

# Early Market Engagement for Innovation, Efficiency and Sustainability



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**Early Market Engagement for Innovation, Efficiency and Sustainability**

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This report may be cited as follows: United Nations Office for Project Services [UNOPS]. (2025). Early Market Engagement for Innovation, Efficiency and Sustainability.

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# Foreword

Public procurement is about more than buying goods. It is a powerful lever to drive innovation, efficiency and sustainability, promoting social inclusion, fairness and value for money. With over 30 years of experience across the globe, even in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, we have proven that smart procurement drives real economic, social and environmental impact.

It's about working with and delivering through suppliers who care about being innovative and ethical, reducing their environmental footprint, and contributing to the well-being of their workers and communities. It's about choosing products that deliver stronger sustainability impacts and achieving better outcomes for our projects and the communities we serve.

To do this effectively, you need to know your market inside and out. You need to understand who the suppliers are, what their capabilities are, what type of products they are offering, and what type of contractual arrangements make sense, among other aspects to consider when drafting the procurement documents.

That's where early market engagement (EME) comes in. This report is your guide to EME, showing you how to do it right and why it's essential for governments and procurement professionals who want to make a difference.

By embracing sustainable public procurement, governments can create market demand, make meaningful change and lead by example. At UNOPS, we stand ready to help lead this transformation!



**Anne-Claire Howard**  
Director, Procurement Group

# Introduction

In September 2024, world leaders adopted the Pact for the Future,<sup>1</sup> which includes the Global Digital Compact and Declaration on Future Generations ([A/RES/79/1](#)). The pact covers a broad range of issues, including peace and security, sustainable development, climate change, digital cooperation, human rights, gender, youth and future generations, and the transformation of global governance, and it's designed to turbocharge the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Among its commitments, the Pact for the Future includes a pledge by heads of state and governments to “Promote sustainable consumption and production patterns, including sustainable lifestyles, and circular economy approaches as a pathway to achieving sustainable consumption and production patterns, and zero-waste initiatives”.

Overall, public procurement represents on average 13 per cent to 20 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP)<sup>2</sup> and holds immense potential to drive the transition towards a low-carbon, circular economy. Strategically integrating sustainability and circularity principles into public procurement practices can create a powerful demand signal for sustainable production patterns.

This requires integrating environmental, social and economic considerations into all stages of the procurement process. It's about choosing suppliers who are committed to ethical practices, reducing their environmental footprint, and contributing to the well-being of their workers and communities. It's about choosing products that deliver stronger sustainability impacts and achieving better outcomes for communities. The public sector can be an early adopter of new technologies before they become mainstream. Low-carbon technologies are already

available and ready for scaling up to play a greater role in decarbonization, alongside circular economy approaches, but they require enabling environments to be deployed.

Public procurement should be approached as a highly strategic policy and implementation instrument, as well as a driver of transformation and innovation towards achieving sustainability and circularity. This is the spirit of SDG target 12.7, which aims to “Promote public procurement practices that are sustainable, in accordance with national policies and priorities”.<sup>3</sup>

As a reference from the built environment, the role of public procurement has also been recognized by the Declaration de Chaillot,<sup>4</sup> which calls on governments to commit to “leading by example through ambitious procurement policies with particular attention to public building procurements”. This declaration was adopted by representatives of more than 70 countries in March 2024, and it reiterates that with the acceleration of climate change, buildings will increasingly be exposed to climate-related risks, particularly affecting developing countries and cities.

Policies beyond the scope of public procurement, such as those related to circular economy, building codes, waste management, sustainable consumption and financial incentives, play a crucial role in fostering an enabling ecosystem. While these policies fall outside public procurement's direct scope, they remain within the public sector's purview. This underscores the need for a national, holistic roadmap that leverages public procurement as a catalyst for change, sets an example and supports the creation of enabling conditions.

1. United Nations, [Pact for the Future, Global Digital Compact and Declaration on Future Generations](#), A/RES/79/1, United Nations, September 2024.

2. World Bank Group, 'Global Public Procurement Database: Share, Compare, Improve!', 23 March 2020, <[www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2020/03/23/global-public-procurement-database-share-compare-improve](http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2020/03/23/global-public-procurement-database-share-compare-improve)>.

