

Document Approval Process

Administrator Configuration Guide

Version: October 2026 — tested on Mayan EDMS 4.10, 4.11 and 4.12

Audience: Mayan EDMS Administrators

Covers: Workflow setup, document types, roles, permissions, email notifications

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1. Overview

1.1 What the Approvals module does

The **Approvals** module extends Mayan EDMS workflows with a structured, multi-party approval mechanism. When a document enters a workflow state, an *Approval Action* (on-entry) automatically creates individual approval requests — one per designated approver. Each approver casts a vote (Approve / Reject) from their personal inbox. Once the configured quorum is reached, the workflow transition fires automatically.

Key capabilities:

- **Flexible quorum rules:** Any, All, or Fraction (N out of M).
- **Multi-group AND logic:** every approver group must pass independently.
- **Anonymous voting:** optionally hide individual votes from requesters and approvers.
- **Deadlines & automatic expiry:** pending votes expire after N days.
- **Reminders:** automated reminder emails after N days without a vote.
- **Escalation:** notify a manager when a request stalls past a threshold.
- **Document checkout:** document is locked during approval, preventing concurrent edits.
- **Audit trail:** every vote, expiry, and outcome is recorded and exportable as CSV.

1.2 Component map

Component	Where configured	Purpose
Document Type	Documents › Document Types	Groups documents; workflows are attached here.
Workflow	Workflows › Workflows	State machine that drives the document lifecycle.
Workflow State	Inside a Workflow	A stage in the lifecycle (Draft, Awaiting Approval, ...). States have <i>on-entry</i> and <i>on-exit</i> action hooks.
State Action (on-entry)	State › Actions tab	Runs automatically when a document enters the state. This is where the Approval Action is placed.
Workflow Transition	Inside a Workflow	The trigger that moves a document from one state to another.
Transition Approver	Transition › Approvers tab	Defines who approves and how many votes are required. Configured on the outgoing approval transition.
Role	Permissions › Roles	Groups users; permissions are granted to roles.
Mailing Profile	System › Setup › Mailing profiles	SMTP credentials used to send notification emails.

1.3 How state actions and transitions work together

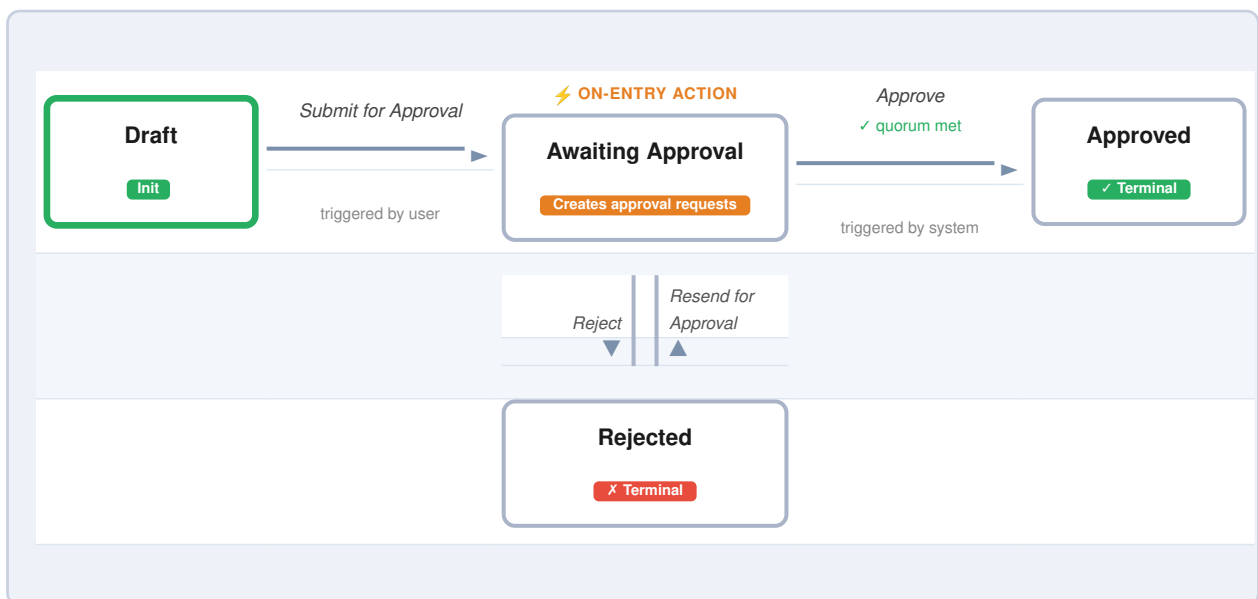
Mayan's workflow engine separates **when something happens** (state entry/exit) from **what moves a document** (transitions). Understanding this split is essential to correctly configuring an approval process.

