

# The carbon removal RFP playbook

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A practical guide to structuring RFPs  
that actually work for carbon removal

## Introduction

# Why CDR RFPs are not plug-and-play

Carbon removal is a high-stakes, low-supply market. Yet many buyers are still using copy-paste language from legacy offset RFPs, or relying on traditional procurement processes that aren't built for the pace and complexity of this space.

That's a problem. High-quality credits move fast. Projects vary dramatically in risk profile, permanence, and delivery confidence. If your RFP doesn't reflect that, you risk wasting time, or worse, walking away empty-handed.

As procurement teams grow more mature, many are turning to RFPs to:

- Increase competition and transparency across suppliers
- Compare methods, prices, and co-benefits side by side
- Formalize decision-making with internal stakeholders

But to work, your RFP has to reflect how carbon removal actually operates.

# Why carbon removal procurement is different

Legacy offset procurement often focused on ex-post credits, commoditized pricing, and standardized registries. Carbon removal is different:

- Most CDR supply is ex-ante, still in development
- Pricing and availability shift rapidly—delays mean missed opportunities
- Quality varies widely across methods, suppliers, and projects

Copying old frameworks won't cut it. You need an RFP process designed for this new category.

## A quick look at what a great CDR RFP gets right:

- ✓ Aligns with your climate strategy and business goals
- ✓ Includes clear scoring criteria so suppliers know how to respond
- ✓ Builds in quality thresholds like permanence and MRV expectation
- ✓ Screens for delivery risk upfront (not after contract negotiations)
- ✓ Moves fast enough to actually secure the credits you want
- ✓ Only engages intermediaries with confirmed access or exclusivity
- ✓ Uses milestone-based contracts to manage risk on early-stage projects

# The three most common RFP mistakes

It's easy to miss the mark in a carbon removal market that's moving faster than most buyers realize. Here's where things most often go wrong:

## MISTAKE #1

### Timelines that don't match market reality

The most common RFP pitfall is moving too slowly for the market. Buyers run a traditional 3–6 month RFP cycle, only to discover that by the time internal reviews and approvals are complete, the credits are already gone.

High-quality carbon removal supply is limited and demand is picking up. The credits you want today won't be around in six months.

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#### What to do instead:

Shorten your timeline. Run a faster review cycle. And if needed, work with a partner that can show you what's actually available right now (not what might be available in a few months).

## MISTAKE #2

### Ambiguous evaluation criteria

A good RFP should make it easy for suppliers to give you what you need. Yet, most carbon removal RFPs lack clear evaluation criteria. Suppliers end up guessing what to prioritize, and buyers struggle to compare proposals.

Instead of clarity, you get confused suppliers, wasted time, and missed opportunities.

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#### What to do instead:

Clearly define what matters. Include a scoring matrix or weighting system that reflects your priorities, whether that's permanence, MRV, delivery confidence, or social co-benefits. The clearer your criteria, the better the proposals you'll receive. Ambiguity invites noise. Clarity invites quality.

## MISTAKE #3

### Fragmentation and duplication across intermediaries

Here's a common but costly scenario: multiple intermediaries pitch the same credits to your RFP, sometimes at different prices or with inconsistent project details. You move forward assuming availability, only to find the credits were already sold.

It's confusing for buyers, frustrating for suppliers, and it undermines the integrity of your process.

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#### What to do instead:

Work only with intermediaries who hold exclusive inventory or can confirm real-time access to project supply. Better yet, use a platform that consolidates vetting, availability, and pricing in one place. No duplicates, and no guesswork.



# What a best-in-class CDR RFP looks like

A well-designed RFP speeds up decision-making, reduces risk, and helps build internal confidence. Here's what high-performing carbon removal RFPs have in common:

## Clear evaluation criteria

Define what matters to you, and communicate it upfront. Scoring weightings help suppliers tailor their responses, and help your team make faster, more consistent decisions.

## Project type and method guidance

Specify which methods you're open to, and which you're not. Whether you're targeting engineered solutions, nature-based projects, or a blend, this prevents misaligned bids and saves everyone time.

## Minimum quality thresholds

Set baseline expectations for:

- Permanence (e.g. 100+ years, 1000+ years)
- MRV protocols (transparency, third-party verification)
- Co-benefits (e.g. social equity, biodiversity, local engagement)

## Delivery and contract terms

Detail your requirements and flexibility on:

- Delivery timelines (start year, credit issuance schedule)
- Payment terms (milestone-based, pay-on-delivery, hybrid)
- Volume flexibility or optionality clauses
- Contract length (e.g. one-year spot, multi-year offtake)

## Risk and disclosure expectations

Ask suppliers to disclose:

- Operational status and readiness
- Project financing plan
- Legal structure and governance model
- Delivery risk mitigations (insurance, buffers, contingencies)

## Proof of availability

Avoid double-selling risk by requiring suppliers or intermediaries to confirm exclusivity or real-time availability of credits. Make it clear that placeholder projects or speculative volumes won't cut it.

