



How to engage the market

A step by step guide for dialogue events



PROCURA+
European Sustainable
Procurement Network





Imprint

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Date published: January 2021

Publisher:

ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability, European Secretariat
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Public procurement as a facilitator of improvements in global supply chains regarding human and labour rights as well as environmental impacts is gaining ground. International initiatives like the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the European Commission's Green Deal showcase public procurement as an important implementation mechanism towards decent work and sustainable consumption and production.

The power of public buyers is immense, especially if they follow a strategic approach based on dialogue that uses independent monitoring to prepare engagement with their supply chains aiming for continuous and meaningful improvements.

This dialogue-based, strategic approach looks beyond the tendering phase to develop relationships with the market before and after tendering. One common format is hosting a dialogue event. However, organising such an event is not as straightforward. This guide aims to support public authorities in this regard by providing a set of practical steps on how to plan a market dialogue event, online or in-person.

Background

Make ICT Fair, funded by the European Union, is supporting public buyers procuring ICT to improve the situation of workers and communities in their ICT supply chains.

ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability and Electronics Watch worked closely with a group of public authorities on piloting socially responsible procurement of ICT hardware. A key ingredient was market dialogue in the form of five Meet your Buyer events across Europe. This guidance draws on key lessons learned from those events aiming to give public buyers inspiration on what steps to take towards meaningful engagement events.

You can learn more about the Meet your Buyer events and associated pilot procurements [here](#).

Market engagement – using dialogue in public procurement

Dialogue oriented public procurement aims to achieve strong social and environmental goals in coordination with the market. Market engagements are public processes providing equal access to all suppliers and treat all suppliers the same.

Public buyers can use market engagement events to accomplish various objectives:

- ★ Present new dialogue approach to your procurement process.
- ★ Communicate your long term strategy, your mid-term goals and short-term activities regarding your social and environmental targets.
- ★ Discuss with potential bidders and/or your existing supply chains the need for alignment, development and planning.
- ★ Consult with industry on questions around specific criteria you plan to use in the next tender.
- ★ Review with your contractors details of contract clauses on social and environmental criteria and their practical implementation during contract management.

- ★ Understand product/service readiness.
- ★ Obtain ideas to develop the next tender.
- ★ Increase your trust and credibility with suppliers.
- ★ Collaborate with other public buyers on similar procurements to develop platforms for innovation.
- ★ Focus on a one-off activity or start a process with multiple engagement methods over a longer timespan.

You can stay focused on strong social and environmental goals, whilst staying open to adapting your plans based on what you learn during market engagement. Challenging the market is important to provide innovation impulse but needs to be kept realistic. Supply chain actors can provide you with ideas during market engagement that you can use to adapt the focus of your tender, for example moving from procuring devices to leasing them.

Goal of the guide

Market engagement is a relatively new approach in public procurement. Both public buyers and their suppliers need to develop a better understanding on how to establish a long-term dialogue-based relation to strengthen social and environmental standards in global supply chains. After you have set your strategic social and environmental goals and decided that you want to develop a more dialogue oriented approach in your procurement, starting the actual dialogue is the next big step.

There are many ways to create a dialogue with supply chain actors and potential bidders. For example, you can issue a request for information, publish annual procurement plans, use surveys or organise market engagement events. This guide is for public buyers that want to understand the HOW of market engagement events.

Overview of market dialogue in the European legal frameworks

The 2014 EU Directives on public procurement regulate market dialogue, providing for preliminary market consultations, competitive dialogue and negotiated procedure with or without prior publication. It contains elements of market dialogue also in the innovative partnership.

Core EU principles always applicable in procurement, also apply to market dialogue:

- ★ Non-discrimination based on nationality;
- ★ Freedom of movements and establishment;
- ★ Economy;
- ★ Efficiency;
- ★ Equal treatment;
- ★ Transparency;
- ★ Mutual recognition;
- ★ Proportionality.

Preliminary market consultations

Preliminary market consultation is [clearly regulated](#): «before launching a procurement procedure, contracting authorities may conduct market consultations with a view to preparing the procurement and informing economic operators of their procurement plans and requirements» (Art. 40, directive 2014/24/EU).

It is a preliminary and voluntary tool that aims at identifying possible tenders and solutions, capacity building in the market, sharing knowledge on the procurement design and providing support to the bidders.

There are more ways to market engagement than hosting an event as part of preliminary market consultation. Learn more about competitive dialogue or innovation procurement and other ways to engage the market in [this overview](#) of the legal framework at European and national level.