Element	Triggered by	Role in the approval process
State on-entry action	Automatically when a document enters the state	Creates the approval requests (runs <i>Create approval requests</i>).
Transition	Manually by a user, or automatically by the system	The <i>Submit for Approval</i> transition is triggered by the requester. The <i>Approve</i> and <i>Reject</i> transitions are triggered automatically by the system once quorum is reached.
Transition Approver	Configured on the outgoing approval transition	Defines the quorum rules. The system evaluates these rules after each vote to decide whether to fire the transition.

KEY PRINCIPLE

The **Approval Action** lives on the **state** (on-entry). The **Transition Approvers** (quorum rules) live on the **transition** that leads *out* of that state. These are two different configuration screens.

The full flow looks like this:



2. Prerequisites

- Mayan EDMS 4.10, 4.11 or 4.12 with the **Approvals** app installed in `COMMON_EXTRA_APPS`: `mayan.apps.approvals.apps.ApprovalsApp` (installation: see the README of the app).
- A Celery worker that consumes the `approvals` queue: it sends the emails and runs the expiry, reminder and escalation tasks.
- Celery Beat running: it starts the expiry, reminder and escalation tasks every 15 minutes.
- At least one **Mailing profile** configured if email notifications are needed, and an email address on each user who must receive them.
- Administrator credentials (superuser or a role with full workflow and permission management rights).

WARNING

Without a worker on the `approvals` queue, no approval email is ever sent and the periodic tasks never run, even with Celery Beat running. Without Celery Beat, deadlines will never expire and reminder/escalation emails will never send. Verify that `task_expire_approval_requests`, `task_send_reminder_emails`, and `task_escalate_approval_requests` are active periodic tasks.

3. Configuration Walkthrough

STEP 1 Create Organizational Roles

Navigate to **Permissions** › **Roles** › **Create role**. Create these three roles before anything else.

Suggested role name	Who belongs here
Document Requesters	Staff who submit documents for approval.
Document Approvers	Staff who review and vote on documents.
Approval Managers	Supervisors who manage stuck approvals and receive escalation emails.

TIP

After creating a role, go to its **Users** tab and add members. Roles can also be used directly in Transition Approver configuration (role-based approver groups).

STEP 2 Create the Document Type

Navigate to **Documents** › **Document Types** › **Create document type**.

1. Enter a **Label** (e.g. *Purchase Orders*).
2. Configure retention and storage settings as needed.
3. Save. You will link the workflow in Step 6.

STEP 3 Design the Workflow (states and transitions)

Navigate to **Workflows** › **Workflows** › **Create workflow**.

3a — Create the Workflow

- **Label:** e.g. *Purchase Order Approval*
- **Internal name:** e.g. `po_approval` (alphanumeric, no spaces)

3b — Create States

Open the workflow. Click **States** › **Create state**:

State label	Initial?	Role
Draft	✓	Starting point; document being prepared by the requester.
Awaiting Approval	—	Document is under review. The on-entry Approval Action fires here.
Approved	—	Terminal success state.
Rejected	—	Terminal rejection state.

3c — Create Transitions

Click **Transitions** › **Create transition**:

Label	Origin state	Destination state	Who triggers it
Submit for Approval	Draft	Awaiting Approval	Requester (manually, from document workflow panel).
Approve	Awaiting Approval	Approved	System (automatically when approval quorum is met).
Reject	Awaiting Approval	Rejected	System (automatically when rejection quorum is met).

