



International
Olympic
Committee

SUSTAINABLE SOURCING FACT SHEET – GIFTS AND PROMOTIONAL PRODUCTS

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In collaboration with



GIFTS AND PROMOTIONAL PRODUCTS

Background

This Sustainable Sourcing Fact Sheet has been developed to provide core and recommended criteria and guidance to sport organisations on what should be considered in sourcing and procurement decisions related to key categories of products and services.

Individuals responsible for sourcing/ procuring decisions and activities should review this Sustainable Sourcing Fact Sheet alongside the ‘Sustainability Essentials’ guide: [‘Sustainable Sourcing in Sport’](#).

Scope

This Sustainable Sourcing Fact Sheet covers Gifts and Promotional Products, including those used in marketing and communication programmes. They may be given away or sold as part of merchandising or memorabilia. For a number of sport organisations, it is common for licensing deals to be in place for merchandise and memorabilia – sometimes these licensing deals also cover the supply of gifts and promotional items (sometimes known as ‘premiums’ in the case of sponsors).

There is a huge diversity of items supplied for things like delegate packs, marketing collateral or engagement events – essentially anything that can be branded – bags, umbrellas, clothing, reusable drinkware, ornaments, toys, electronics, stationery etc. However, virtual or experiential gifts are also common.



This document should be read alongside other Sustainable Sourcing Fact Sheets on Wood and Wood-Based Products (e.g., wood based products, packaging), Textiles and Textile-Based Products (e.g., branded apparel, footwear, homeware), and Suppliers of Sports Equipment (e.g., branded items for resale).

Sustainability fundamentals

Natural resources, including materials, water and energy, are the basis for sustaining society. In recent decades, the global economy has experienced much growth. Over this period there’s been many societal benefits including extreme poverty halving from 1990 to 2015. However, the global population is estimated to increase to around 8 billion by 2030, probably to over 9 billion by 2050, with increases in average wealth further raising the demand for resources, products and services.

The activities of the large and growing human population are eroding many natural resources, while a large part of the global population is still struggling to meet basic needs. Businesses are likely to face intense competition for a wide range of material resources that become less easily available. Even now, some materials, such as rare earth elements and other critical raw materials, are subject to supply pressure and price volatility.

Environmental costs include climate impacts, impacts to land, freshwater and oceans (e.g., plastics pollution) and loss of biodiversity. Workers involved in making promotional items can face unsafe conditions, low wages, forced labour and discrimination, often unable to raise concerns. The industry tends to rely on factory audits to ensure they meet labour standards; however while these are vital, they may not be enough to gain a clear picture of the fair treatment of workers on their own.



This is exacerbated by a lack of supply chain transparency. Items are often sourced from agencies via distributors (rather than factories direct). Concerns over commercial confidentiality can mean a reluctance to disclose factories. Some sport actors (e.g., organising committees of major sport events) have been subject to trade union and NGO campaigns to publicly disclose branded merchandise factories.

Arguably there is a tension that exists between sustainability and the very premise of a promotional item. Items can be very short-lived and classed as 'hard to recycle'. On average, most are discarded or filed away in less than 6 months, even when initially interesting. While some may be given away, most is likely to end up in landfill, incinerated or the ocean. Perversely, promotional items may also lead to the consumption of more 'stuff' if they end up increasing brand preference and loyalty.

The sector needs to give greater focus to sustainable sourcing, invest in more circular models and strategies for reuse and

recycling when items are no longer required. While there may be slowdown in demand for 'stuff' in the developed world, this will be countered by living standards rises elsewhere. Evidence points to consumption patterns needing several planets worth of resources.

Our climate needs to be stabilised, freshwater preserved, land regenerated, oceans and biodiversity made healthier. This needs to be in line with what science defines as Earth's limits and be socially equitable too. This is not ideology; in today's world a more resilient and sustainable business is likely a necessity.

This might even present a future ethical dilemma and existential issue for the sector. Are increasingly hard to access resources prioritised for basic 'needs' like food and shelter or to produce 'wants' for gifts and promotional items? While this may seem a gloomy and stark vision of the future – on the other hand the opportunity for growth linked to purposeful business and sustainable innovation could be significant.

