

WHITEPAPER | IDENTITY GOVERNANCE & ADMINISTRATION

The Real Cost of IGA Application Onboarding

The Number Nobody Puts in the Budget —
And What It's Actually Costing You

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Audience: CISOs • IAM Program Leaders • Federal Identity Architects

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Executive Summary

When organizations plan an Identity Governance and Administration (IGA) deployment, they account for platform licensing, professional services, infrastructure, and ongoing maintenance. Almost none account for the cost they will actually spend most of their time and money on: application onboarding.

Application onboarding — the process of connecting each application to the IGA system, defining roles and entitlements, configuring provisioning rules, and validating that governance is properly in place — is the most labor-intensive phase of any IGA program. It is also the phase that is almost entirely invisible in initial project budgets, and the one most responsible for IGA programs that stall, drag, and ultimately underdeliver.

This whitepaper examines what application onboarding actually costs, where that cost comes from, how it compounds at enterprise and federal scale, and what organizations can do to fundamentally change the economics of their IGA programs.

\$15K–\$75K

Average cost per application
onboarded manually

72%

of IGA-capable organizations have
onboarded fewer than half their
applications

60–80%

of total IGA program cost is
consumed by onboarding, not the
platform

1. The Hidden Bottleneck: Where IGA Programs Actually Stall

Ask any IGA program manager where their program is falling behind, and the answer is almost never the platform. The platform was procured. The platform was deployed. The platform works.

The answer is almost always the same: applications. We have 400 applications that need to be onboarded and we've completed 60 of them. We're 18 months in and we've barely scratched the surface. The applications just keep appearing out of nowhere.

This is not a technology failure. It is a process failure — one that plays out in nearly every IGA program at scale, across both the commercial enterprise and the federal government. And it is almost entirely predictable once you understand what application onboarding actually requires.

What Application Onboarding Actually Requires

Every application onboarded into an IGA system requires the same basic set of inputs and actions:

- Application discovery and documentation — what does the application do, who owns it, where does it live, what protocols does it support?
- Entitlement inventory — what attributes, roles, groups, permissions, and access levels exist within the application?
- Role definition and mapping — how should those entitlements map to organizational roles, job functions, and access tiers?
- Connector configuration — how does the IGA platform authenticate, read, and write to the application's identity stores?
- Provisioning and deprovisioning rule logic — what triggers access grants, modifications, and revocations?
- Access certification and review setup — who reviews access to this application, how often, and on what criteria?
- Testing and validation — does the configuration work correctly, completely, and consistently?

In a mature, well-resourced program, this process takes weeks per application. In a typical enterprise or federal environment — where application owners have competing priorities, documentation is incomplete, and IGA teams are small relative to the application portfolio — it takes months. And in environments where the onboarding process itself is undocumented and inconsistent, the timeline compounds with each iteration.

The IGA platform is only as effective as the applications connected to it. An ungoverned application is not a partially governed application — it is an ungoverned application, with all the risk that implies.

2. What Application Onboarding Actually Costs

Most organizations have never calculated their true per-application onboarding cost. When they do, the number is almost always higher than expected — and it is almost entirely composed of labor that never appears as a line item in the IGA program budget.

The \$15,000 to \$75,000 Range — Where It Comes From

Research and practitioner experience across enterprise and federal IGA programs consistently puts the fully-loaded cost of onboarding a single application in the range of \$15,000 to \$75,000. The wide range reflects significant variation in application complexity, organizational process maturity, and team capability. What is consistent across the range is that the majority of the cost is process cost, not technology cost.

To understand where that number comes from, it is useful to map it to the five primary cost components that every onboarding engagement touches:

Component 1: Identity Team Coordination and Configuration

The IGA team — the specialists who understand the platform, the connectors, and the governance model — is the scarcest resource in any IGA program. Every application onboarding requires their direct involvement: scoping the integration, configuring the connector, validating the access model, and testing the result. Depending on application complexity, a single onboarding engagement may consume 40 to 120 hours of identity team time.

At fully-loaded labor rates for senior identity engineers and architects, that component alone ranges from \$6,000 to \$25,000 per application.

Component 2: Developer and Integration Engineering Time

For applications without standard connectors — or with custom authentication, non-standard entitlement structures, or complex provisioning logic — developer time is required. Custom connector development, API integration work, and scripted provisioning rules are common in both commercial and federal environments where application portfolios reflect years of organic growth and technical debt.

Custom integration work can add \$5,000 to \$30,000 per application, and is often the single largest driver of onboarding delays.

Component 3: Application Owner Engagement

Effective application onboarding requires active participation from the person or team who owns and operates the application. They must document the application's identity architecture, enumerate existing entitlements, validate proposed role mappings, and approve the governance configuration. In most organizations, this person is not an identity expert. They are a system administrator, a development lead, or a product manager with a different primary job.

