Early procurement and the *long-lead register*: what to order before the main contract

Which items to order before the main contract, what to sign off first, and a register for the long-lead ones. No lead times.

AT A GLANCE

Item type	Why it can set the date (the process, not a period)	Sign off first	Ask the maker
Natural stone (tops, slabs, flooring)	Chosen from quarry or slab stock, and often templated on site before it is cut.	Slab or range selection; site template or survey; shop drawing.	When the slab is reserved; when the template is needed; who stores it.
Made-to-order glass lighting	Made to order on the glassmaker's own schedule (our lead times page: Murano glass is blown to order).	Glass colour sample; shop drawing; electrical specification.	What is needed to book a production slot.
Hand-finished or patinated metal	Finishing and curing are not compressed (our lead times page).	Finish sample and batch approval; shop drawing.	How the finish is batched, and what can run in parallel.
Bespoke ironmongery	Made and finished to order.	Hardware schedule; finish sample.	Whether a sample piece comes before the run.
COM fabric or leather	Mills have their own queues (our lead times page). The fire test covers cover, filling and interliner together, so settle the cover first.	Cover approved; width and yardage; fire evidence; batch.	Whether the cover can be held against the batch.
Matched veneer	Leaves for a matched run are chosen and kept in sequence from one log (our reading).	Flitch or sample approval; set-out drawing.	How the flitch is reserved.
Repeated items that need a prototype	Production cannot be released until the prototype is signed.	Prototype or first article approved.	When the prototype review falls in the programme.

Illustrative, not a forecast. No period is given because each belongs to the piece, the workshop and the date. Stone, glass, ironmongery and COM are on our lead times page's long-lead list; the other rows are our reading.

LONG-LEAD REGISTER — Project [ ] Register rev [ ] Date [ ]

Ref	Item, code	Why long-lead	Sign off first	Maker's period	Needed on site	Latest order	Status, owner
L-01	Stone top [item code]	Slab chosen, site template	Drawing rev [ ]; survey [ref]	[ ] from [event]	[date]	[date]	[Not ordered] [owner]
L-02	Glass light [item code]	Made to order, maker's slot	Drawing; glass colour sample	[ ] from [event]	[date]	[date]	[Ordered] [owner]
L-03	COM fabric [item code]	Mill queue, batch	Cover approved; fire report	[ ] from [event]	[date]	[date]	[Quoted] [owner]
.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....

Latest order = needed on site, less delivery window, making period and approvals still to come (each from the maker).

The long-lead register as a form, with three placeholder lines. Original drawing by Make Bespoke Studio.

EARLY OR MAIN PACKAGE: THREE QUESTIONS

· Does its order date set the date it is needed? If not, leave it in the main package.

- Are its drawing and control sample signed? If not, close the gap first. Never order early on a guess.
- Can the order be made and held safely? Storage, change and payment settled with the maker.

SPECIFICATION WORDING

EARLY PROCUREMENT PACKAGE (NOTE FOR TENDER DOCUMENTS)

The Employer intends to place early orders for the items in Schedule [ref] ahead of the Building Contract, under [separate contracts with the suppliers / a pre-contract services agreement / the Contractor's early works order]. The Contractor is to allow for receiving, unloading, storing and protecting these items, for [installing / coordinating the installation of] them, and for the builder's work, fixings, power, data and access they depend on, as Schedule [ref]. The programme assumes the items are on site by [date]. [Late delivery of early-ordered items is / is not] a Contractor risk event: clause [ref].

CONDITIONS FOR AN EARLY ORDER

An item in Schedule [ref] is ordered early only when: shop drawing [number, revision] is approved; control sample [S-nn] is signed; site dimensions are confirmed [survey ref] where the item depends on them; evidence requirements [fire, timber, tests] are agreed; the maker has confirmed in writing what is committed by the order, what may still change and at what effect on cost and programme, and where the item is stored, by whom and insured by whom; and [named role] has authorised the commitment. The order names the drawing revision and the sample reference.

LONG-LEAD REGISTER

The long-lead register is held by [party] at revision [letter] and issued with the FF&E schedule. For each item it records the maker's period and the event it is counted from, the date needed on site, the latest order date calculated from them, what must be signed off first, status and owner, and the risk to the date. It is reviewed at each [programme meeting] and whenever a sign-off date changes.

REQUEST TO THE MAKER

For [item] please confirm: (1) the approvals you need and the time you need to review them after submission; (2) your making period and the event it is counted from; (3) your delivery window to [address]; (4) what you need in order to commit materials or a production slot, and what is committed once ordered; (5) storage arrangements if the site is not ready; (6) anything that could lengthen these. Give each period with its start event, not as a single figure.

TERMS USED

Long-lead item

An item whose making and delivery takes long enough that its order date drives the project programme, so it has to be ordered earlier than the rest. Typical examples are hand-finished, imported or custom-made pieces.

Early procurement package

A group of long-lead items bought ahead of the main contract, usually under a separate order, so they arrive when needed. It requires design and samples to be settled sooner.

STANDARDS AND SOURCES

- Designing Buildings: Long lead-time item: commentary, last edited 23 Jan 2021; read 5 Nov 2026.
- RIBA Plan of Work 2020 Overview (RIBA, 2020): PDF pages 63, 92, 93, 122, paraphrased. Copyright RIBA.
- BIID: Professional Practice Series: FF&E (15 Dec 2020): items outside the main contract.
- Designing Buildings: Furniture, fixtures and equipment (FF&E): edited 30 Jun 2022.
- No standard applies: we found none that sets a long-lead register.

Full guide: https://makebespoke.com/trade/technical/early-procurement-and-long-lead-register. Make Bespoke Studio coordinates manufacture through its partner workshops. Figures are guidance only and your specification governs; some may be superseded, so contact the studio to verify.