Global policy context

Globally, there is an exponential growth of sustainability related regulation and growing recognition of the benefits of resource efficiency and the circular economy to advance more sustainable consumption and production patterns. This is essential to achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Globally, regulators are responding with actions aimed at catalysing on this. Several territories in Asia (China, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam) have moved to ban solid waste imports such as plastics. The EU is progressing an ambitious [Circular Economy Action Plan](#) and chemical strategy aimed at phasing out harmful substances in consumer products. Regulation to advance net zero goals, tackle deforestation and modern slavery and punish greenwashing are other examples.

The promotional products industry, like any other sector, will be impacted directly (and indeed indirectly by its customers) by this exponential growth of sustainability-related legislation.

Sustainability is becoming more important for the sector. In recent years, it has faced unprecedented challenges where it has been impacted by labour shortages, customer budget constraints, supply chain disruption impacting stock availability. This may also have impacted its progress on sustainability – where it's considered to lag behind many others.

In recognition of this, the Advertising Specialty Institute (ASI) has launched '[Promo For The Planet](#)' to encourage the industry to move towards becoming more sustainable. Some in the industry have begun to pivot their brands to become more purpose driven and achieve certified [B-Corp status](#). While so-called eco options have been available for many years, consumers are savvier. They are scrutinising brands sustainability credentials more and may not buy from those where they have concerns.

In parallel, there has been a rise in green claims regulation in several markets. Enforcement action is being taken by regulators for so-called greenwashing (misleading claims or virtue signalling). While certain sectors (e.g., fashion, fast-moving consumer goods) have been most scrutinised – any could be a priority and greenwashing associated with promotional items is an issue.

In general, there are few meaningful sustainability initiatives and collaborations within the promotional products industry – a notable one is ASI's '[Promo For The Planet](#)'. Examples of initiatives in relevant adjacent sectors include the [ICTI Ethical Toy Program](#), [The Sustainability Consortium](#) and [Cascale](#) (formally known as Sustainable Apparel Coalition).

Certification

There are myriad sustainability standards of relevance to gifts and promotional products.

Credible standards allow organisations to develop sustainable sourcing policies and commitments by providing a transparent and impartial assurance system. Standards with chain of custody models allow companies to better understand where products come from.

Standards of relevance to the sector include [B Corporation](#), [Fairtrade](#), [Organic](#), [Cradle 2 Cradle](#), [Better Cotton Initiative \(BCI\)](#), and [Forest Stewardship Council \(FSC\)](#).

[The Standards Map database](#) has information on over 300 standards, codes of conduct and audit protocols addressing sustainability issues in global supply chains. It aims to help organisations review and compare a wide range of standards and requirements through user-friendly online navigation and searching.

Marketing and labelling

The use of third-party logos (e.g., [FSC](#), [Fairtrade](#)) is strictly controlled so the necessary licenses or permissions must be obtained from the corresponding certification or licensing body prior to their use for communications or promotional purposes.

Further guidance on claims and declarations is provided on p54-55 of the 'Sustainability Essentials' guide: '[Sustainable Sourcing in Sport](#)'.



Sustainable Sourcing Criteria and Sustainable Supplier Questionnaire

The core and recommended criteria for Gifts & Promotional Products are set out below. There are two levels of sustainability performance:

- **Core criteria** – refers to minimum sustainability requirements that are advised to be met
- **Recommended criteria** – refers to criteria that goes beyond minimum sustainability requirements to promote higher levels of environmental and social responsibility and advance sports' sustainability vision and goals

Criteria is intended to be jurisdictionally neutral and therefore should be able to be applied in any country or region. In the unlikely event of a conflict with national or regional legislation, the law shall always be complied with and prevail. Individuals tasked with sourcing/procurement should seek to meet the most demanding requirements wherever possible.

Sustainable Supplier Questionnaire

In addition to the Sustainable Sourcing Criteria, a Sustainable Supplier Questionnaire & Scorecard has been developed to be sent to suppliers during the RFP process. [Refer to these within the IOC sustainability library.](#)

This supplementary questionnaire is designed to be launched during tender processes, providing deeper insights into suppliers' sustainability objectives, priorities, and performance. The questions related to the criteria are outlined in the table below. Detailed guidance for each criterion is available to assist in assessing the responses, as part of the evaluation scorecard.

