



Tool

# Meaningful stakeholder dialogue Towards a meaningful dialogue in 9 steps

SEER



This tool is part of a collection of resources, including tools, knowledge documents, and training, designed to help companies prepare and conduct [meaningful dialogues](#) with their stakeholders. Meaningful stakeholder engagement is fundamental for (International) Responsible Business Conduct (IRBC) and is reflected in [all steps of the due diligence process](#) as included in the OECD guidelines.

This tool guides you through the process of developing an effective approach for stakeholder dialogue within the framework of (International) Responsible Business Conduct (IRBC). Meaningful stakeholder dialogue involves four phases, during which you will complete nine key steps. Below is an overview of these phases and steps. Each step provides suggestions for [tools and knowledge documents](#) to use to get you started.

## Complete the self-assessment

Before creating your plan of action, it is recommended that you first complete the [self-assessment](#) 'How to conduct a meaningful stakeholder dialogue?' This assessment will provide you with insights into the focus areas necessary for a meaningful stakeholder dialogue, and help you understand to what extent you are already familiar with them. The summary of your self-assessment will indicate which steps from your plan of action below may require additional attention.

Click on an (i) for additional information.

## Steps

### Phase 1: In the run-up to stakeholder dialogue

- Step 1: Understanding your company's motivation for stakeholder dialogue**
- Step 2: Working on the right preconditions before starting a dialogue**
- Step 3: Identifying your stakeholders**

### Phase 2: Preparation for a stakeholder dialogue

- Step 4: Exploring the need, subject and purpose of the dialogue as well as relevant circumstances**
  - Step 4a: What is the need for the dialogue?
  - Step 4b: What topic or issue do you want to discuss?
  - Step 4c: What is the purpose of the dialogue?
  - Step 4d: What contextual factors should I take into account?
- Step 5: Determining which stakeholders you want to engage with and how you will involve them**
  - Step 5a: Selecting your stakeholders
  - Step 5b: Engaging your stakeholders
- Step 6: Determining which other parties you want/need to work with**
- Step 7: Preparing the dialogue's content and logistics**

### Phase 3: Implementation of a stakeholder dialogue

- Step 8: Having an open conversation**
  - Step 8a: Ensuring the conversation is open and inclusive
  - Step 8b: Allowing sufficient time to conduct the dialogue

### Phase 4: Follow-up of a stakeholder dialogue

- Step 9: Sharing information, following up and evaluating**
  - Step 9a: Sharing information and following up on commitments
  - Step 9b: Evaluating the dialogue together with the stakeholders

## Phase 1: In the run-up to stakeholder dialogue

In the run-up to conducting a dialogue with your stakeholders, it is important to determine what your motivation and commitment are and who your stakeholders are. Steps 1 to 3 guide you through this phase.

### Step 1: Understanding your company's motivation for stakeholder dialogue (i)

Your company may have various reasons for conducting or planning to conduct a stakeholder dialogue. It is important to clearly articulate what drives your company to engage with stakeholders. Are the motivations externally driven, such as compliance with legal requirements or the desire to avoid negative publicity? Or do they stem from an intrinsic curiosity about understanding the needs, concerns, and priorities of your stakeholders, so that these insights can be integrated into your business operations, thereby creating value for both your company and your stakeholders? Entering into a stakeholder dialogue with sincere motivation significantly increases the likelihood of achieving meaningful and productive outcomes. As highlighted in Pitfall 1 from the [knowledge document](#) 'Five common pitfalls', approaching the dialogue with genuine intent is crucial.

#### Support in this step

To better determine and, if necessary, strengthen your company's motivation for engaging with stakeholders, consult the [tool](#) 'The added value of dialogue for your business'. This resource can help clarify the benefits and drivers behind your company's stakeholder engagement efforts.

### Step 2: Working on the right preconditions before starting a dialogue (i)

If you propose entering into a dialogue with stakeholders, you create expectations that your company must be prepared to meet. It is essential to carefully consider whether your company is ready to fulfil these expectations. If necessary, work on establishing the right conditions to ensure a meaningful and successful dialogue, minimising the risk of damaging early relationships. Consider your company's policy and strategy for

engaging stakeholders, the commitment to follow up on the results of the dialogue and allocating the required time and resources (including employee deployment).

#### Support in this step

Refer to the [tool](#) 'Preconditions for starting a dialogue' and gain insight into the preconditions for meaningful stakeholder dialogue. Pay attention to the conditions that you do not yet meet.