3. United Nations Environment Programme, 'SDG - 12.7 target and indicator on Sustainable Public Procurement implementation', <[www.unep.org/explore-topics/resource-efficiency/what-we-do/sustainable-public-procurement/sdg-127-target-and](http://www.unep.org/explore-topics/resource-efficiency/what-we-do/sustainable-public-procurement/sdg-127-target-and)>.

4. A foundational document for international cooperation that will enable progress towards a rapid, fair and effective transition of the construction sector, adopted by representatives of 70 countries in 2024. See United Nations Environment Programme, 'Buildings and Climate Global Forum – Declaration de Chaillot', UNEP, Paris, 8 March 2024, <[www.unep.org/news-and-stories/press-release/buildings-and-climate-global-forum-declaration-de-chaillot](http://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/press-release/buildings-and-climate-global-forum-declaration-de-chaillot)>.



# Importance of early market engagement in public procurement

Why should public procurement officers carry out early market engagement? Imagine this scenario: A team has successfully completed the design and planning stages of an infrastructure project, a building, carefully considering aspects such as sustainability and resilience. With these milestones achieved, it's time to launch the tendering process.

However, to their disappointment, the process fails to attract the expected number of bids. They know there are companies out there, so why did they choose not to participate? Was it due to overly stringent criteria? A lack of clarity in the requirements? Perhaps the project size wasn't enticing enough. Or even worse – there aren't enough qualified companies in the market to begin with.

Regret sinks in as the team recalls their decision to forgo early market engagement activities, convinced at the time that they weren't necessary. Now, it's clear that decision might have been a critical misstep.

According to the results of the 2022 Survey on Green Public Procurement, carried out by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), only 50 per cent of countries provide public procurement practitioners with guidance on how to engage with private contractors and gauge the market's capacity to respond to sustainability requirements.<sup>5</sup>

Tenders with no or few compliant bidders, submissions exceeding the budget, or cancelled tenders are all red flags that may indicate a need for early market engagement. Such engagement can provide a better understanding of the market before launching a tender.

## Purpose of the publication

Despite its many benefits, valid concerns about lack of transparency (and corruption) in practice hinder market engagement.<sup>6</sup> This guide aims to discuss how these risks can be mitigated through open and transparent market engagement. The purpose of this publication is to raise awareness among governments, procurement practitioners and other public procurement stakeholders about the importance of early market engagement in achieving value for money and advancing sustainability goals.

The publication aims to provide practitioners and actors within the public sector with a starting point to:

- Build their understanding of the concept of early market engagement and its benefits.
- Identify early market engagement mechanisms that can be implemented.

Which early market engagement mechanisms are appropriate in a specific context will depend on the complexity of the procurement subject matter, the market, and of course the country's public procurement framework.

This document focuses on early market engagement while recognizing that it is deeply interconnected with procurement strategy. Effective market engagement provides input to refine the procurement strategy.

5. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, [Harnessing Public Procurement for the Green Transition: Good Practices in OECD Countries](#), OECD Public Governance Reviews, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2024.

6. Erizaputri, Sharmila, and Ronja Bechauf, [The Role of Multilateral Development Banks for Low-Carbon Procurement in the Infrastructure Sector: IISD Report](#), International Institute for Sustainable Development, December 2024.

## Early market engagement in public procurement

A simplified public procurement process is composed of three stages:

- **Pre-tender:** identification of needs, planning and budgeting, project preparation, including definition of requirements, and the choice of procedure type.
- **Tender:** preparation of tender documents, specification of selection/award criteria, publication of tender/invitation to tender; opening, assessment and evaluation of tenders, signature of contract and notification of contract award.
- **Post-tender:** contract management in accordance with the outcome of the procurement procedure.

Early market engagement takes place prior to the launch of the procurement procedure, as part of the pre-tender stage. It may even take place as part of the preparation of tender documents, but always before the launch of the procurement procedure.

Public entities should engage with the market as early as possible in the procurement process to ensure mutual benefits. However, this approach is relatively new in many countries and is influenced by the parameters outlined in their respective public procurement frameworks.



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### Box 1. UNOPS Possibilities Forums

In 2024, a UNOPS Possibilities (UP) Forum took place in Lilongwe, Malawi. More than 50 business representatives from across the country took part in a two-day UP Forum to learn about sustainable procurement, UNOPS online tendering platforms and how to navigate the UN Global Marketplace.