NOTE — WRITE DOWN EXACT LABELS

Write down the exact labels of *Approve* and *Reject*. You will need them verbatim when configuring the Approval Action in Step 4.

STEP 4 Add the Approval Action to the "Awaiting Approval" State

The Approval Action is an **on-entry action on the state** — it fires automatically every time a document enters "Awaiting Approval".

1. Open the workflow. Click **States**. Click *Awaiting Approval*.
2. Go to the **Actions** tab.
3. Click **Create action**. Set **When** to *On entry*.
4. Select **Create approval requests** from the action type list.
5. Fill in the fields described in Section 4. At minimum:
 - **Target transition label:** `Approve` (exact label of the outgoing approval transition)
 - **Rejection transition label:** `Reject` (exact label of the outgoing rejection transition)
6. Save the action.

WARNING — ON-ENTRY, NOT ON-EXIT

Always set **When = On entry**. An on-exit action would fire when the document *leaves* the state — too late to create requests for the current review cycle.

WARNING — TRANSITION LABELS MUST MATCH EXACTLY

The *Target transition label* and *Rejection transition label* are matched by exact string comparison. A typo or extra space silently prevents the workflow from advancing. Copy-paste the labels from the Transitions list.

STEP 5 Configure Transition Approvers

Transition Approvers define *who* must vote and *how many* votes are required. They are configured on the **outgoing approval transition** — the *Approve* transition that leads *out of* "Awaiting Approval" — not on the state itself.

1. Open the workflow. Click **Transitions**. Click *Approve*.
2. Go to the **Approvers** tab. Click **Add approver group**.
3. Configure the fields described in Section 5.
4. Add more approver groups if you need multi-group AND logic (Section 7).

WHY IS THIS ON THE TRANSITION, NOT THE STATE?

The quorum rule is conceptually a property of the *transition*: it defines what is needed to *leave* the "Awaiting Approval" state via the approval path. Different outgoing transitions can have different approver groups (e.g. a fast-track approval path with a lower quorum).

TIP — ROLE-BASED VS USER-BASED APPROVERS

Prefer role-based groups. When staff changes, only update role membership — no workflow reconfiguration needed.

STEP 6 Link the Workflow to the Document Type

1. Navigate to **Documents** > **Document Types**. Click your document type.
2. Go to the **Workflows** tab. Click **Add workflow**.
3. Select your approval workflow. Save.

New documents of this type will automatically receive a workflow instance starting in the initial state (Draft). Existing documents are **not** affected retroactively.

STEP 7 Grant Permissions via ACLs

In Mayan, permissions are granted by adding a role to the **ACL of each object** the role needs to access — the Document Type and the Workflow. This object-level approach ensures users only see what they have been explicitly granted access to.

Only the **All approval requests** list and the **Audit report** (and its CSV export) need a global permission: *Manage all approval requests* on the role's **Permissions** tab (Permissions > Roles), because they cover every document (Step 7c).

7a — Document Type ACL

Navigate to the **Document Type**. Click the **ACL** tab. Click **New ACL**, select the role, then grant:

Permission	Requesters	Approvers	Managers
View document type	✓	✓	✓
View documents	✓	✓	✓

Permission	Requesters	Approvers	Managers
Create documents	✓	—	—
Create new document files	✓	—	—
View workflow templates	✓	✓	✓
Transition workflow instances	✓	—	✓

NOTE — DUAL ACL REQUIREMENT FOR SUBMITTING DOCUMENTS

To trigger the *Submit for Approval* transition, a requester needs **View workflow templates** and **Transition workflow instances** granted on **both** the Document Type ACL *and* the Workflow ACL. Granting them on the Workflow ACL alone is not sufficient — Mayan checks the permission on the document (Document Type ACL) to open the transition page, and on the transition (Workflow ACL) to offer it.

