
HOW-TO GUIDE

Construction Job Costing Tracker

A 10-minute read that gets you running a real project — tracking budget against actual on a single job, without an accounting package.

FOR REMODELERS · GCS · SMALL COMMERCIAL BUILDERS

INSIDE THIS GUIDE

What you'll learn, in order.

Six steps from blank workbook to a project you can stand behind in front of a client. Plus the one mistake almost everyone makes when they add rows.

01	Set up the job	5 minutes
02	Build the budget	15–30 minutes
03	Log actuals as they happen	~1 minute per entry
04	Add change orders	~2 minutes per CO
05	Read the dashboard	your weekly check-in
06	Close out the job	final margin, archive
A	How to add new rows	read this — the #1 mistake
B	Limits, cheat sheet, troubleshooting	reference
C	Sample report	what your dashboard prints like

WHAT'S IN THE WORKBOOK

Five tabs. You'll mostly live in the first three.

The dashboard runs itself. The hidden Calculations tab is the engine — don't unhide it.

TAB	WHAT IT'S FOR	EDIT IT?
Setup	Job information — name, owner, contract value, dates	Yes
Budget	Your planned spend, organized by category	Yes
Actual	Every transaction as it happens — invoices, payroll, receipts	Yes
Budget vs Actual	One-page dashboard — your project health at a glance	No — it auto-updates
Calculations	Hidden by default. The engine behind the dashboard	No — don't unhide

BUILT TO EXPAND — NOTHING'S HARDCODED

Add as many line items, categories, or change orders as the job needs. The dashboard re-flows and the formatting holds.

This is the difference between a template built for one example job and a template built to run any job you throw at it.

- Small bath remodel with 12 budget lines? The dashboard shows 12 lines.
- Custom build with 80 lines, 6 categories, and 14 change orders? Same dashboard, same format — just longer.
- Job has zero change orders? The CO section collapses cleanly.

STEP 01 · 5 MINUTES

Set up the job.

Open the Setup tab. Fill in the input cells in column C. These flow into every other tab automatically — you won't have to retype them.

FIELD	WHAT TO ENTER	EXAMPLE
Project Name	The job's short name	Patel Kitchen Remodel
Project Number	Your internal job number	2026-014
Owner	Client, homeowner, or company	Anil Patel
Project Address	Job-site address	412 Oak Ridge Dr, Marietta GA
Contract Value	Original signed contract amount	38500
Start Date	First day of work	2026-02-03
Target Completion	Scheduled end date	2026-03-21

HALLORAN CONSTRUCTION CO.

Riverside Master Suite Addition

Project Setup

FIELD	VALUE
Project Name	Riverside Master Suite Addition
Project Number	2026-014
Owner	Brian & Megan Smith
Project Address	1247 Oakwood Drive, Atlanta GA 30309
Contract Value	\$185,000
Start Date	1/15/2026
Target Completion	5/30/2026

FIGURE 01 · SETUP TAB — INPUT CELLS IN COLUMN C

STEP 02 · 15-30 MINUTES

Build the budget.

Two levels: category headers (○) group related work; line items (◆) sit underneath as your actual budget rows. Every row needs a marker in column B — pick from the dropdown.

MARKER	MEANING
○	Start a new category
◆	A line item under the current category

CODE · COLUMN C — LEAVE IT ALONE

The code auto-generates based on the marker. Categories are numbered 01, 02, 03... and line items within each are -001, -002, -003 .

- Labor → 01-000
- ◆ Site supervisor → 01-001
- ◆ Crew hours → 01-002
- Materials → 02-000
- ◆ Cabinets → 02-001
- ◆ Tile & flooring → 02-002

DON'T TYPE INTO COLUMN C

The code is a formula. Overwriting it breaks the Actual tab's lookups — the Category and Description columns there pull from this code.

CATEGORY · COLUMN D

Pick from the dropdown. Defaults: **Labor, Materials, Subcontractors, Equipment, Overhead**. To add your own — "Permits & Fees", "General Conditions" — edit cells I9:I17 on the same tab. That's the dropdown source. Cap is 9 categories.