The event was hosted under the framework of the European Union-funded Zantchito-Skills for Jobs Programme and attended by small and medium-sized business owners along with representatives from the Ministry of Labour of Malawi, the European Union and UNOPS.

The UP programme aims to diversify the UNOPS supplier base and ensure that the suppliers we work with share and reflect the values of the people and communities we serve. EME activities can also be incorporated in this programme as needed.

It's a common misconception that the public sector cannot engage with suppliers before initiating the procurement process. However, even though the United Nations Commission On International Trade Law (UNCITRAL) Model Law on Public Procurement does not explicitly address this, it acknowledges the significance of these phases for the effective functioning of the procurement system. As noted, "the enacting State will need to ensure that adequate laws and structures are available to deal with these phases of the procurement process: if they are not in place, the objectives of the Model Law may be frustrated."<sup>7</sup> These phases include budgeting, conducting a needs assessment, **market research and consultations**, contract administration, and resolution of performance disputes or contract termination.

Public procurement is a core element of accountability to the community at large regarding the management of public funds. Therefore, it is grounded in principles such as transparency, fair competition, value for money, efficiency and effectiveness, ethical conduct and sustainability. As a part of the public procurement process, market engagement activities need to comply with its principles, which in practice means that

7. United Nations Commission On International Trade Law, [Guide to Enactment of the UNCITRAL Model Law - on Public Procurement](#), UNCITRAL, New York, October 2014.



those activities need to be open and transparent, have defined mechanisms to adequately deal with commercial confidentiality requirements and intellectual property rights, be documented, and provide fair access to all potential suppliers. Suppliers should be informed, whether or not they take part in market engagement activities, that the procurement process will be conducted competitively.

Early market engagement is not to be confused with pre-bid engagement. Pre-bid engagement, carried out through a conference or other means, happens **after the tender documents have been issued but before the bid submission** deadline, with the purpose of providing a platform for potential bidders to ask questions and seek clarifications about the tender documents, project requirements and bid process. It has to ensure all potential bidders have access to the same information, promoting a fair and transparent bidding process. Market engagement activities are those carried out **before the tender documents are finalized and issued to the market**.



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## Box 2. Addressing barriers to restore heritage sites in Albania

UNOPS led a programme to restore over 23 significant cultural heritage sites in Albania. As one of its first projects in the country, challenges included few capable suppliers, unclear site ownership and a complex legal environment.

### Proactive engagement and research

To address the challenges, the team:

- Actively engaged with all stakeholders, in particular the government, to understand existing legal requirements and processes
- Collaborated with the government to soften market barriers
- Published a list of interventions in the government's official gazette
- Held a webinar with local and international suppliers to raise interest levels, and increase competition and transparency
- Composed a past tenders price catalogue to benchmark prices

### Flexible procurement practices

- Increased the duration of tender periods and used Expression of Interest to allow more suppliers to obtain the licenses required by the law for conservation and restoration ahead of upcoming tenders and to shortlist suppliers for backup.
- Introduced more flexible barriers to entry regarding team exclusivity, team-level licenses and accreditation, resulting in stronger cooperation with national institutions.
- Required suppliers to involve recent graduates from local universities.

### Outcome

This approach enabled effective competition and engagement with both local and international suppliers, ensuring value for money while also building local capacity in the restoration of cultural heritage.



There is no threshold below which EME should not be considered, but it's especially valuable when requirements or the anticipated interest within the market are unclear. EME helps the public sector understand the market – what's available, what's innovative, and what might be possible. By researching and talking to suppliers early on, the public sector can make better procurement decisions and bring the market along with them, laying a solid foundation to ensure there are no surprises in the next steps of the procurement process.

