



Tool

Meaningful stakeholder dialogue When and how to share information?

SEER





Introduction

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.

Society is increasingly demanding that companies provide information about their policies, strategies, and progress related to (international) responsible business conduct (IRBC). International guidelines, such as the OECD Guidelines (i), encourage companies to regularly and proactively share relevant information that is easily accessible to a broad group of stakeholders, and that is also user-friendly, timely, accurate, clear, and complete. Legislation also seeks to address this – for instance the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) and the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD).

Click on an (i) for additional information

Transparency in stakeholder dialogue

Transparency should be the guiding principle when conducting a stakeholder dialogue. Sharing information helps stakeholders understand the goals and frameworks of the conversation, set the right expectations, and provide input or feedback in advance. Transparency can contribute to building trust and a personal connection, fostering mutual understanding, and breaking down potential power dynamics. However, information must be handled confidentially when necessary, for example, to ensure the safety of stakeholders.

When sharing information, it is important that it is accessible and understandable to your stakeholders; otherwise, it misses its purpose. To achieve this, provide information in the language of your conversation partner and align with relevant legislation and the jargon used by stakeholders. It is also wise to consider which communication channels will best reach your stakeholders: physical visits; email; phone/video contact; posters, flyers, or other printed materials; or through local organisations and networks.”

Example

When discussing a training program between a company and a supplier, using Teams seemed like the obvious choice, as it allows screen sharing and enables participants to review the program proposal together. The proposal could also be shared in advance to facilitate further coordination during the online meeting. It turned out that one of the suppliers preferred to communicate via WhatsApp, as he is often on the road. He typically encountered connection issues with Teams and needed to be in a closed room with a computer, which was practically very challenging for him.



Key questions and criteria for transparency

The table below outlines topics that you should generally communicate about before, during, and after a dialogue. For each topic, ask yourself the following questions:

1. Is this information relevant to the dialogue? Do the other stakeholders find this relevant?
2. Is caution needed, for example, because sharing the information could endanger my company/business or stakeholders, or because it is sensitive or confidential information?
3. How and when should I communicate? Is the information accessible and understandable to my stakeholders?

Click on the topics on the right hand of this page to receive immediate information about transparency towards stakeholders about:richting stakeholders:

Prior to stakeholder dialogue

- Reason, intention and purpose(s) of the dialogue and the importance of the dialogue
- Strategy that guides the dialogue
- Information about the dialogue topics, approach and preparation
- Individuals from your company joining the dialogue
- Other dialogue participants

During stakeholder dialogue

- Appreciation that the stakeholder wants to engage in dialogue with you
- Information received and documented
- Sensitive information
- Next steps

After stakeholder dialogue

- A summary of the key points discussed, agreements reached, and steps taken so far.
- Acknowledgment of the constructive dialogue and the results achieved.
- Sharing the process or outcomes of the dialogue with stakeholders who did not participate but have a vested interest.
- Communicating the process or results of the dialogue with other relevant external parties.



Prior to the stakeholder dialogue

Communication about	Why communicate?	When to be cautious?	Communicate how and when
Reason, intention and purpose(s) of the dialogue and the importance of the dialogue	This sets the right expectations, brings focus, and can increase the urgency and commitment of the other party, especially if they are still relatively uninformed or hesitant, or if you require their time, resources, or actions.	If certain information cannot be disclosed for safety reasons (i).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain why the dialogue is important, why you want to engage with the stakeholder, what you intend to do with the outcome, what the other party can expect from you, and how it could be relevant to them. • If applicable, acknowledge any steps that have already been taken. • Provide this explanation either in writing or verbally.
Strategy that guides the dialogue	This provides insight into whether it is a one-off exercise or ongoing, which is particularly relevant when the dialogue requires follow-up.	N/a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrate stakeholder dialogue into your IRBC strategy and policy so that you can easily share it with stakeholders, demonstrating the company's long-term vision to them. • Provide this explanation either in writing or verbally.
Information about the dialogue topics, approach and preparation	This ensures that everyone has the same foundational knowledge, allowing stakeholders to provide input on the agenda or the direction of the dialogue beforehand and to prepare for the conversation appropriately. This is particularly important when you need specific input from someone during the discussion.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When you want to gather initial reactions without giving the other party too much time to think beforehand. • When you want to make participation as accessible as possible. • When you want to avoid giving the impression that you are only there to collect information rather than engage in an exchange. Sharing expectations about the stakeholder(s) could create an undesirable power dynamic, making the other party feel like they are the only ones expected to contribute. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share the structure, expectations, and/or questions in writing, or explain them verbally if needed (i). • Consider how you frame information when dealing with sensitive matters; refer to the section on 'sensitive information/topics' later in the table. • Be mindful of the amount of information you share to avoid overwhelming others.
Individuals from your company joining the dialogue	This sets the right expectations and it can increase the urgency and commitment of the other participants if management or people with whom there is a personal bond join in.	Minder relevant als de gesprekspartner gelijk staat aan degene die contact opneemt met de stakeholder.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearly specify who the stakeholder will be speaking with and the roles of each participant if multiple people from your company are involved. • Provide contact details from your organisation for any questions or feedback.
Other dialogue participants	This ensures that participants are not caught off guard at the start of the dialogue by the presence of multiple stakeholders.	If you are aware of any hostility between parties, it is better to first have individual conversations where you introduce the other discussion partners, address any history or incidents between them, discuss what they have learned from this, and explain why you are involving the relevant stakeholder(s).	Share a list of participants, including their names, positions, and organisations, after obtaining their permission.