The remaining columns.

What this line item is. Keep it short — the column shows about 40 characters at default width.

The planned dollar amount. Leave the $\bigcirc$ category row blank — the dashboard sums it for you. Or type a total there as a sanity check.

Leave blank for normal lines. Change orders get their own section — see Step 04.

FIGURE 02 · BUDGET TAB — ○ CATEGORIES, ◆ LINE ITEMS, AUTO-GENERATED CODES

STEP 03 · ~1 MINUTE PER ENTRY

Log actuals as they happen.

Every supplier invoice, sub payment, payroll run, permit fee — anything that hits the job's bank account — goes on the Actual tab. Four columns to fill; the other two auto-populate.

COLUMN	WHAT TO ENTER	EXAMPLE
B · Date	Transaction date	2026-02-05
C · Code	Pick from dropdown — matches a budget code	04-001
F · Vendor / Payee	Who got paid	Cobb County
G · Amount	Dollar amount	425

Columns D (Category) and E (Description) **auto-fill** from whatever budget line that code points to. Don't type into them — they're formulas.

HOW TO PICK THE RIGHT CODE

The dropdown in column C lists every code from your budget. Spent \$4,750 on cabinet deposits? Find the code for your "Cabinets" line — something like **02-001** — and select it. The cabinet actuals now roll up against the cabinet budget on the dashboard.

Typed a code that doesn't exist? Category and Description go blank — that's your sign to fix it.

STEP 03 · CONTINUED · TIPS

A few things to know.

- **Order doesn't matter.** Enter rows in whatever order the bookkeeping comes in. The dashboard sorts and sums regardless.
- **Splitting a check across budget lines?** Make two rows. Same date, same vendor, different codes and amounts.
- **Credits — refunds, retainage releases?** Enter the amount as negative: **-1850** . The dashboard handles the math.
- **No exact date?** Use the invoice date or the date the check was written. Better than leaving it blank.

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Riverside Master Suite Addition					
Project Actuals					
ACTUAL COST LOG					
DATE	CODE	CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION	VENDOR / PRICE	AMOUNT
1/1/26	05-001	Overhead	Permits and inspection fees	City of Atlanta Permits	\$1,850
1/1/26	05-002	Overhead	Insurance allocation	Hartford Insurance	\$600
1/6/26	05-003	Overhead	Project management overhead	Halloran Construction	\$1,200
1/6/26	04-001	Equipment	Excavator rental	United Rentals	\$1,400
1/10/26	03-001	Subcontractors	Foundation / concrete sub	Patterson Concrete	\$6,000
1/13/26	01-001	Labor	Site supervisor (16 weeks)	Payroll	\$1,500
1/16/26	04-003	Equipment	Dumpster (3 hauls)	Waste Pro	\$400
1/20/26	03-001	Subcontractors	Foundation / concrete sub	Patterson Concrete	\$6,500
1/23/26	01-001	Labor	Site supervisor (16 weeks)	Payroll	\$1,500
1/23/26	04-001	Equipment	Excavator rental	United Rentals	\$1,400
1/27/26	02-001	Materials	Lumber package	B4 Lumber	\$14,800
1/29/26	01-001	Labor	Site supervisor (16 weeks)	Payroll	\$1,500
1/30/26	01-002	Labor	Carpentry crew	Payroll	\$1,500
2/3/26	01-002	Labor	Carpentry crew	Payroll	\$1,500
2/5/26	05-003	Overhead	Project management overhead	Halloran Construction	\$1,200
2/6/26	01-001	Labor	Site supervisor (16 weeks)	Payroll	\$1,500
2/10/26	02-002	Materials	Roofing materials	ABC Supply	\$4,200
2/12/26	01-001	Labor	Site supervisor (16 weeks)	Payroll	\$1,500
2/13/26	01-002	Labor	Carpentry crew	Payroll	\$1,500
2/17/26	02-003	Materials	Roofing materials	ABC Supply	\$1,300
2/18/26	02-003	Materials	Windows and exterior doors	Pella Direct	\$8,400
2/20/26	01-001	Labor	Site supervisor (16 weeks)	Payroll	\$1,500
2/22/26	04-003	Equipment	Dumpster (3 hauls)	Waste Pro	\$400
2/26/26	03-002	Subcontractors	Electrical sub	Voltage Electric	\$4,200
2/27/26	01-001	Labor	Site supervisor (16 weeks)	Payroll	\$1,500
3/1/26	03-003	Subcontractors	Plumbing sub	Reliable Plumbing	\$1,300
3/4/26	03-004	Subcontractors	HVAC sub	Comfort Systems HVAC	\$4,000
3/5/26	01-001	Labor	Site supervisor (16 weeks)	Payroll	\$1,500
3/6/26	01-002	Labor	Carpentry crew	Payroll	\$1,700
3/9/26	05-002	Overhead	Insurance allocation	Hartford Insurance	\$600
3/10/26	05-003	Overhead	Project management overhead	Halloran Construction	\$1,200
3/12/26	03-001	Subcontractors	Foundation / concrete sub	Patterson Concrete	\$6,800