EME allows the public sector to do the following:

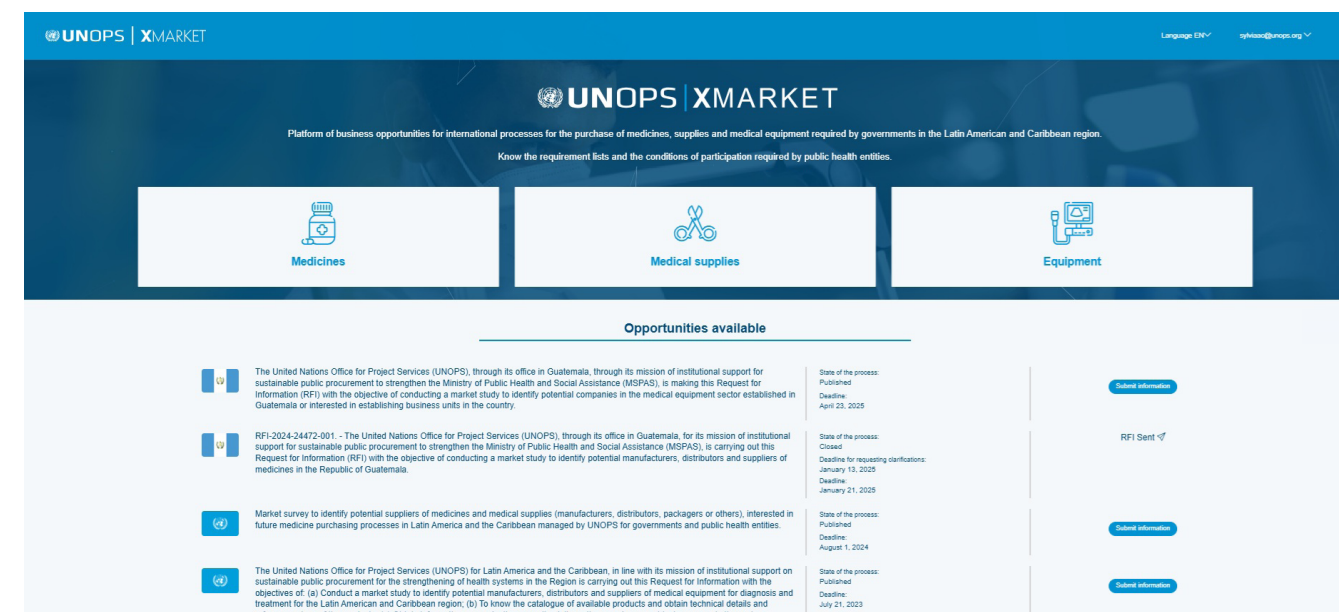
- Understand the private sector's capacity to meet requirements, including sustainability criteria, standards, labels and certifications.
- Discuss social and environmental criteria with the industry and planning their practical implementation during contract management.
- Learn about potential suppliers' expectations for projects.
- Validate sustainability risks and impacts.
- Identify potential supply chain disruptions.
- Discover new and innovative solutions.
- Understand market trends.
- Adapt the procurement strategy to address potential market limitations.

Publishing information about possible forthcoming procurement serves as a means of engaging with the market, akin to a Request for Information (RFI). However, as a one-way communication method, its benefits are limited, contingent upon your objectives. For lower-value, relatively straightforward procurement needs, internet research might suffice to identify potential suppliers. However, for more complex matters, additional EME activities may be necessary.

### Box 3. XMarket tool (Health Marketplace)

XMarket is a digital tool that automates market research, adhering to international best practices and UNOPS guidelines for early market engagement. Its user-friendly interface simplifies the RFI process, allowing suppliers to quickly and easily participate. The streamlined format, featuring easy-to-complete fields and convenient dropdown menus, enables submissions in minutes.

Case study: The Guatemala team launched an RFI for 978 items to ensure the timely delivery of supplies and product quality, meeting partner expectations. As a result, over 900 suppliers were automatically notified via email. Of those, more than 100 suppliers participated, submitting over 2,500 responses.



More information [here](#)



## Steps to carry out early market engagement

Poorly planned EME can introduce risks, such as giving certain suppliers an unfair advantage or mishandling of confidential information. The risks, however, can be managed through careful planning and structured EME. Moreover, as discussed before, EME can prevent issues later in the procurement process by addressing supplier concerns, clarifying procurement requirements and learning from the market upfront.

Think about the type of information you need, how you're going to gather it, and how you'll use it to inform your procurement strategy. Rushing in without a clear plan can result in missed opportunities or the collection of data that is difficult to apply later. The following recommendations should be tailored for your procurement needs and the procurement framework in place using professional judgment.

