

# Responsible Purchasing Practices (RPP)

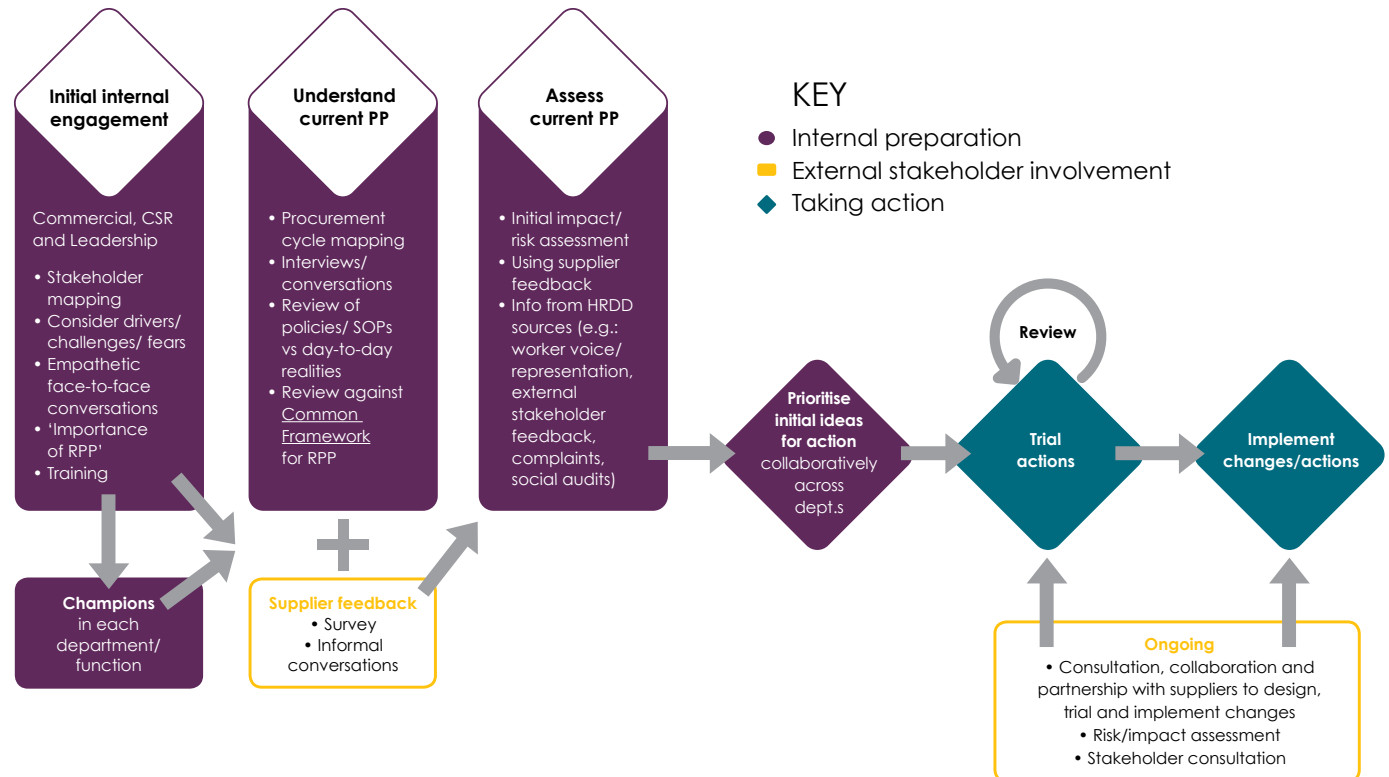
## Supplier engagement briefing

Engaging suppliers is essential to improving purchasing practices. Their insights help illuminate current realities, identify areas for improvement, test changes effectively, and avoid unintended negative consequences.

Supplier input can also support internal buy-in and help prioritise action. As shown in the diagram below, assessing and adapting purchasing practices (PP) must be done in genuine partnership with suppliers to be successful. >>



This briefing outlines how to approach supplier engagement as a key element of improving purchasing practices.



## 1 Consider your approach

The garment and footwear industry can be highly competitive, and supplier relationships with buyers can be commercially sensitive. Suppliers may hesitate to share honest feedback if they fear jeopardising future business. Power dynamics – such as the relative size of your business compared to your suppliers – can also influence how openly feedback is given. It's important to be deliberate in your approach, considering what kind of feedback you need and how best to create space for honest input.


