controls are strengthened, reducing compliance risk






Stakeholder engagement and change management

Although APMs offer tremendous flexibility, changing the way that administrative work gets done in an organization is invariably complex, especially within government. The reasons for this are diverse—from decentralized organizational structures to disparate technologies—and any undertaking of this type should be approached with sensitivity and high levels of engagement and collaboration with stakeholders across the agency. A customer-centric approach to APM development, coupled with robust, proactive, inclusive engagement and change management support for stakeholders across the agency, make the APM a more realistic and effective approach to enable administrative effectiveness and efficiency in Organizational setting when compared to historical centrally focused, top-down models.

Each individual agency has a distinct culture, with different norms, organizational structures, channels for sharing information, and past experiences with implementing new ideas on campus. There is often mistrust campus-wide for administrative projects, since in the past departments have been asked to do more with less, without fundamentally redesigning how work should get done. To address these issues, leaders should consider building trust from the outset, staying actively involved throughout the APM initiative, and demonstrating time and again the agency's commitment to the development of a sustainable model that addresses the agency's myriad needs. Staff, faculty, and, when appropriate, students, should also consider being integrally involved in every step of the project—from inception through post-implementation—to provide input, feedback, and hands-on design and testing support.

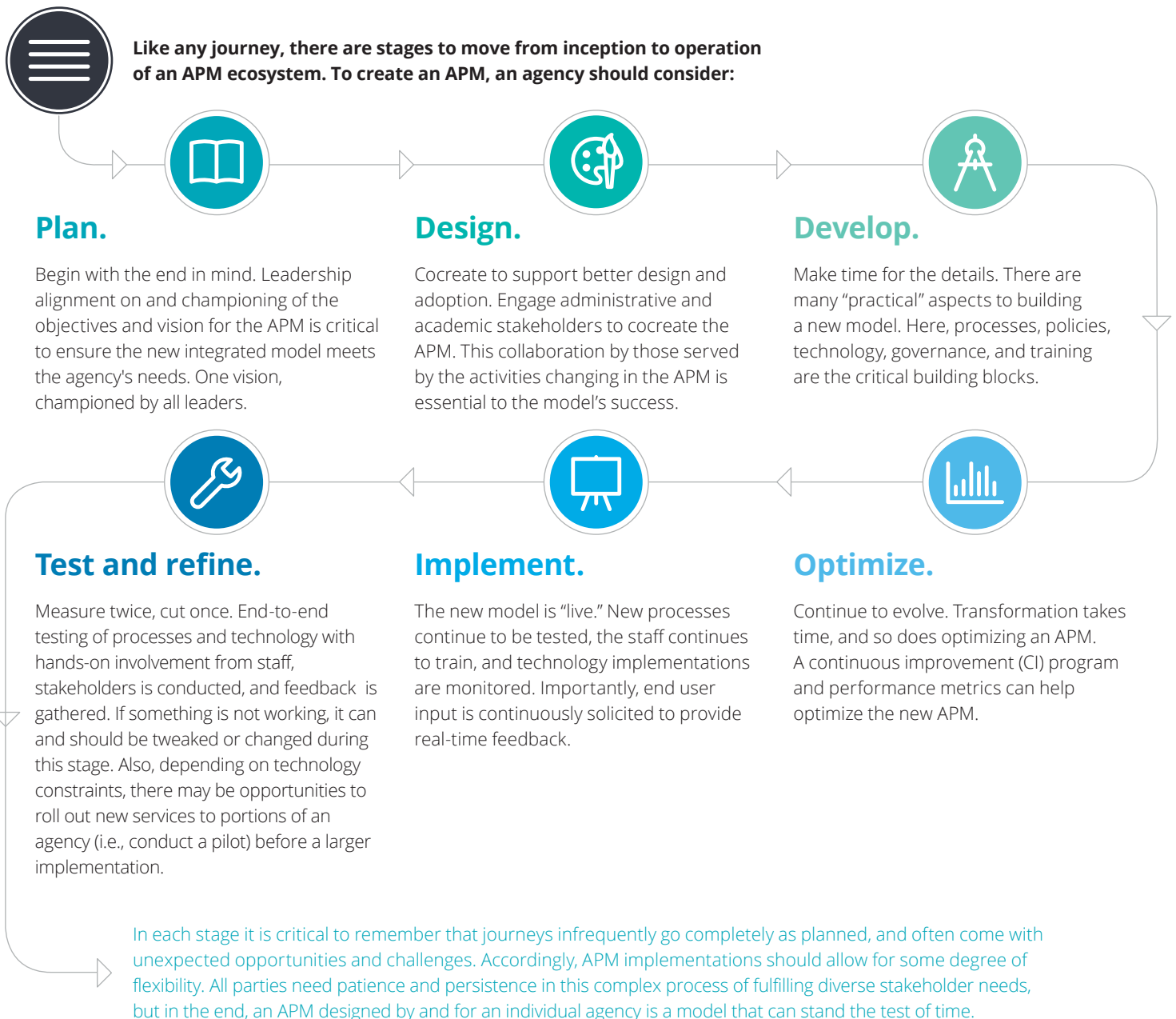
Keys to success for stakeholder engagement and change management for APM implementation:

-  **Articulate the “why”:** Clearly identify the problem(s) that needs to be solved and articulate it honestly and transparently
-  **Align leaders:** Gain alignment for the vision from both administrative and academic leadership
-  **Focus on the “customer”:** Employ a customer-centric design to serve all stakeholders
-  **Think “end-to-end”:** Examine and redesign processes from end-to-end to achieve true value and to uncover and address unexpected impacts that may affect departments
-  **Excel in communications:** Provide consistent and frequent communications and opportunities for engagement through a wide variety of channels
-  **Over-train:** Provide robust training for all stakeholders before and after implementation



An overview of APM development

APM development is a complex process, filled with competing visions, trade-offs, divergent opinions, lots of details, and unexpected challenges. However, the benefits can be tremendous in terms of greater alignment between the academic mission and administrative support, better service, increased accuracy, lower costs, and more transparency. For agencies that develop APMs, one of the leading outcomes of a thoughtful transition to the new model is the sense of accomplishment that arises from the university community when stakeholders work in an environment designed by themselves, for themselves.



About Viderity

Viderity is a management consulting, technology services and outsourcing company, serving clients in both the government and commercial sectors. Combining experience and comprehensive capabilities across multiple industries and business functions, and extensive research on the world's most successful organizations, Viderity collaborates with clients to help them become high-performance businesses and governments. Viderity's home page is www.viderity.com

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