### Preparation

Focus on understanding the needs and begin planning how to meet them through research and market discussions. In essence, this step is about setting your goals for the engagement process. Keep in mind that understanding needs is distinct from defining prescriptive specifications. By engaging with the market, you may discover alternative ways to address those needs. For example, while you might initially consider purchasing a copying machine, market insights could reveal that procuring a copying service is a more suitable solution.

### Research

This step involves desk research to get to know the market, identify potential suppliers and spot key trends. It helps you understand where you need more information from suppliers and where you already have a solid foundation.

### Engagement

This is where the direct engagement with suppliers happens. When choosing a direct engagement method, think about how each one affects the type and depth of information you're likely to receive. For example, some forums are appropriate for detailed discussions, while others are better for high-level feedback.



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**Table 1. Main types of market engagement activities**

Request for information	One-on-one meetings
<p><b>What?</b> An instrument to conduct a market survey and obtain information to identify available or potential solutions to meet needs.</p> <p><b>Why?</b> To understand the market, refine understanding of procurement needs and identify innovations.</p> <p><b>Keep in mind:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Pros:</b> offers broad feedback on market conditions and technical possibilities.</li> <li>• <b>Cons:</b> requires time for supplier responses, which can be high-level or promotional; a one way communication channel.</li> </ul> <p><b>Good practice:</b> advertise RFIs widely (for instance, UNOPS uses UN Global Marketplace).<sup>8</sup> An RFI is a one-off event, and you may receive a lot of data, so have a clear plan to assess and use the information to refine your procurement strategy.</p>	<p><b>What?</b> Direct meetings with suppliers to discuss products, challenges and solutions.</p> <p><b>Why?</b> To hold specific, in-depth conversations on how suppliers and the market can meet project needs.</p> <p><b>Keep in mind:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Pros:</b> allows detailed discussion and access to technical and solution-specific insights.</li> <li>• <b>Cons:</b> potential for inconsistency, perceived bias or mishandling of sensitive information.</li> </ul> <p><b>Good practice:</b> ensure all suppliers have access to the same information and agendas and the same amount of time to prepare. Document the conversations carefully, and if discussing innovations, make sure suppliers know how ideas will be safeguarded.</p>
Supplier workshops	Supplier demonstrations
<p><b>What?</b> An event to engage with multiple suppliers, often consisting of a briefing followed by themed questions, breakout sessions and feedback.</p> <p><b>Why?</b> To ensure equality of information and carry out collective problem solving or reach a consensus.<sup>9</sup></p> <p><b>Keep in mind:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Pros:</b> efficient way to communicate with many suppliers.</li> <li>• <b>Cons:</b> limited in-depth discussion about solutions; suppliers may withhold competitive information.</li> </ul> <p><b>Good practice:</b> suppliers may withhold details in groups, so use these sessions to share your needs rather than seek solutions. Collect questions from suppliers in advance, and allow follow-up feedback for more candid responses.</p>	<p><b>What?</b> Supplier-led demonstrations of their products or services relating to your requirements.</p> <p><b>Why?</b> To see capabilities that can't be easily conveyed verbally or in writing.</p> <p><b>Keep in mind:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Pros:</b> shows real-world performance and current supplier capabilities; supports end user involvement.</li> <li>• <b>Cons:</b> in focusing on end products, there is a chance of overlooking discussion of costs, supply chains, delivery and implementation.</li> </ul> <p><b>Good practice:</b> define the challenges you want the product to address. Have a methodology in place to capture the details of each demo in a consistent format.</p>

8. United Nations Global Marketplace, <[www.ungm.org](http://www.ungm.org)>.

9. World Bank Group, 'Industry Engagement Program', <[www.worldbank.org/en/projects-operations/products-and-services/brief/industry-engagement-program](http://www.worldbank.org/en/projects-operations/products-and-services/brief/industry-engagement-program)>.

## Analysis and implementation

After engaging with suppliers, it's time to consolidate all the data from them to generate useful market insights. Focus on identifying themes, trends and insights that support procurement decision-making. Use the insights from the research and engagement to decide how to shape your procurement strategy. Make sure that the results do not lead you to a specific supplier, but that you use the results to try to attract as many bidders as possible.