SECURITY WARNING — TRUSTED PERMISSION

Users granted **Transition workflow instances** can manually trigger *any* workflow transition that is available on a document — including the *Approve* and *Reject* transitions — entirely bypassing the approval quorum. This effectively gives them the power to unilaterally approve or reject a document without going through the vote process.

Restrict this permission to a small group of trusted users (e.g. document owners or senior administrators). Do **not** grant it to general requester roles unless you explicitly intend to allow manual workflow overrides.

7b — Workflow ACL

Navigate to the **Workflow**. Click the **ACL** tab. Click **New ACL**, select the role, then grant:

Permission	Requesters	Approvers	Managers
View workflow templates	✓	✓	✓
Transition workflow instances	✓	—	✓

VIEW WORKFLOW TEMPLATES — ON BOTH ACLS

Mayan has no separate permission for the workflow running on a document. **View workflow templates**, granted on **both** the Document Type ACL and the Workflow ACL, shows the *Workflows* tab of the documents (current state, history) and the workflow definition (states, transitions, read only). Requesters need it to trigger the *Submit for Approval* transition; approvers need it to see where a document stands when they open it from their inbox.

7c — Document Approvals permissions

Permissions in the *Document approvals* namespace control access to vote details, approver configuration and the management screens. Each one is granted where it applies:

Permission	Grant it on	Gives access to
View transition approvers	Workflow ACL	The <i>Approvers</i> tab of the transitions of that workflow.
Configure transition approvers	Workflow ACL	Adding approver groups to those transitions.
Edit transition approvers	Workflow ACL	Changing those approver groups.
Delete transition approvers	Workflow ACL	Deleting those approver groups.
View vote details (including anonymous)	Document Type ACL	Who voted what on the documents of that type, even when votes are anonymous.
Manage all approval requests	Global (role's Permissions tab)	The <i>All approval requests</i> list and the <i>Audit report</i> with its CSV export, for every document. On a Document Type ACL it only opens the vote details of the documents of that type.

Any of these permissions can also be granted **globally** (Permissions › Roles › **Permissions** tab): it then applies to every workflow and document type — reserve this for full administrators.

TIP — APPROVERS DO NOT NEED "TRANSITION WORKFLOW INSTANCES"

Approvers cast votes through the Approvals inbox. The system executes the Approve/Reject transition automatically on their behalf. Approvers only need *View documents* and *View workflow templates* on the Document Type, and *View workflow templates* on the Workflow.

WHY ACLS INSTEAD OF GLOBAL ROLE PERMISSIONS?

Adding permissions directly to a role (globally) grants access to *all objects* of that type in the system. Using ACLs on each Document Type and Workflow ensures users only see and interact with the specific objects they are supposed to — which is the correct approach for a multi-team environment.

STEP 8 Configure Email Notifications (Mailing Profile)

1. Navigate to **System › Setup › Mailing profiles** and create a profile (e.g. *Django SMTP backend*).
2. Enter your SMTP server details. Use **Test** to send a test email.
3. Note the numeric **ID** in the address of its edit page (e.g. `/mailer/mailling_profiles/3/edit/` → ID = **3**).
4. Enter this ID in the **Mailing profile ID** field of the Approval Action and enable **Send email notification**.

Emails sent by the system, each in the recipient's language (the language of their Mayan user profile), to users who have an email address:

Event	Recipients
New approval request created	Each assigned approver
Reminder (after N days without vote)	Each pending approver
Document approved	All approvers + requester
Document rejected	All approvers + requester
Vote no longer needed (expired / overridden)	Pending approvers whose vote was cancelled
Escalation (stalled beyond threshold)	Configured escalation user or role

4. Reference: Approval Action Fields

Configured on the "Awaiting Approval" state › Actions tab › On entry.

REQUIRED PERMISSION — WORKFLOW TEMPLATE EDIT

All fields in this section (transition labels, deadline, email settings, document checkout, anonymity) are part of the **Workflow State Action** configuration. Editing them requires the *Edit workflow templates* permission on the Workflow — a workflow administration privilege, not an Approvals-specific one. Delegate this to your workflow administrators only, not to team leads or department managers.

