

Sustainable Suppliers – Question Recommendations

With thanks to Rachael O'Sullivan at the Royal Opera House

There is currently a project running to speak to suppliers and theatres about standardizing the questions on sustainability credentials that theatres may want to be asking their suppliers. Whilst that work is underway, please find below some information to get started.

Emissions from your supply chain are complex and can feel out of your direct control. However, you can work with your suppliers to help them to become more sustainable. By doing so, you'll also benefit.

There is a lot of guidance and support to help organisations estimate their supply chain emissions based on spend information¹. This is a great starting point to focus attention in the right areas initially, but a more in-depth approach will be needed once this is done.

The purpose of looking at your Scope 3 supply chain emissions is to see if you can reduce them. This could be achieved by changing to more sustainable suppliers. But often relationships with suppliers are close and the product of many years, and there may be other good reasons for continuing to use them. So, there's also benefit in working with your existing suppliers to influence positive change. Beginning a conversation with them can be the first step.

In practical terms this is likely to be started off as a questionnaire or survey so you can see which of your major suppliers has already begun to think about this. Many suppliers are already receiving questions and requests for information from their customers, so it will help everyone to save time and effort if customers are asking their suppliers the same questions.

Recommended questions:

We recommend that you start with an introduction as to why you are asking these questions, to see if their business plan reflects your organisation's ambitions. Perhaps share a link to your own Environmental Policy or reference that you are working with the Theatre Green Book. An example introduction and five key questions are below:

We are trying to incorporate sustainable practices into how we work and make it part of our culture. You can find a copy of our Environmental Policy here ([link](#)). We'd like to understand more about whether sustainability is part of your core values too.

1. Do you have an Environmental Policy? If yes, please provide a copy/link
2. Do you have any environmental certifications? If yes, please specify - e.g. ISO14001, ISO50001, FSC , GOTS etc.
3. Do you have a renewable energy tariff or generate onsite renewable energy? If yes, please specify.

¹ Such as Appendix E of the Environmental Reporting Guidelines: Including streamlined energy and carbon reporting guidance, available at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5de6acc4e5274a65dc12a33a/Env-reporting-guidance_inc_SECR_31March.pdf

4. Have you calculated your company or product carbon footprint? If yes, please provide this and include information about what is included in this calculation.
5. Do you have any other sustainability information you would like to provide, including details of any environmental actions plans, or can you offer any additional services or advice to help us become more sustainable?

The responses to these questions will give an indication of how mature the supplier's sustainable practices are and potentially highlight areas for concern or further questions.

Before asking you need to decide:

- **When** are you asking the questions? i.e. during a tender process, before signing a contract, before procurement, as part of an annual exercise with your major suppliers, or all of the above? You will need to ask these questions on a regular basis (e.g. annually) if you want to be able to track progress.
- **Who** is asking the questions and gathering the responses – it is centralised or each purchaser asking? Will you have a central database of the responses?
- **What** will you do with the answers? Will you score the responses? Will you encourage suppliers to improve annually? How will you take into consideration the size of the company – a sole trader may not have an environmental policy but could be working in a sustainable manner.
- Will you set **targets** to increase the number of suppliers who answer yes? E.g. by 2030 xx% of spend will be with suppliers who have an environmental policy. We recommend setting targets to ensure action is taken and progress measured.
- What will you **communicate** with your suppliers? It is important to tell them why you are gathering the information and what you will be doing with it.
- Are these questions **enough**? They will give basic information that will usually be adequate, but in some cases you may need more, or have specific questions. If you are thinking about specific products, you may need to ask company level questions and then product specific questions. There is an example of a thorough tender questionnaire below. When asking more questions, you should focus on where suppliers are currently on their journey – where they want to get to is important, but they're not guaranteed to get there.

Once you have asked:

If you have set targets, it will be important to ask the same questions again next year. This will hopefully show that you are spending more of your money with companies that are producing their own carbon footprints and that have environmental policies, certifications and renewable tariffs, either because your existing suppliers have progressed, or because you are selecting more environmentally conscious suppliers.