



PUTTING THE SUSTAINABLE IN PROCUREMENT

A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR LAW FIRMS



February 2026



Foreword

From my role leading the Sustainable Procurement Pledge Community, the largest global network of Procurement Professionals collaborating to embed sustainability and make it the default, I have the unique vantage point to look at procurement globally and with an unsegmented view.

One thing is becoming increasingly clear: procurement has emerged as one of the most powerful forces shaping how our global systems evolve, especially in this unique moment of uncertainty and change. Across sectors and regions, procurement is developing from a cost-cutting function into a strategic profession, influencing resilience, risk, innovation, and trust at a time of unprecedented disruption.

The pace of change can feel unsettling. Economic volatility, geopolitical tensions, rapid technological shifts, evolving team structures, and mounting social and environmental pressures are colliding all at once. Yet history shows us that moments like this are not only disruptive; they are defining. They reveal where responsibility sits, and highlight leaders who are willing to step up.

What we see globally is that procurement professionals and the ecosystems — including you in the legal profession – are increasingly recognising both the weight and the opportunity of this moment to center people and planet.

Sustainability is no longer a nice-to-have, moral add-on, or a communications exercise; it is fundamental to the right to operate, to long-term value, to risk mitigation, and to institutional credibility in business. Beyond the attention-grabbing and nay-saying headlines of abandoned sustainability goals and strategic U-turns, the reality on the ground is that those who have aligned sustainability with business goals are leaning in rather than slowing down, because it makes business sense and is the smart thing to do.

The questions are many: how do we transition systems, align incentives, and embed change while creating prosperity for today and tomorrow? This change is not hypothetical but is happening right now. With it comes discomfort, loss, unfamiliar collaboration, and the need to rethink established ways of seeing and doing things.

It is precisely here that procurement's power lies: in connecting strategy to reality, aligning incentives across complex supply chains, and turning shared ambition into systemic change. The work of the Legal Sustainability Alliance sits firmly within this broader movement, one where collaboration across firms, companies, suppliers, and professional communities, including global activation networks like SPP, is essential. None of us has fully figured out how we get there. But through openness, shared responsibility, and collective action, and knowledge sharing, we are shaping systems that are more resilient, more credible, and better suited to the world we are living in.

This guide is a clear signal that the legal sector recognises both the opportunity and the responsibility it holds at this crucial moment.

Sustainable procurement is, by its nature, a team sport, and its impact grows as we work together. We must come together as allies, be brave enough to believe in the change we want to see, and embrace our role and strengths in making it happen. It is not about getting it perfect; it is about taking meaningful steps together, shaping a future where procurement is a force for lasting positive impact for people, planet, and prosperity.

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Table of Contents

Foreword	1	
Introduction to the Legal Sustainability Alliance	5	
Introduction to This Guide	5	
How to Use This Guide	6	
LSA Supplier Expectations	7	
The Procurement Lifecycle	8	
Maturity	9	
Actions Applicable to All Firms, Regardless of Maturity	10	
Case Study: How Shoosmiths Has Adapted Procurement to Include SMEs	12	
Part 1: Tendering	13	
Introduction	13	
1.1 Beginner	13	
1.2 Intermediate	14	
1.3 Advanced	16	
		Case Study: A&L Goodbody (ALG): Embedding Sustainable Procurement Through Policy and Collaboration
		18
		Part 2: Contracting
		20
		Introduction
		20
		2.1 Beginner
		20
		2.2 Intermediate
		21
		2.3 Advanced
		22
		Case Study: Bird & Bird: Capacity Building Within Supply Chains
		24
		Part 3: Data Collection
		26
		Introduction
		26
		3.1 Beginner
		28
		3.2 Intermediate
		30
		3.3 Advanced
		32
		References and Resources
		34



Introduction to the Legal Sustainability Alliance

The Legal Sustainability Alliance (LSA) is the UK's leading network for sustainability in the legal sector, run by law firms for law firms. Over the last 18 years, the LSA has built up a wealth of knowledge and experience, which it shares not just with members but across the legal profession for the benefit of all.

Alongside an online carbon calculator designed specifically for the legal profession, LSA members have access to events, toolkits, webinars, podcasts, and a wide range of practical resources. Members can also join online or in-person sessions on a wide range of topics, from carbon emissions reduction to sustainable procurement. With over 130 members, from small high-street practices to global law firms, the LSA is a collaborative network focused on accelerating progress towards shared sustainability goals. Our aim is to support firms at every stage of their net zero transition.

Introduction to This Guide

Sustainable procurement is the practice of integrating environmental, social, and governance (ESG) considerations into purchasing decisions and supplier management. For law firms, the largest share of emissions and many responsible business risks lies in the supply chain. Embedding ESG into procurement helps to manage risk, meet stakeholder expectations, reduce Scope 3 emissions, stimulate innovation, support diverse and ethical suppliers, and create measurable value for clients and communities.

This guide draws on the Legal Sustainability Alliance's working materials to provide practical, maturity-based steps you can use now. It is structured around key stages of the procurement lifecycle, with targeted actions for beginner, intermediate, and advanced programmes across tendering, contracting, and data collection.

How to Use This Guide

This guide is intended to provide law firms with flexible guidance on how to implement sustainable procurement within the context of the legal sector. It signposts firms to where they can start and what they can do next, if they have already started. The guide is not exhaustive, and firms should continue to engage with emerging best practice and innovative solutions.