If relevant, include the market engagement report as part of the tender documents, so that all bidders have access to the same information.

Various steps are involved in implementing EME based on its overall goal, with different objectives, activities, outcomes and key decisions involved at each stage (see Figure 1). The complexity of EME will depend not only on the overarching goal but also on the intricacy of the procurement process.



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**Figure 1. EME steps**

Overall goal	Step 1 PREPARE	Step 2 RESEARCH	Step 3 ENGAGE	Step 4 ANALYZE / IMPLEMENT
<b>Competitive</b> Allow broad and diverse supplier participation to enhance competition	Define your market	Find the number and categories of suppliers in the market	Seek a wide range of perspectives	Select a sourcing approach to reflect competition potential
<b>Innovative</b> Encourage innovation to improve project impact, efficiency and effectiveness	Think about the outcomes that could be improved through innovation	Look for the market trends and innovations	Record details of potential innovations	Understand scope for innovation (technical specifications, evaluation criteria, etc.)
<b>Sustainable</b> Integrate sustainability to achieve long-term impact	Identify sustainability criteria	List sustainability metrics and practices	Discuss sustainability objectives and solutions	Refine sustainability criteria
<b>Contractual</b> Develop a contract approach to reflect market conditions	Identify contractual variables and templates	Review pricing and contracting approaches in the market	Ask about pricing, contract duration, options and key terms	Compare feedback to strategy and define contractual approach
<b>Step outputs:</b>	<b>Engagement objectives</b>	<b>Initial market research</b>	<b>Supplier feedback, insights and trends</b>	<b>Final procurement documents</b>
<b>Next decisions:</b>	<b>Select target market(s)</b>	<b>Choose best form(s) of enagement</b>	<b>Close engagement or seek clarification</b>	<b>Start solicitation</b>

# Ethics and other considerations

EME requires careful handling to ensure the process is fair, transparent and efficient.

## Fairness and transparency

Avoid giving any one supplier an advantage over another. To reduce this risk, focus on the following:

- **Equal access to information:** Ensure all potential suppliers receive the same information during EME.
- **Use standard communications with all suppliers:** Share the same information, publish Q&As for all, and be mindful of information disclosed during meetings. Decide in advance how to deal with matters of confidentiality and intellectual property, and inform participants.
- **Document the process:** Keep records of all interactions with suppliers to track communications and collect evidence of the fairness of the process.
- **Consider the location:** Meet at neutral premises, considering that virtual meetings are a cost-effective, neutral option.
- **Inclusivity and representation:** Always ensure that enough public officers are present in any meetings with suppliers.

In every step you take in EME, think about how you can prevent unfair treatment and the perception of it.

### Box 4. Integrity programmes to properly manage corruption and integrity risks

An integrity programme includes provisions to support decision-making regarding EME activities. Multilateral Development Banks promote a risk-based approach, encouraging entities to identify their key integrity risks and allocate available resources appropriately to address the highest-risk matters.

Among the core recommended principles, entities should develop, implement and continually improve their programmes. These programmes should comprise policies and procedures designed to prevent, detect, investigate and remediate defined misconduct (including prohibited practices and other forms of misconduct as specified by the entity).

More information [here](#).

## Time and project management

Managing time and resources effectively ensures the engagement is focused on suppliers and procurement objectives. Think of EME as an investment: while it requires time upfront, it can deliver significant benefits, including potential time savings, down the line.

- **Planning and scheduling:** Start EME planning early, with a clear timeline, sufficient supplier response time, and the right technical support in place.
- **Proportionality:** Avoid overloading suppliers with requests that aren't necessary or are disproportionate to the value of the contract.
- **Time management for suppliers:** Be mindful of the time commitments required from suppliers. Ensure the engagement is designed to be constructive and concise.

A well-managed process keeps suppliers interested, enhances the public sector's credibility and ensures the insights gathered are timely in the procurement process.