The result is a process that requires multiple back-and-forth cycles, repeated clarification requests, and significant coordination overhead. Application owner time across a typical onboarding engagement ranges from 10 to 40 hours — and at \$100 to \$125 per hour fully loaded, that represents \$1,000 to \$5,000 per application in labor that no one accounted for in the program budget.

Component 4: Rework Cycles

Configuration errors caught in testing, incomplete intake information, role mapping disagreements, and access policy changes mid-engagement all generate rework. Each rework cycle adds days to the timeline and hours to the cost, and is compounded by the need to re-engage both the identity team and the application owner.

In organizations without a standardized onboarding process, rework rates are high — industry practitioners routinely report that 30 to 50 percent of manual onboarding engagements require at least one significant rework cycle before completion.

Component 5: Delay Cost and Compliance Exposure

Every week an application remains outside the governance framework is a week of unmanaged access, ungoverned entitlements, and potential compliance exposure. For organizations operating under NIST SP 800-53, CMMC, FedRAMP, or similar frameworks, ungoverned applications are not merely an operational inconvenience — they are audit findings, corrective action items, and in some cases, program suspension risks.

The cost of delayed governance is difficult to quantify precisely but consistently exceeds the direct onboarding cost for applications in regulated or high-risk access tiers.

The majority of IGA program cost is not the platform — it is the labor consumed by a manual, ad-hoc onboarding process that produces results of highly variable quality at highly variable cost.

3. The Scale Problem: Why Portfolio Math Changes Everything

For organizations with modest application portfolios, the per-application onboarding cost is a manageable if frustrating reality. For enterprises with hundreds or thousands of applications — or for federal agencies undergoing platform modernization, Zero Trust implementation, or migration from legacy identity systems — the cost at scale becomes the program-defining constraint.

The Portfolio Math

Consider an organization with 300 applications that need to be onboarded into their IGA system. At an average cost of \$25,000 per application, the total onboarding cost is \$7.5 million. At \$40,000 per application, it is \$12 million. Neither of those figures appears in the IGA platform contract. Neither of them is visible in the program's initial budget. And both of them represent resources that must come from somewhere — typically from program schedule, from other IT initiatives, or from the IGA program's own timeline and scope commitments.

300 Applications in a typical mid-size enterprise portfolio	\$7.5M–\$12M Total manual onboarding cost at scale	3–5 yrs Typical time to achieve meaningful portfolio coverage manually
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The compounding factor is continuity. Application portfolios are not static. New applications are deployed. Existing applications change their authentication architecture, their role structures, or their access tiers. Applications acquired through M&A integration require onboarding from scratch. The ongoing maintenance burden of a manually onboarded application portfolio is a second program cost that rarely factors into initial planning.

The Federal Context

Federal agencies face an accelerated version of this challenge. The Cybersecurity Executive Order, Zero Trust Architecture mandates, and NIST SP 800-207 implementation guidance all establish

expectations for identity governance coverage that require near-complete application onboarding — not the 15 to 30 percent coverage that most agencies currently have.

DoD Components, civilian agencies managing FedRAMP-authorized systems, and Intelligence Community organizations all face the same fundamental constraint: they have the platform authorization, but they do not have the process throughput to achieve the governance coverage the mandate requires. The onboarding bottleneck is not a technology gap. It is a process gap, and it will not be closed by procuring another platform.

4. What Changes When the Process Is Structured

Organizations that have moved from manual, ad-hoc application onboarding to a structured, guided, and automated process consistently see improvement across three dimensions: speed, quality, and volume. The improvements are not incremental — they are structural.

Speed: Weeks to Days

The primary driver of manual onboarding timelines is not the actual work — it is the coordination overhead, the wait time between steps, and the rework cycles generated by incomplete or inconsistent intake processes. A structured onboarding process that guides the application owner through a defined sequence of questions, validates inputs at each stage, and flags issues before they reach the identity team compresses timelines significantly.

Organizations that have implemented structured onboarding workflows consistently report reductions from six to eight weeks per application to five to ten business days — and in some cases, to hours for standard application types with well-established connector profiles.

Quality: Consistent, Auditable Outputs

Manual onboarding produces results of highly variable quality. The quality depends on which identity team member is assigned, how thoroughly the application owner was engaged, whether documentation exists, and whether anyone catches the configuration errors before the application goes live. In practice, manual onboarding produces governance configurations that range from excellent to inadequate within the same program.

A structured process produces consistent outputs by design. Every application goes through the same intake sequence. Every configuration is validated against the same criteria. Every completed onboarding produces the same documentation and audit trail. The consistency itself is a governance control.

