WORKFLOWS

The Specification Shouldn’t Stop at the Project Manual

A requirement becomes operational when the person responsible for the work can find it, apply it, and demonstrate how it was satisfied.

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The requirement has a destination

Coming from architecture, I understand why the project manual matters. It carries requirements that drawings alone cannot communicate adequately. Yet the field often encounters those requirements indirectly, through a submittal review, a checklist someone assembled, or a problem discovered after installation.

I would like the connection to be more deliberate. If a specification establishes a requirement for material, preparation, installation, testing, or documentation, the project should identify where that requirement will be addressed in the work.

That does not mean putting the entire manual into every field form. It means helping each person reach the relevant requirement at the moment it affects a decision.

Translate requirements without changing their meaning

Consider a wall assembly. The applicable information may address several materials, preparation conditions, installation details, and verification obligations. A field checklist can help organize the work, but it should not become an untraceable paraphrase of the specification.

Each check needs a connection to its source. If the wording is simplified for use in the field, the original requirement should remain accessible. The project should also identify where interpretation or clarification was required and who resolved it.

This matters because a checklist can accidentally narrow a requirement. A broad question such as “Installed correctly?” does little to help the person checking the work. A specific question tied to a defined condition is more useful, provided it faithfully reflects what governs the installation.

Put the check at the right point

Some requirements must be addressed before procurement. Others concern receiving, preparation, installation, or testing. Still others become relevant when assembling turnover information. Their timing is part of their meaning.

A check for a concealed installation belongs before the work becomes inaccessible. A requirement for a test report needs an owner and a due point that supports the next activity. Collecting either at the end may be too late to verify the work efficiently.

I would map requirements to workflow stages and responsible roles. That makes the specification an input to planning, rather than a reference people consult only when disagreement arises.

The project can then see whether a requirement is not yet due, ready for verification, satisfied, or awaiting resolution. Those states tell a much clearer story than whether the document has been uploaded.

Connect the requirement to its scope

A specification section may apply to many objects and locations, while a particular exception applies only to a small subset. The project needs both levels of organization.

For example, a common door requirement may apply across a building, but a particular opening may have a different rating, hardware arrangement, or approved condition. The field user should see the requirements applicable to that opening without assuming every nearby door is identical.

This is a useful role for structured project information. Shared requirements can be maintained once and connected to the appropriate scope. Project-specific variations remain visible. When the governing information changes, the team can identify which checks and installations need review.

Use extraction as a starting point

AI can assist with finding candidate requirements and organizing them by subject or workflow. That can reduce the effort of starting with a large manual. It does not eliminate the need for a qualified person to confirm applicability, completeness, and interpretation.

I would expect the system to show where a proposed requirement came from and whether it depends on another section, drawing, or referenced document. If the source is ambiguous, that should become a review item.

The dangerous shortcut is turning extracted sentences directly into authoritative field instructions. The useful approach is to let extraction support a governed process that produces approved, traceable checks.

Make evidence proportional to the requirement

Different requirements need different evidence. A recorded observation may be appropriate for one condition. Another may need a measurement, a product identifier, a test result, or a designated approval. More attachments do not automatically create better verification.

I want the project to decide what evidence is useful before asking field teams to collect it. That gives people a clear task and makes the resulting records easier to assess.

It also improves handover. When the requirement, installation, and verification remain connected, the owner receives a record that explains what the evidence supports.

For me, this is how the project manual becomes part of daily execution. Its authority remains intact, while its requirements become easier to find and apply. The field gains a practical path to the information, and the project gains a clearer view of what has actually been demonstrated.

What’s Next

The next post follows RFIs beyond the answer, into the drawings, installations, and checks that must reflect the resulting decision.

Read online: inertiasystems.com/resources/blog/the-specification-shouldnt-stop-at-the-project-manual

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