During the stakeholder dialogue

Communication about	Why communicate?	When to be cautious?	Communicate how and when
Appreciation that the stakeholder wants to engage in dialogue with you	This is important to build a long-term relationship based on trust.	N/a	Explicitly state your appreciation at the beginning of the dialogue.
Information received and documented	It builds trust to share how you interpret the input received, especially when this influences policy, strategy, objectives, and/or actions.	If the input given is sensitive and may not be shared in writing with each other or externally.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At the start of the dialogue, agree on what information will be recorded, how it will be documented, when it will be shared, and with whom. Capture the input in some form, such as by recording the discussion or simultaneously writing down key points (visible online). During an online dialogue, ensure that participants can still see each other and that it remains a mutual dialogue rather than a simple Q&A session. Refer to the tool 'How to ask the right questions' for guidance. Consider applying the Chatham House Rule, which allows information obtained to be used but without attributing it to a specific source.
Sensitive information	If you are open about topics that are sensitive to your company, it encourages others to be open as well, it inspires trust and you reach the core of a topic/problem quicker.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When sharing information could jeopardise the safety of individuals or organisations or undermine trust, particularly in cases involving alleged complaints or misconduct. When openness about a topic or issue could instantly close off the opportunity for dialogue. 	Be sensitive in terms of tone of voice/formulating sensitive information in view of certain cultures/contexts, without misrepresenting or withholding anything; formulating the same concept in a way that matches the stakeholder's experience, such as 'crop protection products' instead of 'pesticides' or vice versa, can already be helpful.
Next steps	Documenting the outcomes of the dialogue helps maintain its urgency and clarifies responsibilities; this can be crucial for follow-up interactions. Even if the dialogue does not lead to further action, it is still important to keep those involved informed.	N/a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clearly explain how you intend to use the results and insights gained from the dialogue. Outline the next steps, and explicitly document who is responsible for following up on each action. Discuss with whom the content can be shared, and establish specific agreements regarding the form, frequency, and content of the feedback (i).



After the stakeholder dialogue

Communication about	Why communicate?	When to be cautious?	Communicate how and when
A summary of the key points discussed, agreements reached, and steps taken so far.	By reviewing the steps you have taken, you increase trust among your stakeholders. Even if the dialogue has not lead to concrete agreements, it is still important to keep everyone up to date.	n.v.t.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distribute a report to the participating stakeholders summarising the key points discussed and the agreements made. Allow stakeholders the opportunity to provide feedback. • Proactively and consistently share progress updates resulting from the dialogue using a suitable communication platform.
Acknowledgment of the constructive dialogue and the results achieved.	This is important to build a long-term relationship based on trust.	If (for some stakeholders) the results are disappointing.	Explicitly state your acknowledgement in a written message or at least do so verbally.
Sharing the process or outcomes of the dialogue with stakeholders who did not participate but have an interest.	This ensures an inclusive dialogue and increases your legitimacy among stakeholders who are represented indirectly or who were unable to attend. (i).	If this could (potentially) put stakeholders at risk or damage the trust between you and your stakeholder.	Always coordinate with those involved before sharing information or photos externally, and ensure compliance with existing privacy regulations.
Communicating the process or results of the dialogue with other relevant external parties.	This increases your legitimacy and can serve as an example for others if you are willing and able to be open about the process of dialogue and what it has resulted in.	If this could (potentially) put stakeholders at risk or damage the trust between you and your stakeholder.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Always coordinate with those involved before sharing information or photos externally, and ensure compliance with existing privacy regulations. • Include a summary in your annual IRBC report. • Share a post on your website, social media or other channels.

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

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