

Reducing RFIs and Improving Processing Times

The following information is a summary from the research report, *'Transforming Building Consenting Behaviour for Better Housing'*

Read the full report here: [ER91 ModelDocs: Transforming building consenting behaviour for better housing \(2024\) | BRANZ](#)

The building consent process is a critical part of delivering safe, durable, and compliant buildings. But for many designers, it can feel like a roadblock rather than a gateway. A recent research report, 'Transforming Building Consenting Behaviour for Better Housing', looked at how we can improve this system to make it faster, clearer, and more effective.

This article explains the key findings from the report and what they mean for you as a Design Licenced Building Practitioner (LBP). It also offers practical tips to help you reduce delays and improve your consent documentation.

Why change is needed

The Building Act 2004 sets out that buildings must meet performance requirements, but it doesn't tell you exactly how to design or build them. That flexibility is good for innovation, but it also creates uncertainty.

Building Consent Authorities often ask for extra information through Requests for Information (RFIs) because they need to be sure your design meets the Building Code.

The research found that RFIs are one of the biggest causes of delays. Many RFIs happen because documents are missing, unclear, or not in the right format. For designers, this means more time answering questions and less time designing.

Key findings from the report

1. Documentation quality matters

Most RFIs were triggered by missing or incorrect documentation. For example, structural bracing calculations or roof bracing details were often incomplete. This shows how important it is to provide clear, complete, and accurate documents upfront.

2. Searchable PDFs are essential

Councils need to quickly find information in your plans and specifications. The report recommends using searchable PDFs for all consent documents. This simple step can save time and reduce RFIs.

3. **Standardisation helps everyone**

The report suggests using consistent document naming and layout. This makes it easier for BCAs to process your application and reduces confusion.

4. **Focus on key code clauses**

Many RFIs relate to structural requirements under B1 Structure and moisture control under E2 External Moisture. Make sure your design clearly shows compliance with these clauses.

5. **Respond to RFIs promptly**

To avoid delays in obtaining a consent for your client, attempt to respond to RFIs as promptly as possible. If in doubt about the RFI question, consider contacting the BCA for further clarification.

Practical tips for design Licenced Building Practitioners

Here's what you can do to improve your consent applications:

- **Provide complete information**

Double-check that all required documents are included. Use council checklists to make sure nothing is missing.

- **Make it easy to read**

Use clear titles, consistent formatting, and searchable PDFs. Avoid scanned images that can't be searched.

- **Show compliance clearly**

Include calculations, details, and references to standards like NZS 3604:2011 for timber framing. For example, bracing and roof details should be easy to find.

- **Think ahead**

If your design uses alternative solutions, explain them clearly and provide supporting evidence. This reduces back-and-forth with the council.

Why this matters

Better documentation means fewer RFIs, faster consents, and happier clients. It also strengthens your reputation as a professional who delivers quality work.

By following these principles, you help transform the consenting system into one that supports good design and better housing outcomes.