Approval configuration

Field	Required	Description
Target transition label	*	Exact label of the outgoing transition to fire when approval quorum is reached (e.g. <code>Approve</code>). Supports template syntax.
Rejection transition label	opt.	Exact label of the outgoing transition to fire on definitive rejection (e.g. <code>Reject</code>). Leave blank to stay in the current state on rejection.
Deadline (days)	opt.	Days until the approval request expires. 0 = no deadline. Requires Celery Beat.

Email notification

Field	Required	Description
Send email notification	opt.	Enable to send emails to approvers and the requester.
Mailing profile ID	opt.	Numeric ID of the mailing profile. Required when Send email is enabled.
Reminder (days)	opt.	Days after creation before a reminder is sent to approvers who have not yet voted. 0 = no reminder. Only active when Send email is enabled.

Document checkout

Field	Default	Description
Checkout document during approval	On	Automatically checks out the document when approval requests are created, preventing new file uploads. Checked back in when the approval is resolved.

Anonymity

Field	Default	Description
Anonymous votes	Off	When enabled, individual votes are hidden from requesters and other approvers. Only users with <i>Manage all approval requests</i> or <i>View vote details</i> can see who voted.

5. Reference: Transition Approver Fields

Configured on the **"Approve" transition** › **Approvers tab**.

DELEGATABLE — NO WORKFLOW EDIT REQUIRED

Managing Transition Approvers only requires the transition approver permissions (*View, Configure, Edit* and *Delete transition approvers*) in the ACL of the workflow (Section 7c). A team lead or department manager can be granted them to manage who approves what in that workflow — without getting access to the workflow structure, deadlines, email settings, or anonymity configuration from Section 4.

Field	Required	Description
Approver user	either/or	A specific named user. Use for named approvals (e.g. CFO). Either this or <i>Approver role</i> must be set.
Approver role	either/or	All members of this role receive an approval request. Recommended for team-based workflows.
Quorum type	*	ANY / ALL / FRACTION. See Section 8.
Quorum count	cond.	Number of approvals required. Used only when quorum type is <i>Fraction</i> .
Escalation: after (days)	opt.	If pending this many days without a vote, an escalation email is sent. Celery Beat required.
Escalation: notify user / role	opt.	Who to notify when escalation triggers. Accepts a specific user or a role (all members notified).

6. Reference: Permission Table

R = Requester A = Approver M = Manager/Admin

ACL-DT = set on Document Type ACL **ACL-WF** = set on Workflow ACL **Global** = set on a Role's Permissions tab (no object scoping — applies system-wide)

Permission	Namespace	R	A	M	Where
View document type	Document types	✓	✓	✓	ACL-DT
View documents	Documents	✓	✓	✓	ACL-DT
Create documents	Documents	✓	—	—	ACL-DT
Create new document files	Documents	✓	—	—	ACL-DT
View workflow templates	Document workflows	✓	✓	✓	ACL-DT & ACL-WF
Transition workflow instances	Document workflows	✓	—	✓	ACL-DT & ACL-WF
Manage all approval requests	Document approvals	—	—	✓	Global (lists, audit); ACL-DT: vote details only
View vote details (including anonymous)	Document approvals	—	—	✓	ACL-DT or Global
View transition approvers	Document approvals	—	—	✓	ACL-WF or Global
Configure transition approvers	Document approvals	—	—	✓	ACL-WF or Global
Edit transition approvers	Document approvals	—	—	✓	ACL-WF or Global
Delete transition approvers	Document approvals	—	—	✓	ACL-WF or Global

DOCUMENT APPROVALS PERMISSIONS — ACL VS GLOBAL

The *Document approvals* permissions can be granted in two ways:

- **ACL on an object:** the transition approver permissions on a **Workflow**, the vote permissions on a **Document Type**. For example, granting the transition approver permissions on the "Purchase Order Approval" workflow lets a team lead manage the approvers of that workflow only — not of any other workflow.
- **Global on a Role** (Permissions > Roles > Permissions tab): no object restriction — the permission applies across the entire system. Required for the *All approval requests* list and the *Audit report*; otherwise reserve for full administrators.

