



Functional Specification guide

Developing a sustainable functional specification in 6 steps



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Introduction

The reason for developing this guide is outlined in the second recommendation of the Sustainable Procurement Recommendation 2011.

The Recommendation, which is drawn up by the industry and includes ten other recommendations, has laid the foundation for a renewed sustainable procurement policy and focuses among other things on innovation from the market, a (business) process approach and integration of social criteria. The Recommendation was unanimously endorsed on 01-12-2011 by members of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Infrastructure and the Environment.

Background information

Click [here](#) for more information about the Sustainable Procurement Recommendation.

Why a sustainable functional specification guide?

Until recently, the sustainability policy had been focused on minimum requirements such as specific and static resource-based requirements (the so-called NL Agency criteria), functional specification, however, makes way for an ambitious approach focused on innovation of product chains, services and works.

Functional specification calls for constructive dialogue between the customer and supplier about where the opportunities for sustainability lie. The government no longer sets the criteria unilaterally, but leverages the entire procurement process for sustainability. It shows its confidence in the market by focusing on the sustainability goals to be achieved and promoting the processes. Thus, going forward, two objectives will be accomplished at once: the efforts undertaken by entrepreneurs will no longer be seen as financial burdens, but will be rewarded, and will translate into greater sustainability.

In the letter of 17 September 2012 regarding the progress of sustainable procurement, State Secretary Atsma promised the Lower House to have a guide developed for functional specifications. This guide will be used to update the sustainable procurement policy or its execution and to provide buyers with information.

It should be seen as a first version in ensuring compliance with the criterion to include sustainability as a requirement at an early stage of the procurement process. It is furthermore intended as an initial step in the on-going effort to improve sustainable procurement, transitioning the reactive approach to 100% sustainable procurement into a proactive approach to 100% sustainability.

For whom is this guide intended?

This guide is a generic guide and is intended for anyone within the tender and procurement process who in any capacity is involved in developing specifications and is looking to go further or has more ambition than setting minimum sustainability requirements in a tender and procurement process. It helps in formulating questions and providing answers and is therefore applicable to works, services as well as supplies.

What is functional specification?

Developing a specification is an important first phase in the tender and procurement process. Development of a specification (what do I want to buy?) places us at the beginning of a careful and complete procurement process. The functional specification describes the functions that the product or service must fulfil for the user, in other words: what should the product do? Functional specifications say nothing about “how” this need should be met; The functional specification can be very general, short and concise.

Definition of functional specification

A functional specification is a document containing the aggregate of organised requirements and description of the available solution space or the chosen solution with the solution margin that applies to a system (product or service).

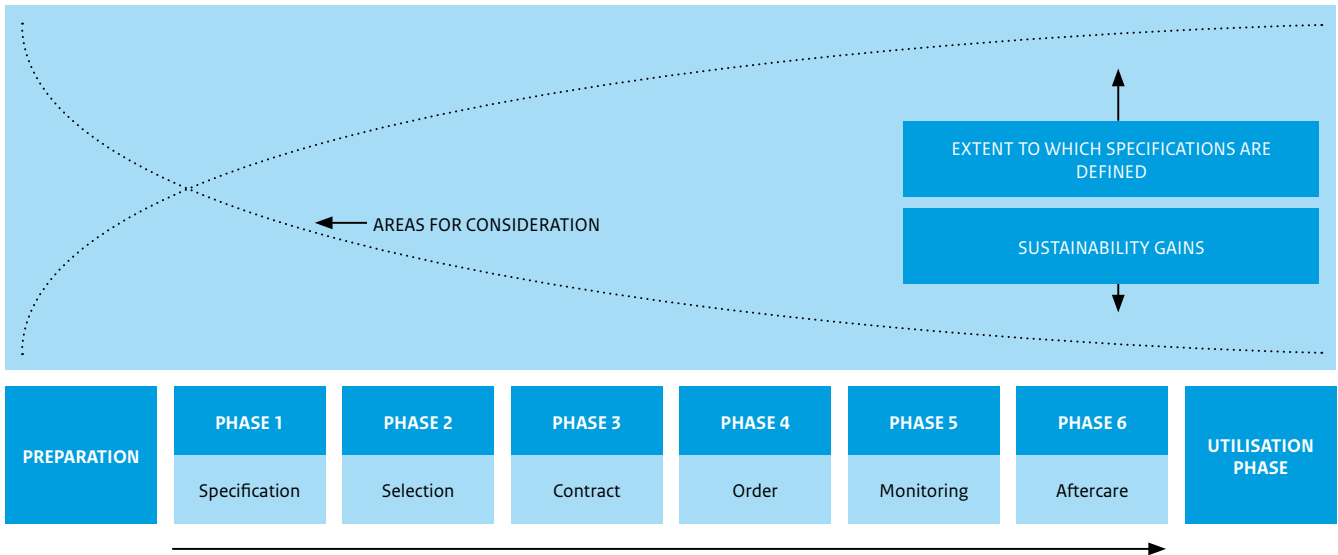
The importance of functional specification?