This resource is not intended to be used to “self-assess” a firm’s maturity on sustainable procurement. Other frameworks – including the WEF [Green Procurement Playbook](#) – provide sector-agnostic maturity assessments. Firms may be more mature in some areas than others and should interpret this guidance in the context of their own operating environment.

Finally, firms are not obligated to adopt the approaches outlined in this guide. However, doing so can help suppliers to coalesce on a common approach to sustainability, data provision and due diligence, reducing compliance burdens and enabling them to focus on delivering improvements.



LSA Supplier Expectations

Suppliers to the legal sector face competing pressures, with different sustainability topics being material to different supply chains and varying priorities for individual law firms.

To support legal industry suppliers, or prospective suppliers, in planning and investing for the long term, the LSA has created a baseline of expectations that all suppliers are required to meet. These minimum requirements enable suppliers to understand what law firms consistently expect, allowing them to plan over the longer term.

Regulatory requirements on topics such as waste, energy, and human rights are also expected of all suppliers regardless of their engagement on sustainability.

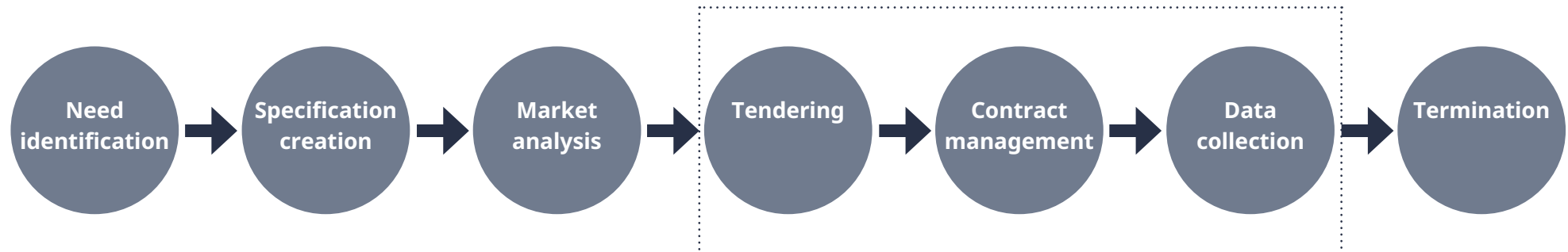
The LSA recognises that suppliers vary in size, sector, and sustainability maturity; however, a minimum baseline for responsible business practices is needed to ensure that the legal sector's supply chains address material environmental and social impacts. Suppliers are expected to:

- **Publish environmental and social policies** that reflect a commitment to nature and human rights, appropriate to the supplier's operations
- **Measure and disclose greenhouse gas emissions** (Scopes 1 and 2, and Scope 3 where relevant), using recognised standards and in a way that is proportional to the supplier's scale and impact
- **Support diversity, equity, and inclusion**, sharing workforce data where lawful and appropriate
- **Engage with law firms to improve sustainability across the legal supply chain**, for example, through initiatives on data quality, waste, or emissions reduction
- **Extend key sustainability expectations to subcontractors and Tier-2**, where material and within the supplier's influence

The Procurement Lifecycle

The diagram below illustrates a typical procurement lifecycle, which will be referred to in this guide as a basis for where interventions are most effective from a sustainability perspective.

It should be noted that this guide does not focus on the decisions made prior to the procurement activity being initiated. The decision on what to buy and whether a firm needs to procure goods and services is a critical factor in supply chain emissions and the sustainability of supply chains, however, this guide focuses on practical applications within the context of the typical procurement function's activity.



Maturity

There is significant variation in the level of action LSA member firms have taken in relation to sustainability in their supply chains. Recognising this, the guide is divided into three sections, each aligned with a different level of maturity, enabling firms to identify where they are on their sustainability journey and which actions are most relevant to them. This structure also supports benchmarking.

Beginners

Some firms will not yet have undertaken meaningful action on sustainability within their supply chain, focusing instead on “getting their own house in order” first. For firms at this early stage, the priority is to identify and mitigate actual and potential risks within their supply chain and to minimise any negative impacts identified. Introducing minimum standards and applying them consistently across suppliers can deliver significant quick wins and rapid improvements.

Intermediates

These firms have begun taking action on sustainability and are now looking to embed those practices more consistently across their supply chain. Many will have a sustainable procurement programme in place but may not yet have seen tangible improvements in Scope 3 emissions or social impact. Intermediate firms should prioritise deeper due diligence and improved data collection to support strategic interventions that meaningfully shift procurement outcomes.

To achieve more substantial improvements, intermediate firms should integrate sustainability into decision-making processes – for example, through dedicated weighting in tender evaluations, pre-qualification requirements for suppliers, and contractual clauses that create feedback loops to drive supplier performance.

Advanced

These firms have established, mature approaches, and are seeking to push best practice even further. With sustainable procurement programmes already in place, the focus should shift to driving continual improvement across the supply chain, extending beyond Tier 1 suppliers and improving the quality and depth of data to support this. Interventions should be data-backed, tracked over time, and focused on targeted improvements.

Actions Applicable to All Firms, Regardless of Maturity

Limit Data Collection to the Essentials

To reduce the burden on suppliers, it is important that firms do not overload suppliers with requests for data and information if it is not used for decision-making or critical due diligence. All data requests should have a purpose and should not be made purely for information or because it would be interesting to the firm. Transparency on the reasons for collecting data, and how that data will be used, creates a clear business case for suppliers and a feedback loop to drive improvements.