# Supercritical's approach to developing effective RFPs

Dozens of carbon removal RFPs cross our desk every year. The difference between the ones that succeed and the ones that stall usually comes down to clarity, speed, and credibility. Supercritical helps buyers run faster, lower-risk procurement processes that secure the credits they actually want, before they're gone.

Here's how better RFPs get built:

## 01 Defined scoring matrix

Without clear evaluation criteria, suppliers are left guessing. That leads to weak submissions and harder decisions.

We work with buyers to build a tailored scoring matrix aligned with their priorities—whether that's permanence, delivery confidence, co-benefits, or price. Some focus on durability above all. Others want to maximize local impact. Either way, the key is clarity.

By weighting criteria explicitly, (e.g. 40% permanence, 30% delivery, 20% co-benefits, 10% cost), buyers get better proposals and internal teams can make decisions faster.

## 02 Clarity on delivery risk

Most suppliers will promise delivery. We push buyers to ask for specifics:

- Is the project operational or still in development?
- Is financing secured, or contingent on the contract?
- Are feedstocks, land, or technology secured?
- What happens if timelines slip?
- Are delivery guarantees backed by contracts, insurance, or buffers?

These questions are especially critical for offtakes and pre-purchase agreements. Many high-potential projects haven't issued credits yet—but with the right due diligence, they're still investable.

Through our [project vetting protocol](#) (covering >100 criteria), we provide buyers with structured insights on delivery confidence, so they can [assess risk before committing](#).

## 03 Milestone-based contracting

Early-stage projects carry risk, but that risk can be managed.

We help buyers structure contracts where payments are only released when defined project milestones are met, including:

- Permits secured
- Equipment purchased
- Facility commissioned
- Credits verified and issued

This keeps suppliers incentivized, reduces buyer exposure, and aligns with standard financing expectations in early markets. Many buyers use this model to [de-risk offtakes](#) and support scale-up of new methods.

## 04 Marketplace intelligence

Supercritical gives buyers access to pre-vetted projects with real-time pricing and availability. We work only with suppliers where we have confirmed access to inventory, meaning no placeholders, and no overlapping inventory. What you see is actually available, and suppliers can respond to your RFP with confidence.

You also get live pricing, vetted project data, and apples-to-apples comparisons across methods, cutting weeks of manual research out of the process. Whether you're building your first RFP or improving an existing process, our tools and expertise can help you run a faster, smarter, and lower-risk procurement round.

### RFPs in the real world (a tale of two buyers)

#### ✗ Wrong way

Ran a 6-month RFP using recycled language from legacy offset contracts. By the time they completed approvals, the credits were gone—sold to faster buyers through marketplaces. They walked away empty-handed.

#### ✓ Right way

Used Supercritical's project data and guidance in creating a custom scoring matrix. They issued an RFP with clear criteria, secured supplier availability, and closed a milestone-based offtake in under 5 weeks.

# Ready to issue an RFP?

Supercritical helps buyers design and issue RFPs that work for them and the market.

We've helped companies of all sizes navigate carbon removal procurement.

We can help you, too.

You don't need a massive budget or a full procurement team to run an effective RFP. You do need clarity, speed, and the right structure.

A good carbon removal RFP reflects your climate goals, risk appetite, and the realities of a fast-moving market. It signals credibility to suppliers and builds internal confidence in your process.

**The biggest mistake you could make is to wait.** Carbon removal procurement is a journey, and supply is tightening. Every year you delay, it gets harder and more expensive to secure the volume and quality you'll need.

Here's a checklist to guide you as you draft your RFP:

## Carbon removal RFP readiness checklist

Before you go to market, make sure you can answer "yes" to the following:

### Strategy & alignment

- ☐ Have we aligned internally on our carbon removal strategy and procurement goals?
- ☐ Do we know what project methods we want to include or exclude (e.g. engineered, nature-based, hybrid)?
- ☐ Have we agreed on key tradeoffs (e.g. permanence vs. price, delivery timing vs. risk)?

### Risk and readiness

- ☐ Are we prepared to assess delivery risk, including project financing, operational status, and timelines?
- ☐ Are we comfortable with milestone-based contracting or other risk mitigation tools?

### Evaluation criteria

- ☐ Have we defined a scoring matrix or weighting system to evaluate supplier proposals?
- ☐ Have we set minimum requirements for permanence, MRV, and co-benefits?

### Execution

- ☐ Do we have the ability to move quickly once supplier proposals come in?
- ☐ Are we working with a platform or partner that can confirm real-time credit availability and reduce duplication?





## Supercritical: access the carbon removal market with confidence

Supercritical is the gateway to the carbon removal market. One-third of corporate buyers, including The Economist, Virgin Atlantic, and Rothschild & Co use Supercritical's marketplace to navigate the market, build portfolios of high-quality vetted projects, and securely transact across spot purchases and offtake agreements. Supercritical is the marketplace of choice for visionary companies with ambitious climate goals that need to be met today, not decades from now.

Request access to the Supercritical marketplace

Speak with one of our carbon removal experts