Sustainability Categories

Key: Climate Nature People Pollution

	Core Criteria	Additional Guidance	RFP Question Reference
	<p>Suppliers of gifts and promotional items must:</p> <p>(a) take all reasonable steps to ensure that gifts and promotional items are produced and / or services supplied are in accordance with all International Labour Organisation (ILO) conventions (e.g., labour standards, working conditions and the use of child labour) and internationally recognised human rights standards as defined by the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights;</p> <p>(b) disclose primary or first tier supply chains (e.g., agencies, distributors, final finishing and assembly locations, providers of contracted labour on venue, packaging and componentry, warehousing etc); and</p> <p>(c) provide an appropriate level of evidence that such sites meet the standards set out in (a) including its approach to conducting human rights due diligence.</p>	<p>The 'Sustainability Essentials' guide: 'Sustainable Sourcing in Sport' provides further guidance on this topic (e.g., template Sustainable Sourcing Code and how compliance might be assessed).</p> <p>For example, it might be appropriate to require suppliers to register on the Supplier Ethical Data Exchange (Sedex) and ensure that at least the final finishing and assembly locations are disclosed, all Self-Assessment Questionnaire modules are completed and made accessible/visible. Self-Assessment Questionnaire modules cover the following topics: Labour Standards, Business Integrity, Health and Safety and the Environment.</p>	<p>(a) I. Standard Questionnaire: Question 11</p> <p>(b) I. Gifts and Promotional Products: Question 1</p> <p>(c) I. Standard Questionnaire: Question 12</p>

	Direct suppliers of gifts and promotional items are required to have appropriate independently certified management systems in place which meet internationally recognised standards which covers the scope of their service provision.	Independently certified systems are preferred – if suppliers do not have this, they need to demonstrate how they meet the standards. ISO 20121-24 certification is preferred for suppliers which specialise in events. Other acceptable standards include ISO 9001 and ISO 14001. Industry specific schemes may also be acceptable.	I. Standard Questionnaire: Question 10
	Items which are or may be appealing to a child / young person must be treated as if it is a toy and meet relevant safety requirements and standards.	The EU Toy Safety Directive EN 17 outlines the safety criteria that the product must meet before it can be placed in any EU market. Other standards exist for other markets outside of the EU.	I. Gifts and Promotional Products: Question 4
	Suppliers describe steps taken to reduce the use and impact of chemicals which pose a risk to human health and the environment used in connection with gifts and promotional items and prevent such substances being released into the environment.	Evidence may include the presence of Product Restricted Substances Lists and Manufacturing Restricted Substances Lists and in the case of textile-based materials signatory of the Zero Discharge Hazardous Substances (ZDHC) initiative . NOTE: Suppliers in the EU or placing products on the EU market should be expected to declare the presence of any REACH Candidate List substances at a concentration of greater than 0.1 % (weight by weight) in finished product. Substances restricted in the case of any electrical products (e.g., by Restriction of Hazardous Substances – RoHS) will also be relevant.	I. Gifts and Promotional Products: Question 2
	Suppliers must declare if microplastics are or could be perceived to be issued with items and where relevant set out measures to reduce potential microplastic pollution including use phase actions.	Synthetic textiles are a significant source of microplastic pollution, but other aspects of promotional items may give rise to microplastics.	I. Gifts and Promotional Products: Question 3
	Electrical or electronic gifts and promotional items are expected to be highly energy efficient.	Wherever possible recognised energy efficiency standards should be used, where this is not possible the supplier must benchmark items against closest equivalent competitor products. Any regulatory issues associated with end of life and chemicals must also be addressed.	
	Conflict minerals shall preferentially not be used or incorporated in any gifts or promotional items but where they are used, suppliers must ensure they are obtained from conflict-free sources or sources certified by a credible third-party audit programme.	Suppliers must have appropriate policies and due diligence measures in place aligned with the OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Supply Chains of Minerals from Conflict-Affected and High-Risk Areas .	I. Gifts and Promotional Products: Question 6
	Suppliers using contracted labour for services connected with the supply of services relating to gifts and promotional items must subscribe to the Employer Pays Principle to ensure that no recruitment fees are paid directly or indirectly in whole or in part by workers used to support catering services and only legally approved or certified recruitment agencies are used.	Fees and costs associated with recruitment and employment should be paid by the employer, not the employee.	I. Standard Questionnaire: Question 13