Unsplash / Headway

6 steps to a successful market dialogue event

This guide focuses on market engagement events such as meet the buyer events which are as much about event organisation and facilitation as they are about dialogue and learning processes. Dialogue events can take various forms, online and in-person. Typically they last between half a day to a full day. Participants range from the relevant public authority staff to representatives of resellers, suppliers and service providers as well as other relevant stakeholders such as NGOs or other public buyers.

Step 1 Assess your needs

The first step is about taking a step back. Before thinking about methods, audience, dates or speakers, take a moment to clarify your needs. Here are some questions that will help you assessing your needs:

- ☐ What do we want to achieve through market engagement?
- ☐ How would a successful market engagement event look like for us?
- ☐ What do we want to communicate to the market?
- ☐ What kind of information are we looking for?
- ☐ Is this linked to a specific tender we are planning or rather a general dialogue with the market about supplier capabilities or our strategic goals?
- ☐ How will we use the information gathered? If the engagement is linked to a specific procurement, will we be able to use the gathered information to develop our current tender?
- ☐ Where in the procurement cycle does the engagement come in e.g. pre-tender or contract management?



Step 2 Collaborate & put together a team

Market engagement events are a team sport. Ideally your team should consist of a few key roles with responsibilities clearly distributed:

- ✦ The procurer or contract manager: in charge of the tender to be discussed or leading the procurement work in a product category of ICT overall.
- ✦ Head of procurement: strategic perspective, provides support and potentially access to political buy-in depending on scope of event.
- ✦ Sustainability advisor: to make the connection to sustainability goals, action plans and to lay the basis for the content.
- ✦ Administrative support: to help with the 1000 and 1 tasks ranging from invitations, event publication, arranging venue or software, building the agenda.

Should you have enough budget it is good to bring in experts from outside to help you with these tasks:

- ✦ Event facilitator: responsible before and during the event to manage the flow of exchange, guide the discussion. Enables the procurement team to focus on the content.
- ✦ External topic expert: some questions might benefit input from an expert e.g. on previous examples, conditions in the supply-chain or on a specific product group.

Experience shows that collaboration with other public buyers is key both from a perspective of learning about market dialogue from each other as well as pooling demand and addressing the market jointly. Tap into networks such as [Procura+ Sustainable Procurement Network](#) or support available through [Electronics Watch Affiliation](#).

Start thinking about whom you want to invite as a participant. Collect ideas in a wishlist. This will help you later in the planning process to keep track of contacts, who has (not) been invited and (not) confirmed their participation.



Step 3 Choose suitable methods

Coming back to the needs assessment, depending on what information you want to receive and how this event fits within a wider dialogue process, choose and prepare relevant engagement methods.

A few examples:

Market Survey

How & When

Send out a questionnaire to suppliers and advertise it as widely as possible, to gain maximum supplier participation. The survey can stand on its own or be connected to a previous or planned dialogue event.

Why

Questionnaires are a useful and a comparatively easy way to gather information quickly. They allow to assess the level of interest and capacity of suppliers and/or the wider market to deliver a solution to your need. This method helps to get clear and detailed information.

Catalogue of questions

How & When

Send out to suppliers a few days before a planned event as a briefing document that includes the criteria and clauses you are planning to include in your future strategy or tender together with a set of questions participants should prepare to give feedback on.

Why

Attendees have the opportunity to prepare. You as the buyer can ask more targeted questions and refer to them throughout the event.

Speed presentations from procurers

How & When

Presentation of your future strategy emphasising the sustainability goals, roadmap and links to upcoming tenders. Or presentation of upcoming tender with emphasis on criteria in question or to connect the tender to the wider sustainability agenda.

Why

Builds momentum for all participants to understand the relevance of the dialogue. Suppliers can learn about your future strategy or upcoming procurements.

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Step 3 Choose suitable methods

Supplier pitch slams

How & When

Suppliers indicate their interest in pitching before the event, organisers then follow up with brands to showcase piloted viable solutions. Depending on volunteers, a number between 3 to 5 pitch slams worked well. Note: brief suppliers beforehand on what type of content you are looking for.

Why

Procurers can gather useful insights on what is possible, new inspiration for tender to go even further, gaining insights on the markets capacity.

One-to-one talks

How & When

A supplier and procurer or other city representative discuss aspects in a private meeting. The city informed all parties that the interviews would not be disclosed, to ensure maximum openness.

Why

This setting holds the opportunity for in-depth discussions.

Roundtables - world café

How & When

Multiple (round) tables hosted by either different public authorities, NGOs or several procurement staff members of one authority. In rounds of >20min suppliers engage in the discussion at one table, then switch to another. Add an introduction and wrap-up as a frame.

Why

Opportunity to exchange with suppliers for more than one public authority and vice-versa. Format allows more direct in-depth discussion.

