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Increasing communication and reducing costly RFIs - by Adrienne Franklin

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Adrienne Franklin
Gilbane Building Co.

Requests for Information (RFIs) and change orders on construction projects are costly and time consuming. They cause delays in operations and create strained relationships between stakeholders due to anxieties associated with disruptions in project schedules and budgets. Best practice dictates that a major component in reducing the number of RFIs and change orders is early (and often) communication and collaboration. But in the fast-paced construction industry, with all its moving parts and various levels of document completeness, how can teams ensure proper communication between disciplines and the ultimate success for all involved? The answer lies in Interdisciplinary Document Review (IDC).

IDC is a preconstruction service designed to identify, track, and communicate construction document coordination issues to the design and construction teams prior to procurement and before construction. By taking a project's nearly complete documents (plans and specifications) and comparing/contrasting them to one another, we can easily identify coordination issues between disciplines before the project team mobilizes and these coordination issues become costly job-site problems.

How is this implemented on projects, and what are the implications down the road for RFIs? IDC teams use a checklist, supplemented by lessons learned and best practices, that provides systematic analysis of the plans and specifications. This review includes three phases and has proven to result in enhanced design and construction team communication. At Gilbane, our experience shows that this process can lead to a 60-70% reduction in construction phase RFIs.

Phase One: Life Safety Review

When the 50% construction documents are released, an IDC team performs a Life Safety Review by utilizing nationally recognized building and fire codes to identify potential compliance issues. This review is focused on egress and disciplines interconnected with egress, like mechanical, electrical,

and fire protection systems, as well as wall and door fire ratings.

Phase Two: IDC Review

When the 90% construction documents are released, the IDC team performs a systematic analysis of the plans and specifications that mitigates risk while improving relationships with the design team. It starts with an assessment of the drawings and specifications to identify any gaps or major missing information. The second step is to conduct a kick-off call with the design and construction teams to share the review schedule, alongside a sample report. This is key to setting expectations and the verbal and video introductions help to build trust amongst the entire project team.

Phase Three: Compliance Check and Life Safety Audit

When the 100% construction documents are released, the IDC team reviews the revised drawings along with the feedback from the design team for any identified discrepancies. Discrepancies that haven't been resolved are elevated to an RFI. At the completion of this phase, the design and construction teams have been set up for success in resolving any outstanding discrepancies.

To further engage construction and design teams, Gilbane creates reports with both right- and left-brain learners in mind.

The technical report is a sortable excel file that is easily navigable, and the graphic report is a combined drawing set with each discrepancy identified exactly where they exist on the drawing(s).

No matter how the design team approaches the project, they can locate the information seamlessly.

Technology plays a large part in the success of what the IDC team does. This year, as our industry grapples with the realities of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impacts on our industry, Gilbane is exploring new software that allows us to enhance our communication capabilities even further. Procore is a software tool that facilitates the sharing of discrepancies with the design team in real time. This can create a streamlined response process that isn't reliant on a reporting schedule. Reports become more of a pulse check rather than a weekly/bi-weekly list of discrepancies, enhancing communication and collaboration throughout the process.

Adrienne Franklin, interdisciplinary document coordination manager at Gilbane Building Company, Glastonbury, Conn.

New England Real Estate Journal - 17 Accord Park Drive #207, Norwell MA 02061 - (781) 878-4540