 	Suppliers must demonstrate how to the extent practicable they have optimised the longevity of the gift and promotional item.	Items must be useful, have the potential to be long-lasting and aesthetically pleasing (rather than simply a logo and event date).	I. Standard Questionnaire: Question 13
	Suppliers must give due consideration to the accessibility and inclusivity of gifts and promotional products they intend to supply.	Items must be fully accessible to people with a wide range of individual needs (including any associated packaging) as well as giving due regard to cultural and religious needs.	I. Gifts and Promotional Products: Question 5
 	Wherever possible gifts and promotional items must not be date marked to enable unused/unsold stock to be used again for future events/purposes.		

	Recommended Criteria	Additional Guidance	RFP Question Reference
	Suppliers are expected to have measured their full scope Carbon Footprint in accordance with an internationally recognised methodology and provide evidence of this calculation to upon request.	As a minimum a Carbon Footprint is expected to have been completed. However, a Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) which meets ISO 14040 is advised.	I. Standard Questionnaire: Question 33
	Preference should be given to suppliers that have or are committed to get carbon reduction targets approved by the Science Based Targets Initiative (SBTi) as being in line with the level of reduction needed to limit global warming to 1.5oC within a realistic timescale and provide evidence of carbon reductions upon request.	Further information on approved Science-based Targets (i.e. a reduction target to cut emissions in line with climate science covering Scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions) is here: https://sciencebasedtargets.org/ . There is a streamlined process for smaller businesses.	I. Standard Questionnaire: Question 16
  	Suppliers can demonstrate that they have mapped their full supply chains beyond their first-tier supply chain covering processing facilities (e.g., sub-contractors, etc.) and suppliers of raw materials such as fibres, hides, rubber, dyes, metals, etc. (e.g., raw material providers, farms, slaughter houses, sewing yarn suppliers, filament and staple, chemical suppliers, etc.).		I. Gifts and Promotional Products: Question 1
	Preference should be given to suppliers who have made a commitment to tackle key endemic social challenges in facing the gifts and promotional products sector such as wages, working hours and forced labour	Examples of commitments may include engagement with industry level initiatives where they exist.	
	Opportunities to include micro or small and medium sized enterprises, social enterprises and other business local to service delivery are encouraged.		

	Opportunities to offer virtual or experiential gifts or promotional options (including donations to charitable causes (to be agreed) in the customer's name) are encouraged.		
	Opportunities to offer purposeful gifts or promotional products which benefit local communities are encouraged.	Examples may include donation of any profits/proceeds from sales to charitable causes (e.g., 1% for the Planet), purchasing from fair trade or direct trade to improve livelihoods for underserved groups or where the economic vitality of local communities are built/supported.	
	Preference should be given to suppliers who have made a commitment to transition to a more circular manufacturing system or solutions within a 2025 – 2030 timeframe.	Examples of commitments may include design strategies for cyclability, use of reused or recycled post consumer material in items, mechanisms to collect unwanted items for reuse or recycling. Other strategies include pre-used or second hand items where performance can be guaranteed.	
	Suppliers are encouraged to demonstrate their broader commitment to sustainability and the steps they are taking to become more purposeful.	This can be demonstrated in several ways – from being a signatory to the UN Global Compact or working towards becoming a certified B Corporation . Other steps include where supplier is engaging with the industry peers to advocate for improved sustainability within the sector.	I. Standard Questionnaire: Question 5