## Maximize diverse engagement

Your EME activities should consider how the participation of a wide range of suppliers, stakeholders and interest groups can help solve your problems and promote diversity. Such actions could include:

- **Minimize barriers to competition:** Ensure that your qualification criteria don't unduly favour large or international suppliers over small and medium-sized enterprises and local or diverse suppliers. Validate requirements with specialists to prevent unintentional bias or unfair barriers.
- Engage a range of suppliers by considering diversity characteristics, such as size, location and ownership, including women-owned businesses, to capture varied perspectives. There is no universally accepted agreement on the minimum number of potential bidders that should take part (unless your procurement framework dictates otherwise), but as a good practice, aim for a sample that is representative of the sector.
- **Publicize engagement opportunities:** Use clear and accessible means to promote EME opportunities, giving all suppliers a fair chance to express interest and participate.
  - **Consider the impacts of grouping:** Be mindful of aggregating requirements, as it may limit smaller suppliers' ability to compete.
  - **Involve supply chains:** Depending on the procurement needs, include lower tier suppliers, as they often play a key role in meeting requirements. Particularly in the case of infrastructure projects, subcontractors and second-tier suppliers are often responsible for ensuring sustainability requirements are met during contract execution.
  - **Engage external stakeholders:** It may be useful to involve authorities or relevant organizations (e.g., environmental or community groups) to provide context or expertise.
  - **Use broad engagement methods:** When feasible, incorporate webinars and other group-based communication tools to reach a wider audience than one-on-one meetings alone can provide, encouraging broader participation.

The overall aim is to create opportunities for all suppliers, regardless of size, experience or background. Achieving this balance requires careful judgment, and qualified technical experts must always validate and endorse the requirements and selection criteria.

## Manage suppliers' expectations

Everyone should understand that EME isn't a competitive part of the process, but is a chance to help define the procurement requirements and strategy.

- **Clarify objectives:** Clearly explain that EME is about gathering information and shaping strategy, not part of the competitive process.
- **Define the information you will share:** The more details you can give to suppliers about your requirements, the easier it will be for them to provide a thorough response. As a minimum, they will expect to know your organization's and project's background, what you want to achieve from the contract, the location of the contract (if relevant), an indication of timescales/duration, and the dates for the conclusion of the engagement process and for the submission of information by suppliers.
- **Without prejudice:** Let suppliers know that the public entity may cancel the procurement process or change its approach, and that ideas shared during EME sessions aren't binding.
- **Voluntary participation:** Highlight that there will be no reimbursement for any costs associated with providing information as part of the process.
- **Conclude the engagement:** After the engagement, thank suppliers for their contribution and, if possible, outline the next steps of the procurement process.

Clear communication from the start prevents misunderstandings and sets realistic expectations for suppliers.

You are recommended to tailor this guidance to your specific procurement framework. For recurring needs, especially those managed by different entities, consider developing sector-specific guidance to support EME activities.



