



Do You Have What It Takes To Be A Technical Program Manager?

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The job of a technical program manager (TPM) is one of the expanding roles in companies today as businesses become more digital. Generally speaking, TPMs help drive company strategy, align teams, collaborate with cross-functional stakeholders, and deliver on [multiple complex projects](#).

It all requires a tricky balance of credentials. The most successful TPM candidates will have the technical expertise to give them street cred with their staff, the soft skills to make them good at managing others, and the business savvy to help them communicate with upper management.

What Do Technical Program Managers Do?

Technical tasks:

- Lead technical design and architecture discussions across cross-functional teams
- Oversee [requirements](#) of software (design, architecture, and testing) and hardware (system design, hardware selection, etc.) assets
- Manage through [Agile methodologies](#)
- Decipher technical needs of other departments within the organization

Soft-skills work:

- Act as a communications liaison between technical and non-technical colleagues
- Develop and maintain [productive internal relationships](#)
- Facilitate cross-collaboration and understanding between IT and other departments

- Generate targeted [reports](#) for different internal and/or external audiences
- Stay current on the latest news, information, and trends about program management and the organization's industry

Business responsibilities:

- Organize and track jobs, clarify [project scopes](#), proactively manage risks, manage project escalations, ruthlessly prioritize tasks, and problem-solve
- Meet specific business objectives
- Support roadmap-planning process
- Develop strategies and implement tactics to follow through on those strategies
- Solve complex business problems within [allocated time and budget](#)
- Represent company management to technical teams, and vice-versa
- Influence others across the company to remain focused on desired outcomes without direct authority

What To Expect In A Technical Program Manager Interview?

Having “outgrown” working the more technical aspects of a job, program-management candidates are ready to take on broader responsibilities. In short, they need just enough technical knowledge to understand how to make sound judgments regarding [project estimates](#), resources, and risks, but they shouldn't get so far into the weeds of technology that they're mistaken for engineers or developers.

Job expectations often depend on the seniority of the role itself and the size of the department or organization. Still, there are basic questions common to TPM candidates, regardless. These might include:

- “Can you walk me through the process of designing an e-commerce platform?”
- “Can you describe a time when you made a decision that affected the architecture of the system?”
- “Share your best experience with regard to problem-solving. What was your involvement?”
- “How will you define milestones and communicate them to all stakeholders?”
- “How will you identify risk, and how will you mitigate it? What are the different ways of identifying risks?”
- “What would you do if a specific project is failing or if it won't meet the deadlines?”
- “How would you update 10,000+ servers in a real-world scenario without impacting the end customers?”
- “What are the important elements of each project phase?”
- “How will you kick off a new project?”

What's The Typical Technical Program Manager Career Path?

In addition to an undergraduate degree in a technical field, most TPMs are required to have a technical background and both project- and product-management or product-development experience (or basic

understanding). And, some positions require [in-depth knowledge of particular technology domains](#), while others give more weight to having a broad understanding of the tech world.

Common positions one might have held before becoming a TPM are:

- Product manager
- Software or hardware engineer
- Engineering manager
- Business analyst

Despite the need for a broad understanding of business, it's not likely that every organization would require a TPM candidate to have an MBA. Still, an MBA or a Master of Science in information technology is often preferred, as is PgMP® or PMI-ACP certification by the Project Management Institute.

Want to be a program-management freelancer? That's less likely. The PMI states it is "virtually impossible" to outsource a PgMP because he or she "must be an integral part of the organization's strategic business."

What's An Average Salary For A Technical Program Manager?

The TPM role usually comes about when a company starts needing structure and discipline within its IT ranks and responsibilities. As such, they're rare to find in small- to mid-size companies and, as such, salaries reflect the demands—and location—of the job.

The average salary in the San Francisco Bay area is \$239,000 total annual compensation, so says a salary survey by Levels.fyi, which puts the national median salary at \$150,000. LinkedIn undercuts that Bay Area salary estimate, putting it at \$190,000/year, while Indeed.com puts the national median total compensation at just under \$160,000.

About the Author



Dharma Mehta, director of Program Management at Roku, has more than 10 years of professional experience at prestigious companies including Amazon, PayPal, and Accenture, solving complex processes and technology problems with simplified solutions. His expertise includes technology portfolio/program/project management, driving software product development, advertising technology, and platform business, strategic planning, building high-performance teams, and transforming software experience for developers and end customers. He is particularly effective at optimizing the performance of people, processes, and technology to deliver improved business outcomes. For more information, email dharmamehta@gmail.com or connect on LinkedIn.