FREE BUYER UTILITY · PRACTITIONER EDITION

Structured Cabling RFP Checklist

42 items every cabling RFP should cover - with what to specify if you're unsure.

> *Skipping items on this checklist is the #1 cause of inflated bids, missed scope, and change orders mid-deployment. Each section below walks through what to specify, what the default-good answer looks like, and what to watch for in vendor responses.*

This is the practitioner edition - each of the 7 sections opens with a Why this matters sidebar, lists the items to specify, and closes with a Common mistake to avoid. Built from 200+ IT RFPs SRS Networks receives per year.

HOW TO USE THIS CHECKLIST

Work this checklist as a worksheet alongside your RFP draft. For each of the 42 items, either decide and write the spec into your RFP, or write "vendor to recommend" if you want vendor proposals. Either is fine - leaving items blank is not.

STEP 1. Walk every section before writing the RFP

Even items that seem obvious (cable category, termination type) deserve an explicit decision. Implicit decisions become change orders later.

STEP 2. Mark each item as DECIDED / VENDOR RECOMMENDS / N/A

If you've made the call, write the spec. If you want vendors to recommend, write "vendor to recommend in proposal." If it doesn't apply, write N/A and note why.

STEP 3. Have a low-voltage tech review the completed checklist

If you don't have one on staff, ask a vendor for a 30-min review call (most reputable cabling vendors will do this free). SRS Networks reviews buyer checklists at partners@srsnetworks.com.

1. CABLE SPECIFICATIONS

WHY THIS MATTERS

Cable spec drives 40% of material cost and 100% of future-proofing. Under-specify and you limit future speeds; over-specify and you pay 30% more than necessary for performance you won't use for 5+ years.

- ☐ Cable category (Cat6, Cat6A, Cat8, OM4, OS2)
- ☐ Plenum vs riser-rated jacket requirement
- ☐ Cable color (often standardized by data type)
- ☐ Strand count for fiber runs
- ☐ Required manufacturer warranty (e.g., Belden 25-year, Panduit 25-year)
- ☐ Approved manufacturers list (or open-spec)

PRO TIP FROM SRS NETWORKS

Default-good for 2026 enterprise: Cat6A plenum for copper horizontal, OS2 single-mode for backbone (12-strand minimum, 24-strand if you're building risers). Cat6 is acceptable for non-PoE-heavy applications but limits you to 1Gbps over 90m runs. Cat8 is overkill outside data centers.

COMMON MISTAKE

Specifying "Cat6A or equivalent" creates 3-way arguments between you, the vendor, and the manufacturer. Either name a specific spec (TIA-568-C.2 Category 6A, FT4 plenum) or name an approved manufacturers list (Belden, Panduit, CommScope, Berk-Tek). Avoid "or equivalent."

2. TERMINATION AND PANELS

WHY THIS MATTERS

Termination spec drives labor cost and field-tech competence requirements. T568B with Cat6A keystone jacks and 48-port patch panels is the modern default - anything else needs a reason.

- [ ] Termination type (T568A vs T568B - modern default is B)
- [ ] Patch panel type (24-port, 48-port, modular)
- [ ] Patch panel category (must match cable spec)
- [ ] Faceplate type and color
- [ ] Keystone jack type (modular vs punch-down)
- [ ] Fiber connector type (LC, SC, MTP/MPO)
- [ ] Fiber LIU panel size and capacity

PRO TIP FROM SRS NETWORKS

Default-good for 2026: T568B termination, 48-port modular patch panels, modular keystone jacks (not punch-down), LC fiber connectors (SC is legacy). MTP/MPO if you're trunking high-density fiber into a data center.

3. PATHWAY AND INFRASTRUCTURE

WHY THIS MATTERS

Pathway scope is the #1 source of cabling change orders. Buyers assume the vendor will handle pathway and fire-stopping; vendors assume the GC will. The result is a 15% change order on a project that was supposed to be turnkey.

- ☐ Pathway included or excluded (J-hook, conduit, ladder rack, cable tray)
- ☐ Fire-stopping included or excluded
- ☐ Penetration sealing requirements (UL-listed system per penetration)
- ☐ Bend radius compliance documentation required
- ☐ Cable separation from power runs
- ☐ Grounding and bonding requirements
- ☐ Seismic bracing (if required by code - California, etc.)

COMMON MISTAKE

If you're in California, Oregon, Washington, or any seismic zone 3+, name seismic bracing explicitly. The code requirement is not always obvious and vendors will either omit it (and you'll fail inspection) or pad 5-8% to cover it (and you'll overpay). Decide upfront.

4. TESTING AND CERTIFICATION

WHY THIS MATTERS

Testing spec is your acceptance gate. Vague testing requirements mean you can't reject bad work. Specific testing requirements mean every drop is certified before handoff.