There are multiple ways to gather feedback from suppliers.

**Direct supplier-buyer engagement** might include supplier surveys, regular two-way dialogue, company-wide meetings involving all suppliers, and integrated processes such as joint planning and decision-making.

**Third-party approaches** might include independent anonymised surveys, interviews, or assessments conducted by independent organisations, as well as MSI grievance mechanisms.

### Key considerations:

- Use a systematic and regular approach to collecting feedback. This helps track progress over time and supports continuous improvement. Combining multiple methods can also capture a wider range of perspectives.
- Involve suppliers in designing the feedback process to ensure you're asking the right questions, meeting their needs, and creating a safe, manageable process.
- Clearly communicate the purpose of collecting feedback, what it will be used for, and how results and improvement plans will be shared.
- Integrate feedback into decision-making and follow up to show how input has informed changes.
- Consider offering written assurance from commercial or leadership teams that honest feedback won't affect future business – backed by internal measures – to help build trust. >>



**Alongside suppliers – workers, trade unions, manufacturing associations, and civil society organisations also play key roles in identifying risks and shaping solutions.** Suppliers, however, are directly affected by purchasing practices, which influence their ability to provide decent working conditions. Strong, transparent communication channels between purchasing companies and suppliers is essential throughout efforts to improve practices.



## 2 Supplier surveys

Surveys can be a useful tool for gathering structured feedback, especially for large companies with multiple buying teams and an extensive supplier base.

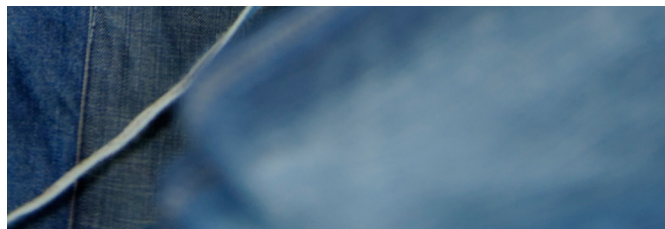
- Better Buying™ offers anonymous feedback services and summarised reports.
  - The Better Buying Purchasing Practices Index™ is a detailed deep dive into a buyer company's Tier 1 purchasing practices – useful for understanding key issues and prioritising action.
  - The Better Buying Partnership Index™ is a short subjective survey of the quality of buyer-supplier partnerships.
- If Better Buying™ is not feasible, consider using an independent third party to conduct surveys.
- If constructing your own survey, consider the points below.

### For effective surveys:

- Have a clear plan for how the data will be used and share this with suppliers to build trust.



***Ensuring that responses are completely anonymous and that suppliers trust the anonymity promised, is likely to lead to far more insightful results.***



- Ensure anonymity and communicate how it is protected. Tools like SurveyMonkey can help maintain confidentiality.
- Involve commercial or leadership teams in the request, to signal its importance and encourage participation.
- Be mindful of “survey fatigue.” Limit requests and ensure they are purposeful.
- Share summarised results with suppliers to close the feedback loop and demonstrate how their input is being used.
- If feedback is consistently positive, review your methods – it may indicate that suppliers are not comfortable sharing honest concerns. >>

### 3 Meaningful two-way dialogue

Two-way dialogue builds trust and enables deeper understanding. It's essential – whether used alongside surveys or as a standalone approach.

- Be aware of power dynamics and cultural differences that may influence communication.
- Collaborate with suppliers to identify appropriate participants in the feedback process.
- Strategically select who gives and receives feedback to foster openness.
- Begin conversations with a summary of feedback received – either from previous rounds or to date – to show that input is valued.
- Establish regular feedback mechanisms to build continuity and trust.
- Involve suppliers early in planning and production to ensure their insights shape decisions from the outset.

### 4 Collaborate to design and implement changes

Changes to purchasing practices should be designed, trialled, and implemented in partnership with suppliers. Ongoing feedback ensures that changes are meaningful, effective, and free from unintended negative consequences.

This continued engagement demonstrates your commitment to responsible purchasing, keeps feedback loops open, and builds trust by showing how supplier input leads to real improvements.

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**Involving suppliers at each stage of your journey to improve purchasing practices ensures that changes are genuinely impactful and workable for manufacturers.**