A functional specification allows great freedom for both suppliers and the buying organisation. With functional specifications usually more suppliers can be found than with tightly defined, detailed specifications, reducing the chance of a monopolistic situation. Working with functional specifications also reduces the risk of neglecting alternatives.

With the functional specification, we lay the foundation for the further tender and procurement process, which as it turns out is where the greatest sustainability gains can be made.

In functional procurement, the procurement is formulated in terms of goals rather than resources. This will also allow ambition levels to be differentiated and to evolve in step with technological and other developments as they emerge. As such, sustainable procurement can give new life to existing innovative solutions in the market or go a step further therein as lead customer.

Potential sustainability gains in relation to phase in the procurement process

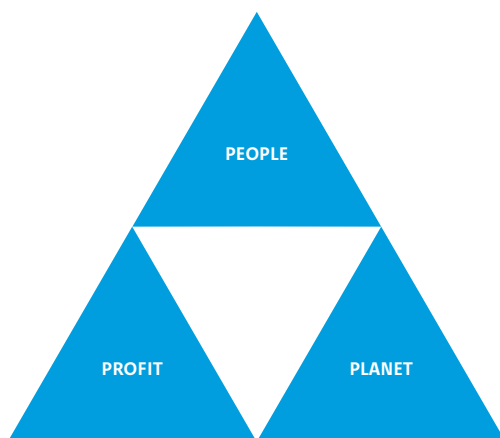


What is sustainable functional specification?

Sustainability is about balancing social well-being, environmental stewardship and economic prosperity. These three aspects should be considered together. This is called the triple P approach where the right balance is sought between people, planet and profit. In other words: promoting the health and well-being of people and the planet while generating a healthy profit.

There is a fair amount of confusion about the use of the term sustainable procurement. We often see terms such as sustainability, responsible sourcing, circular procurement, sustainable outsourcing, sustainable supply chain management, corporate social responsibility (CSR) and socially responsible procurement (CRP) and, of course, sustainable procurement bounced around in the media.

the balance between the three P's



The term sustainable procurement was introduced by the government and NL Agency (formerly Senter Novem), both of which define it as follows: the inclusion of one or more environmental and/or social aspects in the procurement process. The objectives resulting from 100% sustainable procurement in 2010 (National Government) or 75%/50% sustainable procurement for other (government) organisations in 2012