Notes

Inputs are blue. The Category and Description will auto-populate based on the Code selected.

CODE	CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION
01-000	Labor	Labor
01-001	Labor	Site supervisor (16 weeks)
01-002	Labor	Carpentry crew
01-003	Labor	Cleanup / general labor
02-000	Materials	Materials
02-001	Materials	Lumber package
02-002	Materials	Roofing materials
02-003	Materials	Windows and exterior doors
02-004	Materials	Drywall and interior finishes
02-005	Materials	Trim and millwork
03-000	Subcontractors	Subcontractors
03-001	Subcontractors	Foundation / concrete sub
03-002	Subcontractors	Electrical sub
03-003	Subcontractors	Plumbing sub
03-004	Subcontractors	HVAC sub
03-005	Subcontractors	Painting sub
04-000	Equipment	Equipment
04-001	Equipment	Excavator rental
04-002	Equipment	Scaffolding rental
04-003	Equipment	Dumpster (3 hauls)
05-000	Overhead	Overhead
05-001	Overhead	Permits and inspection fees
05-002	Overhead	Insurance allocation
05-003	Overhead	Project management overhead
05-004	Materials	CO #1: Upgraded kitchen window package
05-005	Subcontractors	CO #2: Add bathroom plumbing rough

FIGURE 03 · ACTUAL TAB — LOG EVERY TRANSACTION; COLUMNS D & E AUTO-FILL FROM THE CODE

STEP 04 · ~2 MINUTES PER CO

Add change orders as they're approved.

Change orders live in the Budget tab — not a separate sheet. Add them at the bottom of your budget.

- 1 Add a ○ row labelled "Change Orders" in column D. This groups all your COs under one heading.
- 2 Type **C0** in column G of that ○ row to flag it.
- 3 For each change order, add a ◆ row beneath:
 - 4 Column D — leave as "Change Orders" (or set a per-CO category if you prefer)
 - 5 Column E — C0-001 – Add under-cabinet lighting [Approved]
 - 6 Column F — amount (negative for credits or owner-directed deductions)
 - 7 Column G — type **C0** again

The dashboard's **Revised Contract Value** and **Change Order Value** boxes auto-include any row flagged with **C0** in column G. Add as many COs as the job picks up — the dashboard expands to show every one.

APPROVED VS PENDING

The template doesn't enforce a status field. COs are either in the budget — rolled into Revised Contract Value — or they're not. Common approach:

- | | |
|-----------------|---|
| APPROVED | Add it. |
| PENDING | Add it; prefix description with [PENDING] . |
| DENIED | Don't add it — or add it and prefix [DENIED] to keep a record. |

STEP 05 • YOUR MONDAY-MORNING VIEW

Read the dashboard.