APPROVERS — NO APPROVALS-NAMESPACE PERMISSION NEEDED

Approvers access their requests through **Approvals** › **My approvals** automatically. No Approvals-namespace permission is required to cast a vote. They only need *View documents* and *View workflow templates* via the Document Type and Workflow ACLs to open the reviewed document.

7. Multi-Group AND Logic

A transition can have **multiple Transition Approver groups**. The transition fires only when **all groups** have independently reached their quorum. A definitive rejection by **any one group** immediately blocks the transition.

Group 1 verdict	Group 2 verdict	Overall outcome
✓ Approved	✓ Approved	Transition fires (Approved)
✓ Approved	✗ Rejected	Rejected immediately
✓ Approved	⌚ Pending	Waiting — no action yet
✗ Rejected	⌚ Pending	Rejected immediately
⌚ Pending	⌚ Pending	Waiting — no action yet

Example: A procurement approval requiring both the *Finance team* (ANY quorum) and the *Department Head* (ALL quorum, one named user) to approve independently. Configure two approver groups on the *Approve* transition.

8. Quorum Types Explained

Type	Approval fires when...	Rejection fires when...	Best for
ANY	At least 1 member approved.	All members decided, nobody approved.	Low-risk documents; one positive vote is enough.
ALL	Every member approved (no pending votes remaining).	At least 1 member rejected.	High-risk documents; unanimous sign-off required.
FRACTION	Number of approvals ≥ Quorum count.	Remaining approvals + pending votes < Quorum count (mathematically impossible to reach).	Committees: e.g. 3 out of 5 board members must approve.

NOTE ON ALL AND EXPIRY

With quorum type ALL, an approver whose request expires *without voting* counts against the group — the group is considered rejected if everyone expires without casting a vote. Set a meaningful deadline and use reminders if ALL is required.

9. Troubleshooting

Symptom	Likely cause	Fix
No approval requests created after submitting.	Action on wrong state, or set to on-exit instead of on-entry, or no users in approver group.	Verify the action is on the <i>Awaiting Approval</i> state, set to On entry . Check Approvers tab on the <i>Approve</i> transition for at least one role member.
Approval action fires twice.	Action accidentally added to both on-entry and on-exit, or added to two states.	Check the Actions tab of every state. The action should appear once, on <i>Awaiting Approval</i> , on-entry only.
Transition does not fire after quorum met.	Target transition label mismatch.	Copy-paste the exact label from the Transitions list. Check for trailing spaces.
Rejection transition does not fire.	Rejection transition label blank or mismatched.	Set field to exact label of the rejection transition.
Approver does not see document in inbox.	Approval request not created for this user.	Check Approvals › All approval requests (manager view). Verify the Transition Approver role includes this user.
User gets "Permission denied" viewing a document.	Missing ACL on the Document Type or Workflow.	Add the role to the Document Type ACL with <i>View document type</i> , <i>View documents</i> and <i>View workflow templates</i> , and to the Workflow ACL with <i>View workflow templates</i> (Step 7a and 7b).
User cannot trigger "Submit for Approval".	Missing <i>Transition workflow instances</i> or <i>View workflow templates</i> on the Document Type ACL or Workflow ACL.	Both permissions must be granted on both the Document Type ACL (Step 7a) and the Workflow ACL (Step 7b) for the requester role.
Deadlines never expire / reminders never send.	Celery Beat is not running, or no worker consumes the <code>approvals</code> queue.	Verify <code>task_expire_approval_requests</code> and <code>task_send_reminder_emails</code> are active periodic tasks, the Beat process is running, and a worker lists <code>approvals</code> in its queues.
Emails not sent.	Wrong mailing profile ID, Send email is off, the user has no email address, or no worker consumes the <code>approvals</code> queue.	Confirm the ID matches the mailing profile. Test the profile from System › Setup › Mailing profiles . Check the email address in the user's profile.
Anonymous votes still visible to a user.	User has <i>Manage all approval requests</i> or <i>View vote details</i> .	Expected behaviour — those permissions override anonymity by design.