Take a Risk-Based Approach

By taking a risk-based approach, firms can focus resources on addressing the most significant sustainability risks. Certain industries and countries carry higher environmental and social risks, so directing effort towards increased due diligence, targeted interventions, and deeper engagement with these higher-risk suppliers can deliver greater positive impacts.

For example:

- **Modern slavery risks** – assessed using the [Global Slavery Index](#) for country-level risk, and the ILAB [List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor](#) to identify products or sectors with heightened exposure.
- **Physical environmental risks** – such as pollution or water scarcity.
- **Transition risks associated with net zero** – including increased insurance liabilities or regulatory changes that may affect supplier operations.

Use Supplier Segmentation to Achieve High-Impact Interventions

Segmenting suppliers by industry, size, risk level, or sustainability maturity allows procurement teams to tailor their assessment criteria and engagement strategies more effectively. This approach allows for differentiated questioning in tenders or supplier evaluations, ensuring that expectations are realistic and relevant to each supplier type. It is important to determine a supplier's category before the tendering process, as this informs the appropriate course of action and the level of due diligence required.

Critical Suppliers (High Priority)

Suppliers whose goods or services are essential to core operations, where disruption could significantly impact business continuity, compliance, or client delivery. Potential examples include:

- IT software and infrastructure
- Professional services, e.g. accountants, auditors
- Building management and maintenance

Key Suppliers (Medium Priority)

Suppliers that provide key products or services which support business efficiency and quality, but where alternatives or short-term workarounds may exist without major operational risk. Potential examples include:

- Facilities and security management
- Travel and recruitment agencies
- Training facilitators and providers
- Couriers and printing

Standard Suppliers (Low Priority)

Suppliers that deliver routine or non-essential goods and services, with minimal impact on operations if delayed or replaced, and typically low risk to compliance or reputation. Potential examples include:

- Office supplies and consumables, e.g. stationery
- Catering and hospitality
- IT peripherals

Ensure Proportionality for Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs)

It is important to recognise that effective engagement across the supply chain requires different approaches for different types of suppliers. Many suppliers – such as sole traders or SMEs – may lack dedicated sustainability resources internally, and applying uniform expectations can create unnecessary barriers. Supplier distinctions can also inform the weighting of ESG criteria within scoring models, ensuring that the evaluation process remains both fair and impactful. By aligning question depth and scoring weight with supplier categories, law firms can drive meaningful improvements in supply chain sustainability without placing disproportionate burdens on smaller or less-resourced vendors.

Below are key considerations when assessing and engaging these types of suppliers:

- Tailor requirements based on supplier size, risk exposure, and contract value
- Focus on commitment and trajectory, not solely current performance
- Allow narrative responses where quantitative data is unavailable or impractical
- Use weighted or tiered scoring matrices to adjust expectations according to supplier profiles
- Keep questionnaires short and accessible
- Split large tenders into smaller lots
- Adopt gradual onboarding and improvement pathways – for example, setting expectations such as “within 3, 6, 12 months the supplier will...” to allow SMEs to invest once revenue is guaranteed or a contract is in place.

Case Study: How Shoosmiths Has Adapted Procurement to Include SMEs

Shoosmiths has taken practical steps to reduce barriers for SMEs within its supply chain. Two key approaches are outlined below.

1. Lot Splitting for Major Tenders

In a recent software licensing and support services tender, Shoosmiths identified that combining both requirements into one large lot would limit the supply base and exclude SMEs. To address this, the tender was restructured into two separate lots. This change enabled multiple SMEs to submit bids, many offering innovative solutions that would otherwise have been overlooked. Recognising the value of this approach, Shoosmiths will consider the applicability of lot splitting as part of the procurement process for major tenders.

2. SME-Tailored Risk Assessment

Standard risk requirements, such as ISO 27001, often exclude SMEs from tenders as they may lack the scale or resources to meet certain standards. To address this, Shoosmiths redesigned its onboarding risk matrix to include an SME-focused overlay. This flexible approach allows smaller suppliers to demonstrate risk management through alternative methods rather than meeting blanket requirements, which are often tailored to larger organisations. This ensures robust risk controls while making procurement more inclusive for SMEs.

Impact

By adopting these SME-inclusive approaches, Shoosmiths is broadening its supplier base, enhancing diversity, and capturing innovations often overlooked by larger providers. These changes also strengthen resilience within the supply chain and support Shoosmiths' wider sustainability objectives.

Part 1: Tendering

Introduction

Tendering is a formal procurement process where an organisation requests formal offers (tenders or bids) from potential suppliers to provide goods, services, or works. Stages may include an Invitation to Tender (ITT) or Request for Proposal (RFP) from the purchasing organisation, followed by a detailed proposal from the supplier outlining the price, quality, and other aspects of the service. The buyer organisation evaluates these responses against agreed criteria, selects the most suitable provider, and will often conduct due diligence checks before formally awarding the contract.

1.1 Beginner




Introduce Consistent Sustainability Questions

Beginner firms should start by asking a simple, consistent set of sustainability questions that address key environmental, social, and governance (ESG) risks, and align with the LSA Supplier Expectations.

Evaluate Suppliers Based on a Consistent Framework

When scoring responses to these questions, firms should ensure consistency by applying a simple scoring framework. For example, a 1–3 scoring methodology could be used as follows:




- 1. Unacceptable
Does not respond to the question or does not meet the minimum standards of the LSA Supplier Expectations (e.g., no relevant policy, no disclosure of requested data)
- 2. Acceptable
Meets the minimum standards of the LSA Supplier Expectations
- 3. Outstanding
Exceeds the minimum standards of the LSA Supplier Expectations

 Environmental	 Social	 Governance
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do you have a sustainability policy?• Have you had any environmental breaches or fines in the last 3 years?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do you have a DEI and human rights policy?• Do you comply with labour laws in all operating jurisdictions?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do you have an anti-bribery & corruption policy?• Do you have a data privacy/cybersecurity policy?• Do you have a named ESG contact?