The Budget vs Actual tab is where you find out if you're winning or losing. Everything updates automatically. Don't type anywhere on this tab — except the two inputs at the top.

TWO INPUTS YOU DO EDIT

CELL	WHAT IT DOES
I4 • % completed	Your honest assessment of physical progress (e.g., 0.80 = 80% done). Drives the "Project Completed" bar and the projected estimate-at-completion math.
I7 • Status	Dropdown — Not Started, In Progress, On Hold, Complete, Closed. Set as the job progresses.

WHAT THE DASHBOARD TELLS YOU

At a glance — top section

- **Contract Value** • Revised contract (original + approved COs)
- **Actual Cost to Date** • Every dollar logged on the Actual tab, summed
- **Change Order Value** • Total of all CO rows
- **Remaining Budget** • Budget – Actual to date
- **Margin (\$)** and **Margin (%)** • Contract Value – projected total cost

Cost vs Progress — two bars, one truth

- **Cost Budget Consumed** — what % of budget you've spent
- **Project Completed** — what % done (from your I4 input)

The line below tells you whether you're tracking ahead, behind, or matching progress. **If you're spending faster than you're building, this is where you see it first.**

STEP 05 · CONTINUED

How to read it like a contractor.

Four signals to watch every week. Each one tells you something different about the health of the job.

SIGNAL	WHAT IT MEANS
Margin (%) trending below your bid margin	You're losing money. Investigate.
Cost Budget Consumed > Project Completed	Spending faster than building. Overruns likely coming.
Cost Budget Consumed < Project Completed	Ahead of schedule cost-wise. Either good execution — or you're skipping work.
Big negative in the Remaining column on one line	That line item blew up. Common with steel, framing, sub work that goes over.

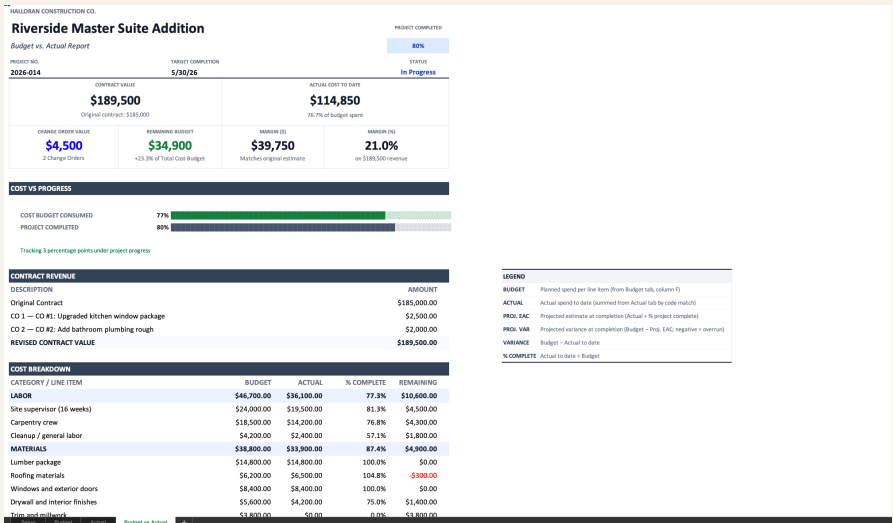


FIGURE 04 · BUDGET VS ACTUAL DASHBOARD — TOP SECTION

STEP 05 · CONTINUED · THE FULL BREAKDOWN

The full breakdown.

Below the top section, the dashboard shows your contract revenue (original contract + each CO + revised total) and a cost breakdown by category. One row per ○ category — Labor, Materials, etc. — with Budget, Actual, % Complete, and Remaining. Each ◆ line item appears beneath its category. A negative number in the Remaining column means that line is over budget.

THE DASHBOARD REFLOWS AROUND YOUR BUDGET

Five categories with 30 line items? It shows five categories with 30 line items. Nothing to resize, nothing to hide. Build the budget the way the job is shaped, and the report keeps up.

