

Panel



How to Handle Scope Creep, Change Management & Difficult Project Conversations



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PURPOSE & LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Purpose:

Explore practical, real-world strategies AEC project managers use to recognize scope creep early, manage change orders, and navigate the difficult conversations that come with the territory while protecting project margins and stakeholder relationships.

Learning Objectives

- Identify how scope creep presents differently during design phases versus construction phases and clarify which party carries responsibility in each scenario
- Use RFIs, submittals, and field directives as early warning indicators of scope drift before it becomes a change order dispute
- Apply a structured change management process for documenting, pricing, and negotiating owner-driven changes while protecting project margins
- Use practical communication frameworks to navigate difficult project conversations including out-of-scope pushback, budget impact discussions, and contractor disputes while preserving working relationships



AEC PM Connect New Jersey 2026

Speakers



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Senior Vice President, Urban Engineers



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Principal/Vice President, Langan



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Senior Project Manager, US Army
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Sara Irick, PE, PMP, CME, TDM-CP

Highway & Traffic Manager, Delaware
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What Questions Do You Have?

- Where have you seen scope creep most often derail projects?
- What difficult conversations around scope or change orders do you find most challenging?
- What would you like to hear from today's panel?



Question 1

Early Warning Signs

In your experience, what are the earliest and most reliable warning signs that scope creep is starting on an AEC project, and what's one action you take immediately when you see it?





Question 2

Client Communication

How do you push back on scope expansion in a way that preserves the client relationship, especially when the client genuinely believes the work is “minor” or “already included?”



Question 3

Change Management Process

What does an effective change-management process look like in practice at your firm— from identifying a change to getting it approved—and where do projects most often break down in that process?





Question 4

Internal Alignment

How do you handle scope creep that originates internally, such as team members going above and beyond without approval, and what systems or behaviors help prevent that?



Question 5

Negotiating with Confidence

What advice would you give a project manager who knows a change should be billable but feels uncomfortable initiating that conversation with a client or contractor?



Key Takeaways

- Scope creep is easier to manage when identified early
- Clear communication protects both the project and the relationship
- Structured change management removes emotion from decisions
- Confidence in hard conversations comes from preparation, documentation, and consistency



Questions • Discussion • Connections



Panel



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