

Member Communication Experience

What's a Submittal Register and How Can it be Managed Effectively?

Written by: RedTeam Builders Blog Editors

In both the workplace and personally, there are multiple benefits to being organized. Managing a significant construction project requires teams to be on the same page. A submittal register helps keep teams organized and on the same page. Although managing the submittal register effectively is challenging, it's a must, as it improves work accuracy and helps progress the project.

What is a Submittal Register?

Before discussing how to organize a submittal register, let's back up and define it.

A submittal register is a structured list of each submittal. Drawn from the specs, the submittal register also includes every item from the shop drawings, product data, material samples, test reports, and certifications. The register is maintained and updated throughout the project.

A submittal register tracks what needs to be submitted, by whom, when it must be submitted and approved, and the current status. It may also include other information, such as where the requirement is derived and who will approve the information.

Note that general contractors (GCs) and trade partners who perform the actual work create the submittals that go into the registry. Suppliers and manufacturers, who can provide cut



sheets and other relevant information about the materials, often aid GCs and trade partners.

With this information, the ownership team, architects, and designers know exactly what the team will use on the project. They can confirm it matches the design intent and contract. If they disapprove, GCs and trades need to make changes. If they don't review the submittal register, it could delay a project or lead to mistakes.

A well-maintained submittal register provides multiple benefits:

- » Ensures compliance with project specifications
- » Provides clear accountability
- » Improves communication and coordination
- » Simplifies project closeout.

A well-maintained submittal register ensures that all

submittals are kept in one place. It's the forerunner to an organized project and helps keep teams on the same page.

Effectively Manage the Submittal Register

All acknowledge the importance and value of submittal registers. Yet, GCs often find the submittal process cumbersome and labor-intensive. They want quick approval to keep construction moving.

Those who have to approve the submittal, be it the ownership team, architects, or designers (or some combination), feel pressure to approve the submittal quickly. They often think GCs should register the submittal earlier to give them more time and provide more details about it.

Ultimately, all involved with submittals feel some level of frustration at some point during the project.

Follow the procedures below to manage the register process effectively and minimize frustration.

ESTABLISH PROCEDURES EARLY IN THE PROCESS

The better and clearer the information entered into the submittal register, the quicker and easier it can be approved (or denied).

Arrange the submittal process during the preconstruction planning. The GC and trade partners should establish procedures regarding their approach to the submittals process.

The team should also develop a schedule for when submittals are due, who will review them (before putting them on the register), and who will be the main point of contact with the ownership team, architects, and designers.

A clear delineation of who is responsible for what empowers the team to perform their jobs with certainty, leading to increased productivity. It also minimizes the potential for miscommunication and increases the chance that the project will stay on schedule.

Those reviewing the submittals, the ownership team, architects, and designers should clarify as clearly as possible the information their processes require.

By sharing their procedures and expectations with the GC, they can focus their energy on reviewing the submittal, rather than researching it. They will rarely need to request more information, which keeps the project moving forward.

THOROUGHLY REVIEW THE SUBMITTAL

While garbage in, garbage out is a phrase associated with computer science, it's relevant to many other areas, including the submittal register.

As noted above, creating and entering a submittal can be time-consuming. The GC, who is responsible for submittals, juggles many responsibilities on a typical construction project and has limited time to review them.

When a submittal is hastily reviewed, the reviewer often overlooks key details, leading to missing information. If key information is unclear or missing, it is challenging for those expected to approve the submittal to interpret it and determine whether to approve it.

So, what happens next?

- » Slow approval time
- » Request for more information
- » Rejection of the submittal

Each result slows down the process and can lead to project delays.

GCs can consider appointing a person whose sole responsibility is to review submittals. Because the employee has sufficient time, they can meticulously review each submittal, ensuring it's easy to understand.

The ownership team, architects, and designers appreciate well-crafted, high-quality submittals (i.e., not garbage). They are much more likely to receive approval promptly, enabling the projects to proceed without delay.

KEEP THE PROCESS MOVING

No matter how quickly ownership reviews submittals, it's never fast enough, from the GC's perspective. One challenge is that submittals often require approval from multiple parties.

The architect might get to it quickly, while the mechanical engineer and or owner's representative might be backed up.

Sharing the submittal for approval of one person at a time is a recipe for a lull in the process. Why? The submittal could get waylaid on someone's desk who is too busy to review it.

Instead, minimize the impact of delays by allowing everyone who needs to review the submittal to access it simultaneously. Not only does this speed up the process, but it also adds transparency as it's clear who is delaying review of the submittal.

Another potential roadblock is not knowing that a submittal requires review. Does the electrical designer know their team needs to review the submittal? Or is it sitting in some inbox waiting for them to notice it?

If so, it could be a couple of days before a team even realizes their approval is required. During that time, they could have reviewed the submittal and offered their feedback/approval.

Notifications that a submittal is awaiting approval alert teams that their input is required. The team can get the ball rolling instantly.

UTILIZE PROJECT MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE

The old school submittal process meant piles of paperwork, endless email threads, and chasing down signatures. For general contractors juggling multiple trades, tight timelines, and complex documentation, project management software is a must for the submittal process.

The software transforms that process into one that is faster, more organized, and more collaborative.


How so?

This digital approach centralizes submittals in one place and automatically tracks deadlines. It gives everyone — GCs, trades, architects, and owners — simultaneous access to the most current information, reducing bottlenecks and miscommunication.

Digital submittal software helps teams improve communication. Because reviewing, sharing, and commenting all occur within a single system, responsibility is more clearly defined, reducing confusion.

With project management software, work will no longer slip through the cracks or sit in an inbox waiting for attention.

Automated tracking and notifications keep everyone in the loop — sending reminders for due dates, pending reviews, and approvals.

Another benefit of the software is that it enables simultaneous review and approval of submittals. It also encourages collaboration as cloud-based software allows teams to access, review, and approve submittals from any location, at any time. This simultaneous access boosts productivity and hastens the review cycle. 



About the Article

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