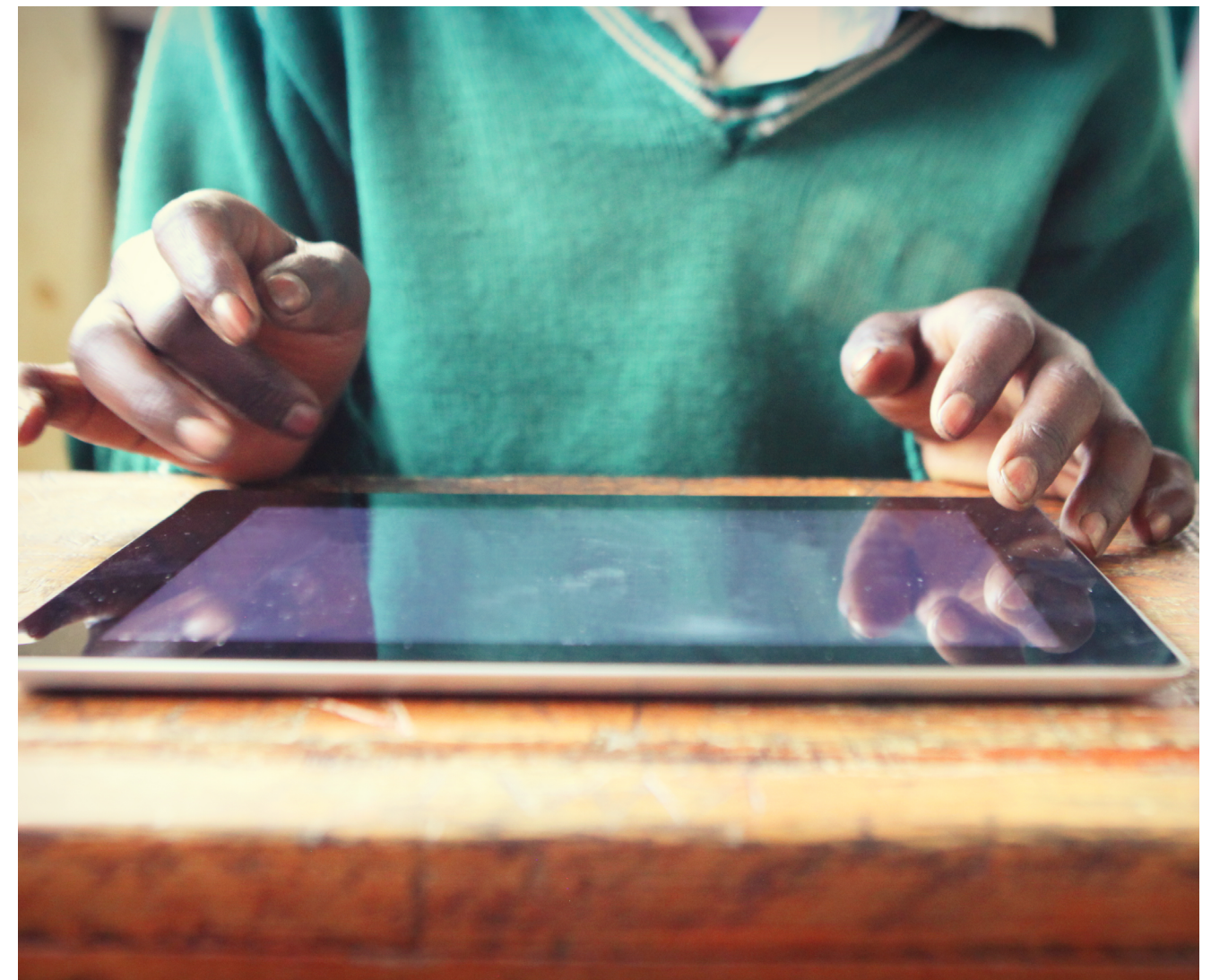
### Box 5. ICT guidance as part of the UNOPS Climate Action Programme

UNOPS has assessed its supply chain emissions and identified high-priority categories for climate action, including transportation, information and communications technology (ICT), energy, medical industries, and infrastructure.

Our Sustainable Procurement Framework and the Delivering Responsibility in Vendor Engagement (DriVE) programme for supplier engagement play critical roles in our Climate Strategy, acting as catalysts for several defined emissions reduction levers.

For example, ICT procurement guidance has been issued to assist procurement officers in incorporating climate-related technical specifications in the procurement process. This includes referencing performance or conformance statements from voluntary sustainability standards or best practice frameworks provided by international organizations. The guidance also covers the identification of key elements during EME activities (e.g., the availability of ecolabels) and the drafting of qualification and technical criteria for solicitations, specifying minimum thresholds.

More information about UNOPS commitment to Climate Action [here](#).



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# Conclusion

Public procurement holds immense potential to drive the transition towards a low-carbon, circular economy. This potential arises not only from its significant spending power but also from its role as a catalyst in creating enabling conditions for sustainable consumption and production, such as fostering circular economy practices, implementing sustainable building codes, enhancing waste management systems and providing financial incentives, among others.

To fully realize this potential, public procurement must align with market capacity. Public entities should engage with the market early in the procurement process to ensure mutual benefits and better outcomes.

Despite its advantages, concerns about transparency and the potential for corruption often hinder the use of early market engagement activities. However, these risks can be effectively mitigated through open and transparent engagement practices.

Developing a better understanding of the market before launching a tender, through open and transparent communication, can help reduce the occurrence of tenders with no or few compliant bidders, submissions exceeding budget constraints, or canceled tenders. It also improves outcomes by fostering innovation, efficiency and sustainability.

# References

This document is based on UNOPS experience, along with research from the list below. You may find the following resources helpful if you want to explore specific categories of procurement needs (e.g., infrastructure, healthcare, information technology) or focus on particular objectives in your engagement (e.g., innovation or sustainability).

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