1.2 Intermediate

Add More Comprehensive Sustainability Questions

In addition to the questions asked in the beginner stage:

 Environmental	 Social	 Governance
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Please share your most recent carbon footprint, including Scopes 1, 2, and 3• Do you purchase renewable energy? If so, please share whether this is through green contracts, Power Purchase Agreements (PPAs) or generated on/near site.• Do you measure your energy, waste, and water consumption and have a plan for reducing consumption?• Do you have a net zero target? If so, is it approved by SBTi?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What actions have you taken to improve inclusion and equity across your company?• Do you have a grievance mechanism that enables stakeholders outside your company to raise concerns without fear of reprisal?• What risks have you identified in your supply chain regarding human rights?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How do you ensure compliance with your anti-bribery and corruption policy, and with your data privacy and cybersecurity policies?• Who has responsibility for sustainability within your company?• What percentage of your staff have undergone sustainability training?

Evaluate Suppliers Based on a Consistent Framework

When scoring responses to these questions, firms should look beyond written policies and procedures and assess whether suppliers are actively meeting their commitments. To ensure consistency, apply a 1–5 scoring framework, requiring evidence to support each response:

1. Unacceptable

Does not respond to the question or does not meet the minimum standards of the LSA Supplier Expectations (e.g., no relevant policy, no disclosure of requested data)

2. Acceptable

Meets the minimum standards of the LSA Supplier Expectations

3. Good

Policies and procedures exceed the minimum standards of the LSA Supplier Expectations

4. Very good

Policies and procedures exceed the minimum standards of the LSA Supplier Expectations and action can be demonstrated against commitments

5. Outstanding

Policies and procedures exceed the minimum standards of the LSA Supplier Expectations and action can be demonstrated against commitments, tracking performance over time, and delivering impact beyond the company's own identification




Introduce KPIs

It is essential that performance can be tracked over time, so firms should be transparent with suppliers during the tender process about how success will be measured. Intermediate firms are therefore encouraged to begin engaging suppliers in defining KPIs – based on the questions assessed during the tender – that will be carried forward into contracts (e.g., percentage of renewable energy used, living wage coverage, and training completion rates).

1.3 Advanced

Add More Comprehensive Sustainability Questions

In addition to the questions asked in beginner and intermediate stages:

 Environmental	 Social	 Governance
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Please provide the % reduction/increase of greenhouse gas emissions against the previous year• Is your carbon footprint third-party assured?• Can you provide product/service-level carbon footprints (e.g., EPDs) and, if so, are they third party verified?• What percentage of your energy consumption is supplied by renewable sources?• Have you assessed the impact of your goods/ services on nature and/or biodiversity, and if so, against what standard?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do you pay a living wage to all direct and indirect employees? Do you require your suppliers to pay a living wage to their employees?• What actions have you taken to address human rights risks within your supply chain?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How is sustainability governed within your company to ensure accountability and delivery?• What accreditations/ratings does your company hold? (CDP, EcoVadis, B Corp etc.)• How do you drive sustainability requirements through your own supply chain?• Have you mapped your supply chain for sustainability impacts, risks, and opportunities?

Evaluate Suppliers Based on a Consistent Framework

When scoring responses to these questions, firms should look beyond written policies and procedures and assess whether suppliers are actively meeting their commitments and demonstrating improvement over time. To ensure consistency, apply a 1–5 scoring framework, requiring evidence to support each response:

1. Unacceptable

Does not respond to the question or does not meet the minimum standards of the LSA Supplier Expectations (e.g., no relevant policy, no disclosure of requested data)

2. Acceptable

Meets the minimum standards of the LSA Supplier Expectations

3. Good

Policies and procedures exceed the minimum standards of the LSA Supplier Expectations, and action can be demonstrated against commitments

4. Very good

Policies and procedures exceed the minimum standards of the LSA Supplier Expectations, and action can be demonstrated against commitments, tracking performance over time, and delivering impact beyond the company's own operations

5. Outstanding

Policies and procedures exceed the minimum standards of the LSA Supplier Expectations, with progress against commitments independently verified, transparently reported, and supported by granular performance tracking over time. The supplier also demonstrates leadership by contributing to wider sector or industry improvements.

Minimum Weighting for Sustainability

Applying a minimum weighting for sustainability in tenders ensures that responsible sourcing is consistently and meaningfully evaluated within procurement. Firms can achieve this by assigning a fixed percentage of the total tender score – such as the 10% commonly used in UK public procurement – to sustainability, ensuring it has influence alongside cost and quality. This approach provides a clear incentive for suppliers to strengthen their sustainability performance, particularly in competitive tenders where marginal differences in service levels determine the outcome.

Improvement Plans

Where suppliers do not currently score highly on sustainability but present a strong business case in other evaluation areas (such as pricing or quality), it is recommended that they be contractually required to meet the minimum standards within 6–12 months of contract award. This approach drives improvement among suppliers who might otherwise have been excluded, helping to raise overall sustainability performance across the supply chain.

