

Mind the Gaps – Why QA/QC is an Important Step in Disclosures

As environmental professionals, we all know the importance of accuracy and completeness when it comes to finalizing documents for external release. Investor/stakeholder disclosures, such as CDP and the Dow Jones Sustainability Index (DJSI) questionnaires, offer opportunities for companies to tell their story regarding sustainability performance, strategy, and goals. But companies want to tell the *right* story. It is important to remember that once the information is out there, it may not be retracted without potential risk to reputation or integrity. So you want to get it right from the start.

Where should you look for gaps?

Public disclosures typically consist of many moving parts. Input is required from several resources – environmental, health and safety specialists, procurement, facilities, legal, communications – and it is critical to ensure messaging is consistent, data is accurate, and each contribution fits together to create a meaningful report. Even after a disclosure has undergone review, however, there are some common pitfalls that, if left unchecked, can be detrimental to disclosure quality or perception, such as:

- **Blanks.** Leaving blanks in a disclosure/stakeholder questionnaire can give the impression that a respondent was unprepared to report, hastily completed the document, or purposely avoided disclosure.
- **Vague statements.** Public disclosures should focus on quality, not quantity. Avoid issuing high-level, vague statements to simply mark a question complete. It is better to explain why you cannot answer the question, rather than provide a “fluff” answer.
- **Misinterpretation of questions or pathways.** Read the question thoroughly and understand question pathways. Make sure you don’t miss “Part 2” in a two part question, or you will unintentionally provide an incomplete response.
- **Conflicting information.** Repetition is common in disclosure questionnaires. Common messages, themes, and data should be consistent throughout a disclosure document, and align with other publically available information.

Consider third party QA/QC.

Third party reviewers are available to assist with the QA/QC process before a public disclosure is considered final. A third party provides an unbiased “second set of eyes” that can review reports to identify these gaps and opportunities for improvement.

CDP’s Response Check service is a great example of a third-party review that can greatly benefit the outcome of a report. The service offers responding companies the opportunity for QA/QC of their climate disclosure questionnaire for completeness before final submittal and scoring by CDP. The scope of Response Check includes a review for blanks, question/pathway misinterpretation, partial answers,

and incorrect response format. Although Response Check does not guarantee a higher score or act as a proxy for third-party verification, the value of an expert evaluation and feedback/review session prior to public release can positively enhance a company's CDP performance and messaging. For more information on this service, visit "Response Check" on the CDP website: <http://bit.ly/1kFtGhU>

By "minding the gaps" in investor/stakeholder disclosures, a company can tell the right story: one that is complete, transparent, engages stakeholders, and represents a company's sustainable brand values. Don't let your story be derailed by seemingly simple details; always complete proper QA/QC and engage a "second set of eyes."



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