### Step 3: Identifying your stakeholders (i)

Companies typically interact with a wide range of stakeholders. Before deciding who to engage in in the dialogue, it is crucial to identify all relevant stakeholders, not just those you already have relationships with. In the context of IRBC, stakeholders should be identified based on the potential risks your business activities may pose to people and the environment, rather than just the risks to your company. This includes stakeholders who may have little influence over your company but could be negatively impacted by your operations.

#### Support in this step

Refer to steps 1 to 3 of the [tool](#) 'Identifying your stakeholders' for guidance on identifying, analysing, and reaching your stakeholders. This will provide a solid foundation for determining which stakeholders to engage with.

## Phase 2: Preparation for a stakeholder dialogue

Once you have a clear understanding of your motivation, commitment, and identified stakeholders, you can begin preparing for the actual stakeholder dialogue. It is important to note that you do not need to have fully completed Phase 1 before moving on to Phase 2. In fact, initiating dialogue can help strengthen your motivation, commitment, and deepen your understanding of stakeholders. Steps 4 to 7 will guide you in preparing for the dialogue.



## Step 4: Exploring the need, subject and purpose of the dialogue as well as relevant circumstances (i)

### Step 4a: What is the need for the dialogue?

The need for the dialogue reflects the circumstances surrounding the discussion, its importance, and provides initial insights into which stakeholders should be involved. Possible reasons might include refining your IRBC policy, sourcing a new location or supplier for products or raw materials, responding to a stakeholder's request for dialogue, developing an approach to combat child labour, or addressing a complaint received through a grievance mechanism.

### Step 4b: What topic or issue do you want to discuss?

The need for the dialogue will help clarify what is already known and what information is still needed. This will, in turn, shape the topic or issue of discussion or the specific question you would like to explore with stakeholders.

### Step 4c: What is the purpose of the dialogue?

Clearly formulate the purpose of the dialogue, so that you can provide clear direction to it. The goal can be general, such as getting to know and understand stakeholders better, or a concrete goal, such as identifying risks of human rights violations in country X or region Y or solving an abuse within the supply chain. However, too narrow a focus on a specific end goal hinders open dialogue, because it makes flexibility and ad-hoc adjustments more difficult. Conversely, a purpose that is too broad can lead to ambiguity. Aim for a balanced approach that allows for both a broad perspective and a specific end goal.

### Step 4d: What contextual factors should I take into account?

Refer to the [tool](#) 'Considering country-specific and cultural factors' to gain knowledge and insight into the legal, political, technical, cultural and social conditions within which the dialogue will be conducted.

## Step 5: Determining which stakeholders you want to engage with and how you will involve them (i)

### Step 5a: Selecting your stakeholders

To identify the most relevant stakeholders for your specific situation, use the insights gained from Step 3, where you more generally identified and analysed your stakeholders. The specifics of the situation will guide you in determining which stakeholders to involve in the dialogue. Select stakeholders based on (possible) impact on their rights or interests as well as their knowledge or experiences. These can be stakeholders who not only confirm what you want to hear or already know, but also stakeholders who will ask critical questions and identify risks. This is ultimately the information that will help you make the right choices for formulating policies and actions. See also pitfall 2 in the [knowledge document](#) 'Five common pitfalls'.

#### Support in this intermediate step

- Refer to steps 4 and 5 in the [tool](#) 'Identifying your stakeholders' to determine who you should talk to.
- Consult the [knowledge document](#) 'Listening to workers in the supply chain' to gain a deeper understanding on how you can incorporate the insights of workers in your chain. This is an important yet difficult-to-reach stakeholder group.

### Step 5b: Engaging your stakeholders

It is crucial to clearly communicate to stakeholders the purpose and process of the dialogue, as well as the reasons why you want to engage with them. This transparency allows stakeholders to assess the relevance of the dialogue for them and to identify the appropriate representatives for the discussion. For example, ask them whether you have involved all relevant stakeholders and what outcome determines a successful dialogue for them. This way you ensure that the dialogue has added value for everyone whilst building mutual trust. If you fail to do this, you risk stakeholders being unwilling to engage in dialogue with you. See also pitfalls 3 and 4 in the [knowledge document](#) 'Five common pitfalls'.

### Support in this intermediate step

- Refer to step 6 in the [tool](#) 'Identifying your stakeholders' and the [tool](#) 'Promoting stakeholder commitment' to gain a deeper understanding of factors that influence the commitment of stakeholders for dialogue and how you can work on this.
- Refer to the [tool](#) 'When and how to share information?' to determine what information you need to share with stakeholders prior to the dialogue.
- Refer to the [tool](#) 'Building trust' to gain a deeper understanding of the importance of trust, which is a key element throughout the dialogue process, and how you can already strengthen this in this phase of the dialogue.