Case Study: A&L Goodbody (ALG): Embedding Sustainable Procurement Through Policy and Collaboration

The Starting Point: Establishing a Policy Framework

ALG launched a Responsible Procurement and Vendor Management Policy to establish a framework that ensures procurement decisions consider not only cost and quality, but also environmental, social, and governance (ESG) factors. The policy outlines a complete procurement approach – from planning and need identification to supplier sourcing, due diligence, selection, risk assessment, contracting, and ongoing vendor review. The policy sets out clear expectations for supplier selection, due diligence, and ethical standards.

Key Objectives:

- Ensure timely, competitively priced service
- Comply with ethical and legal requirements
- Protect data and manage risk
- Embed ESG considerations across procurement

Building ESG Into Supplier Due Diligence

To support the policy, ALG developed a supplier due diligence questionnaire aligned with its own ESG standards and commitments, ensuring suppliers are not asked to meet standards higher than the firm applies internally, supporting a fair and consistent approach to responsible procurement. To reduce duplication and minimise the administrative burden on suppliers, the questionnaire incorporates carbon measurement and target-setting questions aligned with ALG's Science-Based Targets initiative (SBTi) commitments.

Building a Structured Process Without a Central Procurement Team

With procurement responsibilities distributed across business services teams, ALG created a coordinated structure to maintain consistency:

- **A defined supplier engagement process** with defined roles for Risk, Information Security, and Responsible Business teams
- **A dedicated shared mailbox** for supplier communications (access to the mailbox was assigned to all employees involved in purchasing goods or services – the 'business owners')
- **A centralised SharePoint folder** for completed questionnaires, improving accessibility and accountability across departments
- **Smartsheet tracking to monitor questionnaire status and reviews**, helping reduce email traffic and improve visibility

In this decentralised model, business owners lead supplier interactions, while the Responsible Business team provide oversight and guidance.

Pilot Findings

ALG piloted the new procurement process, allowing them to gather feedback, refine the workflow, and clarify follow-up responsibilities. Some key findings arose from the pilot:

- **Supplier engagement varied:** Some provided detailed responses, evidenced by policy documents, whereas smaller suppliers often lacked formal policies or declined to respond to certain questions.
- **Proportionality matters:** Compliance requirements must be balanced with supplier capacity, especially for SMEs
- **Supplier profiling is essential:** Business size, location, criticality, and availability of alternatives are important to determine how compliance gaps should be addressed.

Challenges and Next Steps

Maintaining oversight and supplier engagement at scale can be difficult in a decentralised model. However, by building clear processes and fostering cross-functional collaboration, ALG have created a solid foundation for a robust and scalable responsible procurement framework. As part of their continuous improvement efforts, ALG is also exploring how AI tools can streamline questionnaire review and improve ESG risk identification.

Part 2: Contracting

Introduction

In procurement, contracting is the process of creating a legally binding agreement between a buyer and a supplier for the purchase of goods, services, or works. This involves negotiating terms, defining obligations, and establishing the framework for the entire transaction, from delivery to payment. The contract protects both parties, ensures clear expectations, and mitigates risk.

2.1 Beginner

Contract Terms

The firm's minimum sustainability requirements for suppliers – along with a commitment to sharing data and information with the purchaser upon request – should be incorporated into contract terms and conditions from the outset. Adoption of the LSA Supplier Expectations can be a helpful mechanism in documenting these commitments at a high level.

Communication and Awareness

Relationships are established early in the contracting process, providing a valuable opportunity to reinforce expectations with suppliers. Internal communication and awareness are also essential to effective supplier management. In many law firms, procurement is decentralised, meaning

supplier relationships are managed by individuals or teams, whose primary focus is often the quality of the product or service. Firms at the early stages of sustainable procurement should therefore prioritise targeted communication with these relationship owners – supporting them to understand potential ESG risks and impacts within the supply chain, as well as the minimum expectations the firm has set for all suppliers.

Performance Management

Periodic reviews of supplier performance should be included in the terms of high-priority contracts. Supplier relationship owners may benefit from a simple checklist or agenda template to help structure review meetings, with sustainability topics introduced as appropriate to the contract.

Items to consider during review meetings include:

- An overview of the firm's sustainability goals and strategy
- An overview of the supplier's approach to sustainability, and future plans
- Trends in supplier sustainability metrics (where available)
- Signposting to relevant resources, guidance, or training that may support the supplier's progress

2.2 Intermediate

Contract Terms

As firms develop the capacity to monitor and manage ESG risks in procurement, contract terms can become more specific and detailed in this area. Some intermediate level firms may use contract templates for different categories of procurement, with mechanisms such as:

- **A 'mandatory provisions' schedule** including a section on responsible business expectations
- **Financial crime clauses**, covering anti-corruption and bribery
- An expectation that suppliers are accredited **Living Wage employers**
- **Defined supplier reporting obligations**, setting out the required format, content, frequency, and timing of reporting throughout the contract term. For example, a hardware disposal supplier may be asked to provide data on waste removed from the law firm's premises and how it has been processed, in a format that can be easily integrated into the firm's existing waste-management reporting systems
- **Explicit environmental incident reporting requirements**, obliging suppliers to take prompt action in the event of an incident (e.g. a spill) and provide full records to the firm
- **Specific governance and engagement requirements**, such as mandatory meetings, or the inclusion of standing ESG agenda items for regular discussion

Communication and Awareness

At the intermediate level, firms that are mapping suppliers and other stakeholders in a more sophisticated way (see 'Segmenting' on page 10) are better able to identify who to inform or consult, based on contract value, duration, and level of perceived risk.