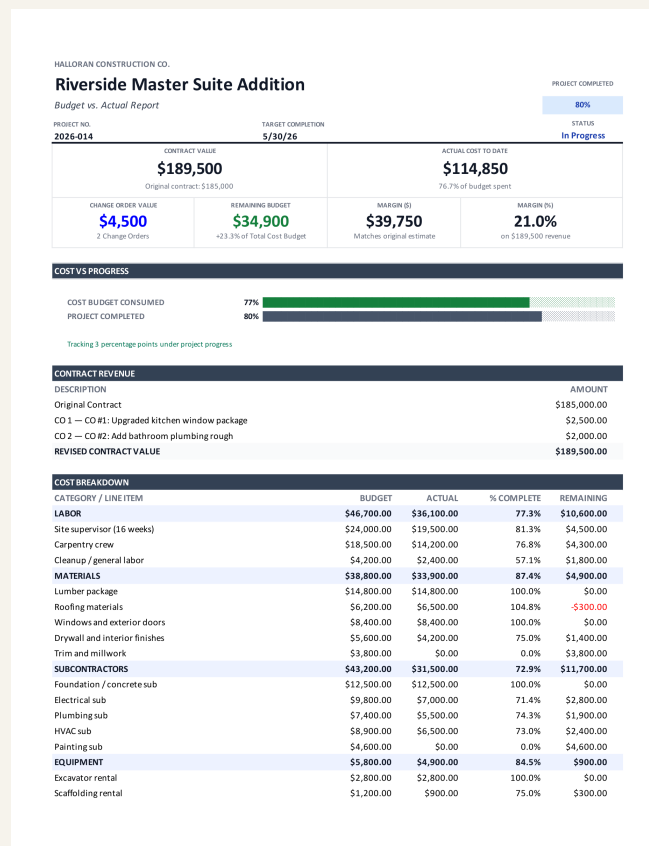


FIGURE 05 · THE DASHBOARD'S PRINT VIEW — A ONE-PAGE CLIENT-READY SUMMARY

STEP 06 · CLOSE OUT THE JOB

Final margin. Archive the file. Done.

When the job is done, four small actions turn the workbook into a permanent record.

- 1 Make sure every invoice and payment is logged on the Actual tab.
- 2 Confirm any pending change orders are either approved + included, or denied + removed.
- 3 Set I4 (Project % completed) = 1 (100%).
- 4 Set I7 (Status) = Closed.

The dashboard's Margin number is now your final job profitability. Save a copy of the workbook with the project number in the filename — that's your archived job record.

TWO-MINUTE SANITY CHECK BEFORE YOU SHIP A JOB TO A CLIENT

Before sending a customer-facing summary, glance at these:

1. **Setup tab** — Is the project number, owner name, and contract value right?
2. **Dashboard I7** — Is the status what you'd expect?
3. **Dashboard I4** — Is the % complete a realistic estimate, not stale?
4. **Cost Breakdown** — Any line item with a big red negative in the Remaining column?
5. **Change Orders section** — Are all approved COs listed and pending ones either included or noted?

If any of these surprise you, the dashboard is doing its job.

REFERENCE A · THE #1 THING PEOPLE GET WRONG

How to add new rows.

The dashboard handles as many rows as you give it. But on the Budget and Actual tabs, new rows still need to inherit the template's formulas, formatting, and dropdowns — and those are baked into existing rows, not into fresh blank ones.

Don't just type into a blank row at the bottom. Copy an existing row first.

THE RIGHT WAY — COPY, PASTE, THEN CLEAR

- 1 **Select an existing row** that already has data — any populated row in the same table will do. Click the row number on the left to highlight the entire row.
- 2 **Copy it** (⌘+C on Mac, Ctrl+C on Windows), then **right-click the row where you want the new row to live** and choose **Insert Copied Cells** (or paste the row, depending on your Excel version).
- 3 **Now clear the data** out of the new row — select the cells with the copied data and press Delete. **Do not delete the row itself**, just the values inside the cells you'd normally type into. Leave the formula columns alone — they'll auto-fill once you enter a code or marker.