Material Specific Requirements

Core Criteria		Additional Guidance	RFP Question Reference
	No endangered, vulnerable or protected species must be used in connection with gifts and promotional items produced or supplied as defined in CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) Appendices I, II and III or IUCN Red List of Threatened Species		I. Gifts and Promotional Products: Question 7
   	Textile and Textile-Based components must meet the core criteria set out in the Textiles and Textiles-Based Products Sustainable Sourcing Fact Sheet.	This also covers animal and animal-derived and cellulosic materials.	III. Textile based products
   	Wood and Wood-Based components and any such material used in connection with gifts and promotional items must meet the core criteria set out in the Wood and Wood-Based Products Sustainable Sourcing Fact Sheet.	Any non-timber forest componentry (e.g., rubber) should follow the criteria set out in the Wood and Wood-Based Products Sustainable Sourcing Fact Sheet.	II. Wood based products
 	Gifts and promotional items must not contain PVC and / or polycarbonate which contains BPA.		I. Gifts and Promotional Products: Question 8
  	Notwithstanding the often specialist nature of materials used, suppliers must demonstrate steps taken to mitigate the impact of any materials or componentry used within gifts or promotional items at all stages of its use life.	This may include for example plastic-free, use of lower impact or alternative materials, reduction of virgin materials through use of post consumer recycled content and ensuring all items can be reused or recycled at end of life (use). NOTE: Any lower impact claims must be able to be substantiated, ideally by verified LCA.	

Recommended Criteria		Additional Guidance	RFP Question Reference
   	<p>Where possible major/dominant materials used in gifts and promotional items should come from more sustainable sources, with priority given to certified sources (where schemes or labels exist).</p>	<p>See above main commentary section including reference to the Standards Map database. Materials certified vegan or vegetarian may also be appropriate to explore.</p>	
  	<p>Preference should be given to suppliers that have formally committed to supporting the goals of the Global Plastics Pact (or one of its official national networks).</p>	<p>This does not necessarily mean that suppliers are formal Plastics Pact signatories – but have at least made a public commitment to support the goals</p>	<p>I. Gifts and Promotional Products: Question 9</p>

Waste, Packaging And Consumables

	Core Criteria	Additional Guidance	RFP Question Reference
	The supplier must adhere to, and proactively support, arrangements which have been put in place to reduce and manage waste in accordance with the waste hierarchy.	The supplier is expected to outline how they will aspire to operate in a zero/low waste manner. NOTE: The waste hierarchy gives top priority to preventing waste in first place. When waste is created, it gives priority to preparing it for reuse, then recycling, then recovery, and last of all disposal (e.g., landfill)	I. Standard Questionnaire: Question 35
	Unless otherwise agreed the use and / or supply of single-use plastics packaging or consumables is not permitted.	Single-use plastics are intended to only be used once before they are thrown away or recycled. NOTE: Some territories have legally enforced bans in place for certain single-use plastics items.	I. Standard Questionnaire: Question 36
	All other single-use packaging and consumables is expected to be able to be easily reused or recycled in the market – items considered non-recyclable are not permitted unless the supplier puts in place special arrangements to collect and reuse or recycle such material.	Specific arrangements may be required to be in put in place by the supplier if recycling infrastructure is not currently in place in market.	I. Standard Questionnaire: Question 36
	Use of biodegradable and oxo-degradable products, components or materials (including film wrapping) are not permitted to be supplied.	Some materials (e.g., plastics) contain an additive which is intended to make them (bio)degrade over a period of time (which could be several years). These materials (known as [oxo, oxy or oxobio] degradable are suitable inputs into composting systems. These are also generally not compatible with recycling with other materials and wider environmental impacts are uncertain. NOTE: If relevant, compostable materials are only to be used where facilities are widely available to enable the items to be composted or specific arrangements have been put in place. Compostable materials may be ‘industrially’ compostable (i.e. EN 13432 certified) or ‘home’ compostable (i.e. OK Compost HOME). ‘Industrially’ compostable are unlikely to compost in a domestic environment and may not compost in an industrial facility – this will need to be confirmed.	I. Standard Questionnaire: Question 36

Recommended Criteria		Additional Guidance	RFP Question Reference
 	Supply of gifts and promotional items that are pre-used or second-hand is encouraged where appropriate and feasible.	Performance based guarantees or warranties are expected.	
 	Use of reused or recycled content in gifts and promotional products and other materials is encouraged.	Sources must be post-consumer in origin and be independently verified by a qualified third party or through a recognised scheme. The only exception to this is where technical constraints limit the % content or a lower level is considered to be above the marketplace norms.	

NOTE: Although focussed on single-use plastics suppliers should ideally be publicly supportive of the goals of the Global Plastics Pact (or one of its official national networks). It should be noted that as part of its Sustainability Essentials Series the IOC has developed the [‘Plastic Game Plan for Sport’](#) which aims to help sports organisations eliminate single-use plastic items, reduce the amount of plastic used in general and recycle as much as possible.