Supplier relationships are an opportunity to build trust and foster two-way communication. As well as setting out the firm's expectations, it is recommended that law firms ask about – and listen to – suppliers' own ESG challenges and opportunities. Identification of common themes and recurring issues across suppliers can help firms determine interventions that deliver impact across the supply chain.

At the Intermediate stage, firms may begin to bring suppliers together on a semi-regular basis through forums or webinars, to ensure consistent messaging and enable direct engagement. These sessions can be held virtually or in-person, depending on supplier locations and the nature of the engagement.

Performance Management

Relationship owners should remain informed about the firm's sustainability strategy and their role in managing supplier performance.

For critical suppliers, sustainability should feature prominently in review meetings. It is recommended that a representative from the firm's sustainability team attends these meetings regularly.

Even where procurement is largely decentralised, shared systems and processes can help track reviews and support continuous improvement. This may include documented meeting minutes, data or feedback updates via email or tools such as Microsoft Forms or – where available – a more advanced Supplier Relationship Management (SRM) platform or framework.

2.3 Advanced

Contract Terms

At the advanced level, firms can adopt a more flexible approach, amending and tailoring contract terms for individual suppliers based on tender responses and the specific nature of the services being provided.

Where frameworks such as the LSA Supplier Expectations are used, they can be developed into a two-tier structure: minimum standards and continuous improvement. For high-priority suppliers, contract terms should clearly set out metrics and monitoring arrangements, with performance tracked through KPIs or service level agreements. KPIs can be linked to supplier remuneration or improved terms in recognition of strong performance. Conversely, poor performance should be linked to appropriate redress mechanisms.

Advanced firms often have greater capacity to audit suppliers' adherence to the code of conduct and other contractual requirements. This can be incorporated into general supplier audits or, for higher-risk suppliers, undertaken as a dedicated ESG audit.

Advanced firms may also require their Tier 1 suppliers to cascade relevant contractual requirements to their own suppliers (the law firm's Tier 2). This helps ensure that positive pressure to improve extends throughout the supply chain, with risks and responsibilities allocated to those best placed to manage them.

Firms should also consider contract length and begin planning well ahead – two years is recommended – for the renewal process. This includes identifying the internal stakeholders that should be involved in deciding whether to renew or retender and capturing any learnings to inform the next iteration of the contract.

Examples of contract terms can be found on the [Chancery Lane Project website](#).

Communication and Awareness

As firms mature in their approach to supplier engagement, inviting suppliers to participate in training, events, and development activities – either with other suppliers, or alongside the internal teams they work with most closely – can help deepen relationships and strengthen collaboration. This targeted engagement increases awareness of relevant risks, issues, and strategies, and supports more effective action on specific topics.

The LSA has an important role to play here, convening firms to share knowledge, highlighting best practice, and providing benchmarks that enable continuous improvement.

Performance Management

With clear KPIs and timelines set out in contract terms, performance management becomes more formal and rigorous. Regular meetings and reviews can be used to collaboratively monitor performance metrics, track corrective actions, and identify opportunities for improvement – with actions for both the firm and the supplier. Escalation pathways can also be built into the process, on both sides of the relationship, to minimise ‘blockers’ and maintain momentum.

Case Study: Bird & Bird: Capacity Building Within Supply Chains

Law firms increasingly recognise that sustainable procurement is not simply about compliance – it's about creating shared value across the supply chain. While requesting ESG data from suppliers is essential, doing so without context can lead to confusion, resistance, or incomplete responses.

To address this, Bird & Bird adopted a proactive approach: educating their suppliers on why sustainability data matters, how it supports the firm's wider responsible business goals, and how it aligns with international frameworks such as the UN Global Compact principles and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Previously, suppliers were asked to provide sustainability metrics without prior engagement, often resulting in inconsistent data and limited understanding of its purpose. Many suppliers were unsure what was being measured and why, which hindered meaningful progress.

In March 2025, Bird & Bird launched a six-month supplier engagement and training pilot – the first step in their longer-term supplier engagement strategy. The programme aimed to:

- **Build supplier understanding** of the importance of sustainability in legal services procurement.
- **Explain the context** behind data requests, including regulatory drivers, client expectations, and alignment with the UN Global Compact principles and SDGs.
- **Provide practical training** on how to measure, report, and improve sustainability performance.
- **Create a feedback loop** to identify supplier challenges and opportunities.

Whilst this was just the initial step in strengthening sustainable procurement, the education and training proved crucial for embedding new practices. By investing in supplier capability – enabling suppliers to apply the knowledge to their own supply chains in turn – and aligning their approach with international frameworks, Bird & Bird not only advanced its own responsible business objectives but also contributed to wider industry transformation. The pilot has created a strong foundation for ongoing engagement and continuous improvement.



Part 3: Data Collection

Introduction

Gathering information is an important part of assessing and managing supplier performance and is essential for delivering ESG outcomes through contracts.

Supply chain Scope 3 emissions are often the most challenging to measure due to their complexity and reliance on supplier-provided data. This diagram illustrates the four main approaches to calculating these emissions: supplier-specific, hybrid, average-data, and spend-based methods. As a firm's maturity, data availability, and level of engagement with suppliers increase, more granular methods are recommended, as they improve the quality of carbon footprint calculations. However, these more detailed methods require deeper collaboration and robust data-sharing practices. Understanding the trade-off between accuracy and practicality – particularly in the context of a law firm's current maturity level – is therefore key when deciding on the most appropriate approach.