### Step 6: Determining which other parties you want/need to work with (i)

It is unrealistic to expect yourself to have all the necessary knowledge and capabilities to prepare and conduct a stakeholder dialogue on your own. Instead, consider collaborating with other parties, such as companies, business networks, trade unions, NGOs, and other experts. These collaborators can play a crucial role in organising and supporting the dialogue process by sharing on-the-ground knowledge and experiences, and by providing access to relevant stakeholders. In many cases, organising a dialogue together with others is not only more efficient but also more effective, especially when dealing with complex topics that are challenging to address alone. Collaboration allows you to leverage the strengths and insights of various partners, leading to a more comprehensive and impactful dialogue.

### Support in this step

Refer to the [tool](#) 'Who to partner up with?' to determine with whom and how you can best collaborate in your specific situation.

### Step 7: Preparing the dialogue's content and logistics (i)

Prepare the dialogue together with your colleagues and possible collaborating partners. Pay attention to:

- Determining topics for discussion
- Timing of the dialogue
- Location and format of dialogue: physical/online/hybrid, plenary/in groups
- Method of reporting and feedback
- Need for a facilitator and/or interpreter
- Facilitating stakeholder participation

### Support in this step

- Refer to the [tools](#) 'Checklist multi-stakeholder dialogue' and 'Checklist multi-stakeholder dialogue meeting abroad' for an overview of considerations when organising a dialogue meeting. These actions can also be applied to smaller-scale dialogues. It is important that you prepare well, so as to prevent any surprises during the dialogue.
- Refer to the [knowledge document](#) 'What makes a good facilitator?' to assess whether you need a facilitator for your dialogue, perhaps because of the risk of conflict, and to know what to look for when selecting a facilitator.

## Phase 3: Implementation of a stakeholder dialogue

Once you have prepared the dialogue, it is time for the implementation. Step 8 takes you through this.

## Step 8: Having an open conversation (i)

### Step 8a: Ensuring the conversation is open and inclusive

- Focus on active listening and understanding instead of active speaking and convincing
- Ask open questions
- Focus on experiences rather than opinions
- Ensure equal participation
- Be open to (critical) feedback and input
- Try to understand the other person's perspective and postpone your judgment

When everyone adheres to the above rules of engagement, stakeholders are more likely to feel safe to share their input. This does not mean that a conversation should take place in complete harmony. When you bring together stakeholders with conflicting interests and needs, there is always a risk of friction. Try to deal with this friction or tension constructively to achieve a sincere and more in-depth dialogue. See also pitfall 5 in the [knowledge document](#) 'Five common pitfalls'.

### Step 8b: Allowing sufficient time to conduct the dialogue

Summarise the points discussed. Discuss what follow-up you and your stakeholders want to give to the dialogue and who or what is needed for this. If necessary, schedule a follow-up meeting.

### Support in this step

- Refer to the [tool](#) 'Good practices in conducting dialogue' to learn which dialogue techniques you can apply and to practise scenarios that may be similar to those that occur or are expected in your dialogue.
- Refer to the [tool](#) 'Asking the right questions' to refine your questioning methods in a way that encourages open and productive discussions.
- Refer to the [tool](#) 'When and how to share information?' to determine what information you need to share with stakeholders during the dialogue.

## Phase 4: Follow-up of a stakeholder dialogue

After conducting the dialogue, it is time to focus on feedback, follow-up, and evaluation. Step 9 will guide you through this process.

## Step 9: Sharing information, following up and evaluating (i)

### Step 9a: Sharing information and following up on commitments

Provide information to your stakeholders summarising what has been discussed and agreed upon, and follow up on agreements and commitments. Discuss how the insights or results from the dialogue will be integrated into your due diligence process and other relevant procedures. Always provide feedback, even if you do not plan to take immediate follow-up action, and explain your reasoning.

### Step 9b: Evaluating the dialogue together with the stakeholders

Review whether the dialogue achieved its intended goals and what outcomes it has produced for both the stakeholders and your company. This evaluation can inspire you to continue or adapt the dialogue, or expand the approach to engage additional stakeholders.

### Support in this step

Refer to the [tool](#) 'When and how to share information?' to determine what information you need to share with stakeholders and possibly others after the dialogue.

## Information and support

This tool is part of a collection of tools, knowledge documents and training to help companies set up and implement a [meaningful dialogue](#) with their stakeholders. Meaningful stakeholder engagement is fundamental for (international) responsible business conduct and is reflected in [all steps of the due diligence process](#) according to OECD guidelines.

Click on a topic below for more information and support preparing and conducting a meaningful stakeholder dialogue.



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## Colophon

**The SER project 'Meaningful stakeholder dialogue in (international) supply chains' is partner of Humanising business, supported by the Goldschmeding Foundation.**



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