The new row inherits all the right formatting, conditional formatting, dropdowns, and any hidden helper logic. Now type your new data into it.

REFERENCE A · CONTINUED

Where to insert & what goes wrong.

Inserting in the middle vs appending at the bottom — same technique, slightly different result. And the three quiet failure modes if you skip it.

WHERE TO INSERT VS APPEND

Inserting in the middle of a table — e.g., a new ♦ line between two existing categories on the Budget tab — use the Insert Copied Cells method. Auto-generated codes will renumber themselves.

Appending at the bottom — e.g., the 9th actual entry when there are 8 above — same method, just paste it below the last populated row.

WHAT GOES WRONG IF YOU SKIP THIS

- **Plain typing into a blank row past the demo data:** on the Actual tab, the Category and Description columns stay blank because the lookup formulas don't extend past where the master had them.
- **Dragging a row down to copy formatting:** sometimes works, sometimes silently breaks. Copy-paste is reliable.
- **Using "Insert → Row" with a blank row:** you get a row with no formulas, no formatting, no dropdowns. Looks fine, won't work.

QUICK REFERENCE

WHERE	WHAT TO COPY
Adding a ♦ line item under an existing Budget category	Any other ♦ row in that table
Adding a new ○ category header in Budget	Any other ○ row
Adding a new transaction in Actual	Any populated row in the Actual table
Adding a change order row in Budget	An existing CO row — one with CO in column G

REFERENCE B

Limits & cheat sheet.

The big stuff has no practical cap. Two small structural constraints, plus the recipes you'll reach for most often.

LIMITS TO KNOW ABOUT

ITEM	LIMIT	NOTES
Categories	9	The dropdown is sourced from I9:I17 on the Budget tab. Edit those cells to set your own.
Description text per cell	~40 chars	Longer text gets cut off visually (still stored in the cell).

Everything else — number of line items, number of actual transactions, number of change orders — add as many as the job needs.

COMMON TASKS

TASK	HOW
Add a new line item to an existing category	See Reference A — copy any existing ♦ row, insert it, clear the data, type your new line.
Change a category name	On Budget tab, edit I9:I17 . Existing rows in column D will need re-selection from the new dropdown.
Backdate an actual	Type the older date in column B. Order doesn't matter on the Actual tab.
Reverse / cancel an actual	Don't delete the original (you lose history). Add a new row, same code, negative amount.
Multiple invoices from the same vendor	Each invoice is its own row. Same vendor, different date, different amount.

REFERENCE B · CONTINUED

Troubleshooting.

Five things people email about most often. If you hit a snag that's not on this list, support@mightytemplate.com — we usually reply same day.

"My code in Actual shows blank Category and Description"

The code you typed (or selected) doesn't exist in the Budget tab's column C. Either fix the code or add the missing budget line.

"My dashboard total doesn't match my hand-calculated sum"

Open the file in Excel (not Numbers, not Google Sheets) and press **F9** to force recalc. Excel sometimes caches stale values when files come in from elsewhere.

"My conditional formatting on the dashboard disappeared"

The file was probably saved through a non-Excel program (Numbers, Google Sheets, openpyxl). Open the original in Excel, copy your data into a fresh copy of the template.

"I deleted a formula by accident"

Easiest fix: open a fresh copy of the template, copy your data over — Setup values, then Budget rows, then Actual rows. The formulas regenerate.

"I want more than 9 categories"

The template caps at 9 because the dropdown is sourced from a 9-cell range. If you genuinely need more, lump similar trades together — "All Subs" instead of separate Electrical, Plumbing, HVAC at the top level. Track those as line items under one "Subcontractors" category.

REFERENCE C · SAMPLE REPORT

What the dashboard prints like.

