

# A Guide to Legal Project Management

*The five disciplines every legal team needs, and why no two teams need them the same way*

Legal Project Management (LPM) is the application of structured project disciplines to legal work. It brings planning, resource management, risk oversight and financial control into how legal matters are run. It does not replace legal expertise. It gives that expertise the structure it needs to be delivered efficiently, predictably and profitably.

One thing the market gets wrong: LPM is not one-size-fits-all. What it looks like in a law firm is different from what it looks like in-house, and what a team needs on day one is different from what a mature function needs. This guide covers the five universal pillars, then shows how the approach changes depending on where you sit and how far along you are.

## Why Now

### Client pressure

Clients are negotiating harder than ever and expect cost transparency. Buyers with disciplined billing data are securing significant discounts, and firms without delivery discipline absorb the difference.

### The insourcing shift

In-house teams are taking on more substantive work and instructing firms more selectively. The work that does go external must be scoped, priced and reported with precision.

### AI without foundations

Every legal team is under pressure to adopt AI. Without structured process and clean matter data, AI amplifies the chaos rather than fixing it.

*Lawyers work an average of **49 hours a week** but bill for only **37\***. Some of that gap is non-billable by design. Much of it is unstructured delivery, and that is the part LPM recovers.*

## In This Guide

### 01

#### The five pillars

The universal LPM foundation

### 02

#### Two seats

Private practice vs in-house

### 03

#### Maturity

Just starting to fully mature

### 04

#### Your starting map

What to do next, from where you sit

# The Five Pillars of Legal Project Management

*The universal foundation, whichever seat you sit in*

1

## Scope Management

Define what is included, excluded, and what assumptions underpin the estimate. Scope creep is the biggest driver of cost overrun, and it almost always starts before the matter does.

- Scope documented at matter inception, not assumed
- Exclusions explicitly stated
- Scope change protocol in place

2

## Budget & Cost Control

Track spend in real time against an agreed matter budget and report to clients before they ask. A profitability discipline for fixed-fee work, a trust discipline for hourly work.

- WIP tracked against plan throughout the matter
- Variance alerts triggered at agreed thresholds
- Client budget reports issued on a fixed schedule

3

## Resource Planning

Match task complexity to timekeeper grade. Most matter plans fail because they assume full availability. Good resource planning builds in realistic capacity constraints from the outset.

- Task-to-grade mapping agreed at kick-off
- Capacity constraints factored into the timeline
- Resource conflicts flagged and resolved early

4

## Risk Management

Identify key risks at matter inception, monitor throughout, and escalate when they materialise. A RAID log does not need to be complex. The value is in the conversation it forces.

- RAID log created at matter kick-off
- Risk reviewed at each milestone
- Lessons learned captured post-matter

5

## Communication & Reporting

Proactive, structured communication is the visible face of LPM. Status updates go out on a schedule and issues are raised early. The format matters less than the habit.

- Status reporting schedule agreed with client upfront
- Update format templated and consistent
- Issues communicated before the client has to ask

# One Discipline, Two Seats, Many Stages

How LPM changes between private practice and in-house, and as your team matures

The five pillars apply everywhere. What changes is why they matter and what good looks like. A law firm runs LPM to protect margin and win work. An in-house team runs LPM to control spend and prove value. Same toolkit, different game.

## Same Discipline, Two Different Seats

Lens	Private Practice	In-House
Primary driver	Margin protection and client confidence. On fixed fees, every hour of scope creep comes off the bottom line.	Cost control and demonstrating value. Legal must show the business what it delivers for the spend.
Budget focus	Matter profitability, write-off prevention and pricing accuracy on future work.	Forecast accuracy, external counsel spend and budget defence at year end.
Scope discipline	Protecting the agreed fee from uncontrolled expansion.	Deciding what stays in-house, what goes external and how instructions are framed.
Key relationship	The client. Predictable delivery wins repeat instructions and panel places.	The business and the CFO. Credibility comes from visibility and no surprises.
Data that matters	Matter history for pricing, utilisation and profitability analysis.	Spend by firm, matter type and outcome. Performance data on panel firms.

## And It Changes With Maturity

The second variable is how far along you are. A team just starting needs foundations and quick wins. A mature function needs optimisation, data and the discipline to scale. Be honest about where you sit. The table below is the test.

Pillar	Just Starting	Building	Mature
Scope Management	No formal scope. Work begins without documented boundaries.	Scope agreed verbally. Inconsistently applied.	Written scope at every matter. Change protocol in place.
Budget & Cost Control	No matter budget. Billing done retrospectively.	Estimates exist but not tracked in real time.	Real-time WIP tracking. Client reports on schedule.
Resource Planning	Staffing decided informally. Grade mix not managed.	Staffing planned upfront but capacity not factored.	Task-to-grade mapping. Capacity built into timeline.
Risk Management	No risk process. Issues managed reactively.	Risks discussed informally. Not documented.	RAID log at every matter. Reviewed at milestones.
Communication & Reporting	Updates reactive. Clients chase for status.	Updates provided but inconsistent in format.	Scheduled updates. Templated. Issues raised proactively.

Most teams sit in Building for years. The difference between staying there and moving on is rarely effort. It is design.

# What To Do Next, From Where You Sit

Four starting points, one principle: meet your team where it is

Put the two variables together and you get four starting points. Find yours below.

## The LPM Starting Map

	Just Starting	Fully Mature
Private Practice	Pick one practice group and pilot matter plans, budget tracking and structured client updates. Target the quickest win: reducing write-offs on fixed-fee work. Prove it, then scale.	Turn delivery discipline into a selling point. Use matter history to price with precision, embed LPM into pitches and panel responses, and deploy AI on the foundations you have built.
In-House	Start with visibility: matter intake, demand triage and a baseline of external spend. Structure instructions to panel firms before buying any technology. Quick win: one page of data the CFO actually trusts.	Use LPM data to drive sourcing decisions: what to insource, what to send out, what to automate. Hold panel firms to performance data and position legal ops as a strategic function, not an admin one.

## What Holds True Everywhere

Wherever you start, three things hold true. Start small and prove value before scaling. Coach people on live matters rather than in classrooms. And fix the process before buying the technology, because systems amplify whatever they are given.

*“Most legal teams are being sold AI solutions to problems they haven’t yet structured. The diagnostic conversation, not the technology selection, is where the value is.”*

— Amar Sohal, Founder, AMRU Consulting

## The Conversation Worth Having

The most expensive sentence in legal delivery is “we’ll figure it out as we go”. If you read this guide and could not confidently place your team on the map above, that is the conversation to have, and it is the one AMRU Consulting starts with every client.

We offer a complimentary 60 minute LPM diagnostic conversation. No slides, no pitch. We will tell you where your biggest gap is and what we would do about it. If it is useful, you will know within the first fifteen minutes.

### Book your diagnostic conversation

[E amardeep.sohal@amruconsulting.com](mailto:amardeep.sohal@amruconsulting.com) [W amruconsulting.com](http://www.amruconsulting.com) [LI linkedin.com/in/amar-sohal-6a153811](https://www.linkedin.com/in/amar-sohal-6a153811)

\*Source: Bloomberg Law, 2026 Attorney Workload and Hours Survey.