Product life cycle stages



Caluculation	All other upstream emissions from production of product	Supplier's scope 1 & 2 emissions	Notes on data used
Supplier-specific method	Supplier-specific data	Supplier-specific data	All data is specific to the supplier's product
Hybrid method	Supplier-specific data or average data, or combination of both	Supplier-specific data or average data, or combination of both	Scope 1 & 2 data specific to supplier's product, all other upstream emissions either supplier specific or average
Average-data method	Average data	Average data	All emissions are based on secondary process data
Spend-based method	Average data	Average data	All emissions are based on secondary EEIO data

3.1 Beginner

Engaging Suppliers

To begin engaging suppliers on sustainability, firms should proactively communicate the purpose of the new requirements, provide clear instructions for completing any requests, and share relevant updates as needed. Email is typically the best channel for this engagement, as it ensures transparency and allows suppliers to easily refer back to the information.

When starting out, firms should engage their suppliers through a central function or role. This helps ensure consistency of messaging, supports effective coordination of responses, and allows for internal capability building.

Establishing a supplier code of conduct can also help set clear expectations regarding ethical, environmental, and social standards. LSA members are encouraged to align their codes of conduct with the LSA Supplier Expectations to promote consistency across the sector.

Collecting Meaningful Data

When beginning to request data from suppliers, firms should focus on collecting only the information necessary for due diligence and decision-making. Data requests should align with the minimum requirements as set out in the LSA Supplier Expectations, as well as the questions asked during the tender stage.

Examples of the types of information firms may request include:

 Environmental	 Social	 Governance
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Environmental Policies• Spend-based carbon footprint for Scopes 1, 2 and Scope 3 where relevant	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Policies on human rights, fair pay, diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) and whistleblowing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Policies on whistleblowing, ethics, anti-bribery• Any breaches/fines

Data Frequency

Firms should also consider the appropriate frequency for collecting this information. In most cases, data can be captured during onboarding or tendering and refreshed annually or aligned with contract renewal cycles. Setting clear expectations on frequency helps ensure data remains relevant while avoiding unnecessary administrative burden for suppliers.

Using Appropriate Tools

It is recommended that firms beginning their sustainable procurement programmes start by using spreadsheets or simple questionnaires to capture both qualitative and quantitative data. This approach is low-cost, easy to manage and appropriate when only a limited amount of data is required. Templates should include questions such as do you have an Environment Policy or do you measure your carbon footprint?

The LSA have compiled a questionnaire which is available to LSA member firms by contacting manager@legalsustainabilityalliance.com

3.2 Intermediate

Engaging Suppliers




As firms mature in their sustainable procurement practices, the scope of supplier requests will invariably increase. It is therefore important that firms coordinate and refine their messaging and provide opportunities for suppliers to build the skills needed to meet these expectations.

To support this, firms are encouraged to develop – or signpost suppliers to – training programmes and webinars that explain the sustainability requirements of the firm. These should be complemented by follow-up sessions and accessible static resources to accommodate different learning preferences and ensure all suppliers can engage effectively.

As internal capabilities grow, ownership of supplier engagement should begin to decentralise to contract owners, supported centrally. This enables a deeper level of engagement aligned with specific supplier relationships. To maintain consistency, contract owners should be supported with clear guidance on topics to cover and the steps to take if a supplier is not on track to meet expectations.

Collecting Meaningful Data

In addition to the information requested at the beginner stage:

 Environmental	 Social	 Governance
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Supplier-specific carbon data, such as allocated emissions• Net zero target date• Identified sustainability impacts, risks, and opportunities• Water, waste & energy (renewable %) data	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• DEI statistics, such as demographics across role seniority (% for age, gender, ethnicity, etc.)• Living wage coverage within the company• Supply chain risks identified and mitigation action taken• High-risk suppliers identified	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Certifications/standards (including information security, environment, and human rights)• Training statistics• Organisational charts

Using Appropriate Tools

As maturity increases, firms can begin integrating supplier questionnaires into e-procurement, supplier management or collaboration platforms. This helps ensure alignment with existing internal systems and improves visibility and availability of data across functions.

However, these internal tools often have limited data-visualisation capabilities, and because they are bespoke to each firm, suppliers are required to complete data for every client – increasing their administrative burden. To minimise this impact, firms are encouraged to use the standardised questionnaire which has been developed by the LSA and is available to LSA member firms by contacting manager@legalsustainabilityalliance.com.



3.3 Advanced

Engaging Suppliers

For more mature firms, supplier engagement becomes critical to driving continuous improvement, particularly as collaboration deepens and incentives such as contract clauses or KPIs are introduced. To be effective, this engagement should be owned and led by contract owners, supported by central teams for monitoring, guidance, and escalation where needed.

Targeted supplier development programmes – such as those delivered by [Heart of The City](#) – should be considered to help upskill suppliers in areas where issues have been identified or where particular risks are present.

Collecting Meaningful Data

In addition to the information requested at the beginner and intermediate stages:

 Environmental	 Social	 Governance
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Environmental product declarations/product carbon footprints• Supplier specific, unit-based carbon footprints• Year-on-Year improvements in carbon emissions• Nature impacts and risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Initiatives to improve social sustainability• Supply chain diversity• Supply chain living wage• Grievances raised	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Senior leadership ownership evidence• Supplier audits completed• Employee training statistics

Data Frequency

For higher-risk suppliers that have the maturity and capability to support it, more frequent – or even real-time – data collection can provide actionable, in-year insights rather than relying solely on annual updates. More frequent updates may also be needed, for example:

- **When suppliers provide Environmental Product Declarations (EPDs):** data should be refreshed whenever a new product is made available or purchased.
- **When a supplier undergoes significant changes,** such as a merger, acquisition, or major restructure. Firms should re-engage with them to collect new data, to ensure information remains accurate and up to date.