The Budget vs Actual tab is print-formatted. Print to PDF (or to paper) and you get a clean, client-ready summary like the page that follows.

This is the exact output for a sample job — *Riverside Master Suite Addition*, \$189,500 revised contract, two approved change orders, 80% complete. Yours will reflow around the size of your own budget; the format is identical.

SEE IT ON THE NEXT PAGE



The full sample report — turn the page.

HALLORAN CONSTRUCTION CO.

Riverside Master Suite Addition

Budget vs. Actual Report

PROJECT COMPLETED

80%

PROJECT NO.
2026-014

TARGET COMPLETION
5/30/26

STATUS
In Progress

CONTRACT VALUE \$189,500 Original contract: \$185,000		ACTUAL COST TO DATE \$114,850 76.7% of budget spent	
CHANGE ORDER VALUE \$4,500 2 Change Orders	REMAINING BUDGET \$34,900 +23.3% of Total Cost Budget	MARGIN (\$) \$39,750 Matches original estimate	MARGIN (%) 21.0% on \$189,500 revenue

COST VS PROGRESS



Tracking 3 percentage points under project progress

CONTRACT REVENUE

DESCRIPTION	AMOUNT
Original Contract	\$185,000.00
CO 1 — CO #1: Upgraded kitchen window package	\$2,500.00
CO 2 — CO #2: Add bathroom plumbing rough	\$2,000.00
REVISED CONTRACT VALUE	\$189,500.00

COST BREAKDOWN

CATEGORY / LINE ITEM	BUDGET	ACTUAL	% COMPLETE	REMAINING
LABOR	\$46,700.00	\$36,100.00	77.3%	\$10,600.00
Site supervisor (16 weeks)	\$24,000.00	\$19,500.00	81.3%	\$4,500.00
Carpentry crew	\$18,500.00	\$14,200.00	76.8%	\$4,300.00
Cleanup / general labor	\$4,200.00	\$2,400.00	57.1%	\$1,800.00
MATERIALS	\$38,800.00	\$33,900.00	87.4%	\$4,900.00
Lumber package	\$14,800.00	\$14,800.00	100.0%	\$0.00
Roofing materials	\$6,200.00	\$6,500.00	104.8%	-\$300.00
Windows and exterior doors	\$8,400.00	\$8,400.00	100.0%	\$0.00
Drywall and interior finishes	\$5,600.00	\$4,200.00	75.0%	\$1,400.00
Trim and millwork	\$3,800.00	\$0.00	0.0%	\$3,800.00
SUBCONTRACTORS	\$43,200.00	\$31,500.00	72.9%	\$11,700.00
Foundation / concrete sub	\$12,500.00	\$12,500.00	100.0%	\$0.00
Electrical sub	\$9,800.00	\$7,000.00	71.4%	\$2,800.00
Plumbing sub	\$7,400.00	\$5,500.00	74.3%	\$1,900.00
HVAC sub	\$8,900.00	\$6,500.00	73.0%	\$2,400.00
Painting sub	\$4,600.00	\$0.00	0.0%	\$4,600.00
EQUIPMENT	\$5,800.00	\$4,900.00	84.5%	\$900.00
Excavator rental	\$2,800.00	\$2,800.00	100.0%	\$0.00
Scaffolding rental	\$1,200.00	\$900.00	75.0%	\$300.00

Dumpster (3 hauls)	\$1,800.00	\$1,200.00	66.7%	\$600.00
OVERHEAD	\$10,750.00	\$8,450.00	78.6%	\$2,300.00
Permits and inspection fees	\$1,850.00	\$1,850.00	100.0%	\$0.00
Insurance allocation	\$2,400.00	\$1,800.00	75.0%	\$600.00
Project management overhead	\$6,500.00	\$4,800.00	73.8%	\$1,700.00
TOTAL PROJECT COST	\$145,250.00	\$114,850.00	79.1%	\$30,400.00

SUPPORT

We're here when you get stuck.

Email support@mightytemplate.com with your question and we'll get back to you the same business day.