Volume: The Throughput Multiplier

The most significant impact of a structured onboarding process is not speed on individual applications — it is throughput across the portfolio. When the identity team is no longer the

bottleneck for every application, and when application owners can self-serve through a guided workflow rather than waiting for a meeting, the number of concurrent onboarding engagements the program can sustain increases dramatically.

This is the change that allows a program that has been averaging 10 to 15 applications onboarded per year to reach 100 or 200. It is the change that converts the three-to-five-year portfolio coverage timeline into an 18-month achievable goal.

5. How We Help Solve These Problems: Introducing Onboard.id

Onboard.id is a purpose-built application onboarding platform for IGA. It was designed specifically to address the problem this whitepaper describes: the process bottleneck that prevents IGA programs from achieving meaningful governance coverage, regardless of which IGA platform they are running.

How It Works

Onboard.id structures the application onboarding process from end to end. Application owners are guided through a defined, validated intake workflow that collects the information the IGA team needs — in the right format, in the right sequence, with the right validation rules — before any identity team involvement is required.

The result is an intake packet that is complete, consistent, and actionable. The identity team receives a structured work order rather than a blank canvas. Connector configuration is accelerated by pre-validated application data. Rework cycles are eliminated because the intake process catches issues before they reach the configuration stage.

Built on Federal-Grade Experience

Onboard.id was developed out of UberEther's decade of implementing IGA solutions in the most demanding identity governance environments in the world: FedRAMP High, DoD Impact Level 5, and federal agencies operating under the full weight of NIST SP 800-53 and Zero Trust Architecture mandates.

Every design decision reflects the hard-won knowledge of what it actually takes to onboard applications at scale in environments where the cost of a governance gap is not a performance metric — it is a security incident.

What Onboard.id Delivers

- Guided, validated intake workflows that application owners can complete without IGA expertise

- Automated quality checks that catch incomplete or inconsistent data before it reaches the identity team
- Structured output packages that accelerate connector configuration and reduce rework
- A complete audit trail for every onboarded application — who did what, when, and what was validated
- Integration with leading IGA platforms, enabling organizations to extend their existing investment rather than replace it
- Federal-grade security architecture, built for environments where compliance is not optional

Onboard.id doesn't replace your IGA platform — it does the one thing your IGA platform can't do: get your applications onboarded.

6. The Business Case for Structured Onboarding

The investment in a structured application onboarding platform pays for itself in the first few months of deployment for most organizations. The math is straightforward:

Cost Avoidance at Scale

An organization that reduces average per-application onboarding cost from \$35,000 to \$8,000 — a conservative estimate of what structured onboarding delivers — saves \$27,000 per application. For a portfolio of 200 applications, that is \$5.4 million in avoided labor cost. For a portfolio of 500 applications, it is \$13.5 million.

These are not theoretical savings. They are hours not spent on coordination overhead, rework cycles that do not happen, and identity team capacity that is redirected from onboarding administration to strategic architecture and governance.

Risk Reduction

Every application that remains outside the governance framework represents access that is not reviewed, entitlements that are not governed, and a potential audit finding that is one inspection away from becoming a corrective action. For organizations operating under federal frameworks, the cost of a single significant audit finding — remediation, reporting, program impact — routinely exceeds the cost of the onboarding platform many times over.

Structured onboarding reduces the size of the ungoverned application portfolio, which directly reduces the organization's risk surface.

Program Timeline Compression

IGA program value does not accrue from having the platform — it accrues from having the applications connected. A program that takes five years to achieve meaningful governance

coverage delivers value at a very different rate than a program that achieves the same coverage in 18 months. The difference is not the platform. It is the onboarding process.

Conclusion

The IGA platform is not the problem. The process that connects applications to the platform is the problem. And it is a solvable problem — one that has already been solved by organizations that have moved from manual, ad-hoc onboarding to a structured, purpose-built process.

The cost of doing nothing is not zero. It is the accumulated cost of every manual onboarding engagement, every rework cycle, every delay, and every application that remains outside the governance framework because the queue never clears. For most organizations, that cost is already measured in millions of dollars per year — it is simply not visible on any budget line.

Onboard.id makes that cost visible. And it makes it avoidable.

About Onboard.id

Onboard.id, Inc. is a purpose-built IGA application onboarding company, delivering the structured intake, workflow, and automation capabilities that IGA programs need to achieve meaningful governance coverage at scale. Onboard.id was developed from UberEther's decade of experience implementing identity governance in FedRAMP High and DoD IL5-authorized environments.

To request a demo or learn more about Onboard.id, visit onboard.id or contact us at hello@onboard.id.

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