

The RFI's Role in the Construction Process

Contributed by the Delaware ABC-AIA Partnering Committee
(a joint committee of ABC Delaware and AIA Delaware)

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SUMMARY

When used properly, a request for information (RFI) can provide an orderly, reliable, and documented mechanism to field and resolve legitimate contractor questions. The response from the design team can provide valuable guidance or the RFI can result in the issuance of an architect's supplemental instruction.

ABUSE OF THE RFI PROCESS

Occasionally, however, the RFI is misused to provide additional time for the contractor, especially on projects containing liquidated damages. RFIs can also be used to set the stage for future change orders. Increasingly, RFIs are used in lieu of phone conversations or shop-drawing submission questions, which could be far more efficient in resolving minor issues.

WAYS TO IMPROVE THE RFI PROCESS

There are numerous ways a project team can improve the RFI process. Below are a number of options to consider:

- Require that all RFIs be accompanied by a lowest-cost suggested solution from the submitting subcontractor to show that the request has been properly considered.
- Require that all RFIs include a reference to the applicable drawing number and specification to show that the request has been properly researched.
- To prevent frivolous requests, require that the general contractor/construction manager and owner's representative review and sign-off on the RFI.
- Make better use of the shop-drawing submission process.
- Make more efficient use of the subcontractor job meetings to share information and foster respectful, open exchanges between project participants.

- Make better use of e-mail capabilities to distribute drawings and sketches, so the entire project team can review and comment at the same time. E-mail also allows easy attachment of sketches and photos as part of the response.
- Owners should make judicious use of liquidated damages, which create an inherent friction between the general contractor and the design team, forcing the general contractor to look for opportunities to justify project delays.
- Assign a priority and/or required response date.
- And finally, the design team should endeavor to provide timely, accurate responses to legitimate RFIs.

PREVENTING RFIS

There are also numerous ways a project team can prevent the inconsistencies that create RFIs in the first place. Below are a number of options to consider:

- Provide a discrete coordination phase to tighten up the design documents. This is a valuable function that is sometimes missing in the current fast-track environment.
- Initiate a peer review to solicit an independent evaluation of the documents.
- Before setting the construction budget, have the general contractor/construction manager perform a constructability review to ensure that design can be easily implemented.
- Write good, tight scopes of work before final subcontractor awards and hold a detailed scope-review meeting.
- Try to resolve questions before final bid.
- Make better use of pre-bid meetings. Hold a second pre-bid meeting approximately 10 to 14 days before bid. Insist that all pre-bid meetings be attended by principals or chief estimators.

RECOMMENDED RFI FORM CONTENT

We recommend that the following fields be included on project RFI forms to incorporate the committee's recommendations:

- Project information
- Project name
- Project number
- RFI information
- RFI number
- RFI title
- Initiation date
- Subject
- Discipline affected
- Priority: (1–5)
- Submission Information
- Submitted by: (name, company, telephone number, fax number)
- Coauthor
- Submitted to: (name, company, telephone number, fax number)
- Copies to:
- Referenced drawing and specification section
- Construction manager/general contractor sign-off
- Impact
- Cost impact: (yes/no; dollar amount)
- Schedule impact: (yes/no; number of days)
- Drawing impact: (yes/no; description)
- Change order required: (yes/no)
- Request
- Information requested
- Requested by
- Date required or ASAP
- 1st/2nd/3rd request
- Proposed solution
- Response
- Answered by: (name and company)
- Date answered

This Best Practice Recommendation is a product of discussions by the ABC-AIA Partnering Committee, a joint committee consisting of Owners, Contractors, and Design Professionals solely for the betterment of the project design and construction process and is nonbinding.

RESOURCES

More Best Practices

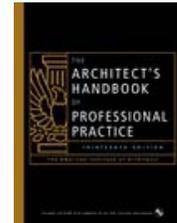
The following AIA Best Practices provide additional information related to this topic:

- 11.04.05 Quality Control: A Construction Contract Administration Checklist
- 11.04.02 Administering Changes and Change Orders
- 11.04.06 Effective Methods of Site Safety

For More Information on This Topic

See also “Contract Administration” by Patrick Mays, AIA, *The Architect's Handbook of Professional Practice*, 13th edition, Chapter 18.9, page 603.

See also the 14th edition of the *Handbook*, which can be ordered from the AIA Bookstore by calling 800-242-3837 (option 4) or by email at bookstore@aia.org.



Feedback

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Key Terms

- Practice
- Project administration