Panel discussion

How & When

5-6 speakers + moderator. Can consist of procurer(s), city sustainability manager, NGO representative, supplier, reseller and another public authority. The group is asked specific questions by the moderator as well as by the audience with the aim to facilitate an engaging discussion that looks at key items from different perspectives. Panelists need to be willing to share insights and open to engaging in discussion.

Why

Useful format to exchange on the state-of-the-art, identify tension and agreement between experts.

Supplier driven meeting

How & When

Organise at the start of the contract management phase. Participants should include: head of responsible procurement, contract manager, supplier/reseller account manager, supplier/reseller supply-chain sustainability expert, external facilitator, expert on monitoring processes. The meeting is set up as an open 'ask us anything' format, meaning that both contracting authority and supplier/reseller can address whatever questions they might have as well as to outline next steps.

Why

This is vital as to start a fruitful process that assures good communication between contracting authority and supplier/reseller. It helps reiterate the commitment towards a socially responsible supply-chain and clarify the details of contractual obligations. Discussing and committing to clear processes will help both sides managing their part of the contract.

Facilities / site visit

How & When

As part of the event invite potential suppliers to visit the facilities/ site where the solution needs to be implemented. Ensure relevant people from your organisation are there to answer their questions on the day. You could ask suppliers to sign up for a time slot for the visit to better manage attendance. The site visit could also take place virtually.

Why

For certain solutions/ services, seeing the site or facilities where products/serves need to be implemented can strongly help potential suppliers better understand your needs.

Step 4 Before the event

For in-person events: be deliberate about the space you choose e.g. modular, interactive furniture arrangement, main space + side space, easy to reach by public transport.

For an online event: be deliberate about the digital platform you deploy, depending on needs assessment, take also into account accessibility, license, max. capacity, user friendliness. Offer technical check-ups to speakers and the facilitator.

For the administrative support team member, this is the high-workload phase: being responsible for event logistics such as sending out invitations, organising catering, putting together the agenda, thinking through technical set-up.

Publish openly and widely - and draw on your wishlist of companies that you ideally want to meet. And spread the word internally.

Do an internal test-run to for instance check that the timings work well for the different agenda points.

Step 5 During the event

Facilitation is key - this is about a dialogue process. You will need a facilitator who is capable of keeping up a good flow and fruitful atmosphere, noticing and navigating challenges as they occur.

Offer participants enough time for arrival and informal introductions. Start with housekeeping rules as well as some interactive elements such as polls.

Stay focused on the goal of the event, reiterate throughout what outcome you aim for. However, also remain agile to react to delays in the agenda. Most likely, something will go differently than planned.

Capture the content of the discussion e.g. through templates, post-its, minutes.

End the event with a proper closing. Outline key themes that occurred throughout the event and mention next steps. Give opportunity for a short round of key take-aways from participants.

Step 6 After the event

The market engagement event is part of various learning processes. In the week after the event you should consider bringing in your event's team for a debrief. Discussing the results of the event on the background of your planned goals and methods you can formulate lessons learned for future market engagement events.

Setting up a brief online survey for participants, especially potential bidders, will provide you with their perspective you can use for reviewing the impact of the event.

If your event was focused on a tender you are preparing, be sure to plan in enough time for reviews.

Publish a press release on the event summarizing the goal, methods and results. You can consider using comments from the feedback online survey.



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Lessons learned

- ✦ A regular dialogue with the market (resellers and brands) on the criteria - both before and after procurements - will help to understand how far the market can be pushed in the next procurements. specific end goals have to have a step-by-step approach. (Region Stockholm, Sweden)
- ✦ Successful implementation of new criteria depends on support and cooperation with different stakeholders - talk both with politicians, legal services and suppliers. (Barcelona City Council, Spain)
- ✦ Expect the unexpected - be prepared that the market dialogue event will sweep you off your feet and afterwards your initial approach to an upcoming procurement will look different. (Municipality of Haarlem, Netherlands)
- ✦ Participate in international networks to see how things are going forward in other countries. Cross-country knowledge sharing gives valuable insight into methods, tools and procedures. (Barcelona City Council, Spain)
- ✦ Cooperate with other local authorities, observe an event, learn from the experience of others, if your authority does not have the capacity to host a market dialogue event. (City of Stavanger, Norway)
- ✦ Market dialogue can be a valuable tool to engage in the contract management phase, for examples making sure contract clauses are well understood from the start. (Greater London Authority, UK)
- ✦ Signaling that you as buyer care about supply chain transparency you drive future change with regards to how much supply chain details suppliers will provide you. (APUC Scotland, UK)