- ☐ Required certification standard (TIA/EIA-568 permanent link)
- ☐ Required test instrument (Fluke DSX-8000 is the modern default)
- ☐ Pass / fail report deliverable format (PDF + raw .flw files)
- ☐ OTDR testing for fiber required (yes/no, both ends)
- ☐ Test thresholds (e.g., insertion loss limits)
- ☐ Re-test policy if any drop fails

PRO TIP FROM SRS NETWORKS

Always request raw .flw files (Fluke's native format), not just PDF summaries. The .flw files let you re-run analysis if you suspect a vendor cherry-picked passes. PDF-only deliverables can hide marginal passes.

5. DOCUMENTATION AND LABELING

WHY THIS MATTERS

Documentation is what you actually own at handoff. Without it, you have a working network you can't troubleshoot. Specify documentation requirements in the RFP - retrofitting them later costs 3-5x more than building them into the original scope.

- [ ] Required as-built documentation (floor plans, riser diagrams)
- [ ] Port-to-panel mapping spreadsheet format
- [ ] Required labeling spec (per location, per port, per panel)
- [ ] Printed label format (printer type, label material)
- [ ] Final closeout package format and timing
- [ ] Photo documentation requirement (per drop, per panel)

SAMPLE LABELING LANGUAGE

Strong labeling spec: "All faceplates labeled per ANSI/TIA-606-C. Labels printed on Brady BMP71 or equivalent thermal printer; vinyl labels rated for 7-year indoor use. Port labels match the port-to-panel mapping spreadsheet delivered as Appendix in the closeout package."

6. PROJECT EXECUTION

WHY THIS MATTERS

Project execution spec is how you control daily operations. The items below are how you prevent the field surprises that drive change orders and schedule slips.

- [ ] Single point of accountability (vendor PM identified)
- [ ] Standard hours vs after-hours work
- [ ] After-hours premium structure
- [ ] Site access requirements (escort, security clearance, badging)
- [ ] Work-area protection (drop cloth, dust containment)
- [ ] Daily cleanup requirements

COMMON MISTAKE

If you don't specify after-hours premium structure in the RFP, the vendor will charge after-hours hours at 1.5x or 2x with no ceiling. Specify either "all work at standard rates regardless of hours" or "after-hours work at 1.25x standard rate, vendor PM approval required". Either is enforceable. Silence is a blank check.

7. TIMELINE AND MILESTONES

WHY THIS MATTERS

Timeline spec turns the RFP from a feature list into a contract. Without dates, vendors bid the cheapest crew schedule (which may stretch 6 months) instead of the right crew schedule for your needs.

- [ ] Target project start date
- [ ] Target substantial completion date
- [ ] Per-site milestone schedule (if multi-site)
- [ ] Floor plans or drop list provided to vendors

PRO TIP FROM SRS NETWORKS

For multi-site rollouts, specify either a wave-based schedule ("8 sites per 2-week wave") or hard per-site dates. Wave-based is easier to manage and gives the vendor flexibility on site sequencing; hard dates are necessary when sites have lease/opening constraints.

WHY THESE 42 ITEMS MATTER

Every one of these 42 items is on the list because SRS Networks has seen it cause a change order, a missed deadline, or a failed inspection on a real project. The buyers who work through all 42 items before publishing the RFP get tighter bids and finish on schedule. The buyers who skip items pay for the skip later.

Skip This Section	Typical Cost	Why
Cable Specifications	10-15% bid pad	Vendors hedge against unknown spec with conservative material assumptions
Termination and Panels	5-8% bid pad	Labor estimate varies 2x between modular and punch-down work
Pathway and Infrastructure	10-25% change order	Single most common change-order trigger
Testing and Certification	5-10% rework cost	Can't reject bad work without specific test thresholds
Documentation and Labeling	3-5x retrofit cost	Adding labels after install costs more than during
Project Execution	Blank-check after-hours	No ceiling on premium labor without specified structure
Timeline and Milestones	2-6 month slips	No hard date = lowest-cost-crew schedule, not fastest

PRO TIP FROM SRS NETWORKS

SRS Networks will walk through this checklist with you at no cost. Email partners@srsnetworks.com with your scope summary and we'll return a marked-up checklist within 3 business days - no obligation to bid.

ABOUT THIS TEMPLATE

Published free by SRS Networks - nationwide structured cabling and IT infrastructure deployment, all 48 contiguous US states since 1996. 500+ deployments, 5,000+ sites.

Want SRS Networks to review your draft before publishing? Email **partners@srsnetworks.com** or call **(866) 224-3636**. Returned within 3 business days at no cost — no obligation to bid.

More IT procurement resources at **srsnetworks.com/structured-cabling-rfp-checklist**