This approach should only be adopted where the firm is prepared to use the data to inform decisions; it should not be implemented solely for information gathering.

Firms should use the data collected to inform management reporting and external disclosures, and to feed insights into category strategies and future tenders.

Using Appropriate Tools

For more mature firms, data collection platforms offer opportunities to standardise data collection and reduce the burden on suppliers. However, some platforms carry significant fees, and in some cases also charge suppliers to respond. Careful selection is therefore essential to ensure the chosen tool is appropriate. A 2024 overview of available tools is provided by the [Scope 3 peer group](#).

It is important to note that if firms select different platforms, the benefits of standardisation are lost. Developing or selecting a common tool across the LSA therefore represents a potential opportunity to streamline supplier reporting and reduce duplication.

For firms with more advanced capabilities, creating a real-time data link to an internal database can enable supplier-specific dashboards and visualisations. This provides contract owners with timely, data-backed insights to support more meaningful supplier engagement. This is particularly important where sustainability-related contract clauses or KPIs are in place.

References and Resources

Glossary of Key Terms

B Corp

A certification for companies that meet high standards of social and environmental performance, accountability, and transparency.

CDP (formerly the Carbon Disclosure Project)

A global disclosure system for companies to manage and report their environmental impacts.

Centralised Procurement

A procurement model where purchasing decisions and supplier management are controlled centrally.

Chancery Lane Project

A collaborative initiative providing model contract clauses and resources to help law firms and their suppliers address climate change and sustainability.

Decentralised Procurement

A procurement model where purchasing decisions and supplier management are distributed across multiple teams or locations rather than controlled centrally.

EcoVadis

A sustainability ratings platform for global supply chains, providing independent assessments of supplier ESG performance.

EPD (Environmental Product Declaration)

A third-party verified document that provides transparent information about the environmental impact of a product throughout its lifecycle.

Environmental, Social, Governance (ESG)

A framework for addressing a law firm's environmental stewardship, social responsibility, and governance practices.

Grievance Mechanism

A formal process that allows stakeholders to raise concerns or complaints safely and without fear of retaliation.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Measurable targets used to track and assess progress against specific objectives, such as sustainability goals.

Living Wage

A wage level that meets basic living costs, ensuring workers can afford essentials such as housing, food, and healthcare.

Mandatory Provisions Schedule

A section within procurement contracts that outlines non-negotiable sustainability requirements or obligations that suppliers must comply with. These provisions are legally binding and enforceable.

Materiality

Identifying and prioritising sustainability issues that significantly influence a company's ability to create long-term value or have a substantial impact on people and the environment.

Net Zero Target

A commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions as much as possible and offset any remaining emissions to achieve a net balance between emissions produced and emissions removed from the atmosphere.

Peer Group

A group of organisations collaborating to share best practices, benchmarks, and resources, such as the Scope 3 Peer Group.

Power Purchase Agreement (PPA)

A contract to buy renewable energy directly from a generator, usually for a longer period of 5–25 years. Delivery can be on-site, near-site, or through the grid.

SBTi (Science Based Targets initiative)

An organisation that validates corporate net zero targets against scientific criteria.

Scope 1 Emissions

Greenhouse gas emissions released directly from sources owned or controlled by the organisation (e.g. company vehicles, on-site fuel combustion).

Scope 2 Emissions

Indirect greenhouse gas emissions from the generation of purchased electricity, steam, heating, or cooling consumed by the organisation.

Scope 3 Emissions

All other indirect greenhouse gas emissions that occur in the value chain, including those from suppliers, business travel, waste, and product use.

SLA (Service Level Agreement)

A contractual commitment defining the expected level of service, performance metrics, and remedies if standards are not met.

Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs)

Businesses with fewer than 250 staff and ≤ £44m turnover or ≤ £38m balance-sheet total.

SRM (Supplier Relationship Management)

A strategic approach to managing interactions with suppliers, focusing on collaboration, performance improvement, and risk mitigation.

Supplier Code of Conduct

A set of standards outlining ethical, environmental, and social expectations that suppliers must adhere to when working with a law firm.

Sustainable Procurement

Purchasing goods and services in a way that minimises negative environmental and social impacts, promotes ethical governance, and integrates ESG into all procurement stages.

Third-Party Assurance

Independent evaluation of reported data and the systems, controls, and methodologies that underpin it. Typically conducted under recognised frameworks such as ISAE 3000 or ISAE 3410, similar to financial audit standards, and carried out by accredited professionals.

Third-Party Verification

Independent verification of data, claims, or performance – such as external audits of carbon footprints or sustainability reports – focused on assessing the accuracy and completeness of information provided.

Tier 1 Suppliers

Suppliers that provide goods or services directly to your firm. They have a direct contractual relationship.

Tier 2 Suppliers

Suppliers that provide goods or services to Tier 1 suppliers. They are one step removed from your firm but still part of the supply chain.

Weighted Scoring Matrix

A tool that assigns different weights to evaluation criteria to prioritise factors such as sustainability alongside cost and quality in procurement decisions.

Useful Resources:

[WEF Green Procurement Playbook](#)

The Scope 3 peer group [2024 tools review](#)

Risks of modern slavery can be assessed using tools such as the [Global Slavery Index](#), which provides country-level risk ratings, and the [ILAB List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor](#), which highlights products and sectors with elevated slavery risks.

Examples of contract terms can be found on the [Chancery Lane Project website](#)

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