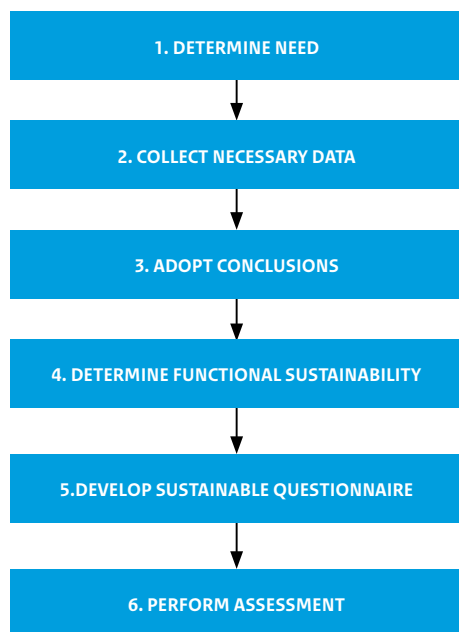
or 2015 have been included by many (lower government) organisations in their policy or in the agreements (education, hospitals, etc.) they have signed.

Roadmap as basis for sustainable functional specification?

To develop both functional and sustainable specifications, a choice will be made at policy level as to whether a contract is more or less suitable to qualify for a functional specification. Subsequently, at organisational level, choices must be made to call for a new sustainable solution or to use existing systems and/or sub-systems such as the SIP approach, social conditions, SE systems, etc. The six steps preceding this phase are generic until these choices are included in the next chapter as a roadmap for sustainable functional specification.

The roadmap for sustainable functional specification consists of six steps (see below) which can be completed using generic or specific questionnaires, checklists, flowcharts and fleshed out according to existing approaches and/or examples. The next chapter describes one by one the steps for developing sustainable functional specifications.

Roadmap for sustainable functional specification



Relationship to existing systems and approaches?

In some industries, such as aerospace engineering, use of functional specification is already quite common; this principle has also spread to the construction industry. Systems such as “Design and Build”, “Systems Engineering”, “Value Engineering”, SIP approach and Social Conditions as well as Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) are often mentioned in one breath with (sustainable) functional specification. These industries and/or approaches are often associated with other specific procedures such as environmental impact assessments, route decisions, etc. This guide is based on the basis of a functional specification for any given industry and organisation, and will, where possible, establish the relationship and deeper link to existing systems.

Who has developed this guide?

This document was created by NEVI on behalf of the Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment.

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Step 1

Determining the need

The procurement policy must support the organisational policy and thus the sustainability policy. In many organisations, procurement has a significant impact on the goals and results, i.e. financial results, qualitative results, and most certainly on the sustainability results.

This is the first premise in determining the need, so check your organisational policy.

Examples of sustainable procurement policy:

Promoting procurement of (more) sustainable products, services and works;

Promoting corporate social responsibility among market players;

Including environmental and/or social criteria in tenders (e.g. NL Agency, Social Return, Social Conditions, etc.)

The second premise is the customer demand, this, for example, can be determined by way of a survey, questionnaire or the Systems Engineering roadmap (Directorate General for Public Works and Water Management), the latter comprises the steps:

- Analysing problems and defining objectives
- Analysing stakeholders
- Gathering customer requirements
- Determining validation strategy
- Drafting customer requirement specifications
- Validation

When and when not to pursue?

Before deciding to develop a sustainable functional specification, you want to know whether an opportunity realistically exists, is it worth pursuing or does it involve a risk. Not all projects or procurements lend themselves to functional specification. And not all projects or procurements lend themselves to functional sustainability.

But what procurement projects actually qualify for both functional and sustainable specification.

This will be different for each need and organisation, the questionnaire below is a first step in determining that choice.

Questionnaire for determining choice

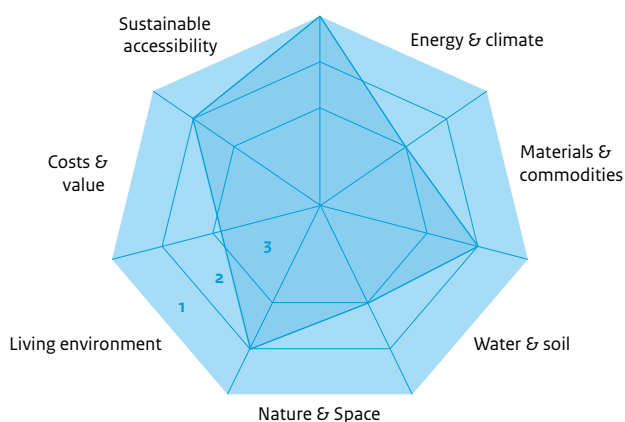
- What is the problem?
- Can this problem be solved in some way other than through procurement?
- Is the entire scope known, therefore including training, maintenance, disposal?
- Is this a new purchase situation for our organisation?
- Am I looking for a custom product?
- Are all financial data readily available in case of a repeat purchase?
- Are the budgets for purchase, maintenance and disposal bundled into one?
- Can we purchase less/or nothing at all and achieve the same result?
- Can sustainability play an important role in this purchase to meet the sustainable procurement policy requirements (e.g. energy efficiency, social return, etc.)?
- Is the organisation/internal customer convinced that sustainability will not stand in the way of the quality of its procurement?
- Is the scope of this contract broad enough to sustainably stimulate the market?
-

If the answer to the majority of these questions is Yes then it is certainly worth the effort to develop the specification in the context of sustainable functional procurement.

Practical example

In the SIP approach, the ambitions can be placed in various parts of the so-called Ambition Web. For more information, please visit www.aanpakduurzaamgww.nl

The Ambition Web



Step 2

Gathering the necessary data

To avoid reining in innovation by the supplier, the right balance must be found in the functional specification between the requirements of the purchasing party and freedom for the supplier, for this we need different internal and external data, such as:

- Internal financial data
- Internal qualitative data
- External market data
- External sustainability data

For a careful assessment of the feasibility of functional sustainable specifications, you need to make these integral to the internal/external opportunities (e.g. innovation) and risks (e.g. acceptance). Together, these data ultimately constitute the choices and the degree to which functional and sustainable can be specified. But how can you obtain these data?

Questionnaire for quantitative (financial) data

The basic financial data for new projects, investment goods and repeat purchases can usually be derived from the annual budget. But obtaining more in-depth data is certainly advisable and these can often be filtered from internal financial systems or otherwise from new products on the market. When gathering the data, look not only at the direct purchase costs but also at the total costs in terms of service life, e.g. energy consumption, waste charges, etc.

To obtain a more comprehensive picture, it would be prudent to compare year-on-year repeat purchases to identify trends. Are costs increasing, stabilising or falling? Are there departments where consumption will be higher or lower? A figure says nothing in itself, but when we compare figures in a series and in perspective with each other, they add up to a value. To make it future-proof, we recommend adding a column for expected development in the next year/5 years.

Example of key financial figures

Subject	Year X	Year Y	Year Z	Expected development > 5 years
total product group purchase value				
purchase value turnover per division				
number of suppliers				
number of products				
number of orders				
number of invoices				
number of internal customers				
research and development costs				
purchase costs				
inspection costs				
cost of ownership/consumption costs				
disposal costs				
.....				

Questionnaire for qualitative data

For gathering data on what “the customer” or “the user” actually wants, there are any number of documents and analyses, such as project descriptions/plans, internal process descriptions, manuals, stakeholder analyses, contract satisfaction analyses, etc., that are often readily available for use in organisations. To the extent that these are not readily or fully available, the following open questionnaire serves as a general guideline that can be supplemented with other specific organisational questions, if necessary:

- What is the relationship with other products, e.g. is it part of a larger project?
- What does the (internal) user really need, what is our functional need? Is a product required for this, or can it also be provided in the form of a service?
- To which sustainability objectives can the need contribute?
- Is it proportional (contract scope and market relationship) enough to call for a functional specification for this need?
- To what extent are we able to make functional specifications for this product group? Should we pay specific attention to this in the tender?
- To what extent does knowledge about this product group exist in our organisation and/or with suppliers?
- Who within our organisation has knowledge about the product group and should be involved in the specification phase?
- To what extent is there a great diversity of specifications for this product group within our organisations?
- Do we have an effective and clear procedure for how a specification is developed and approved?
-

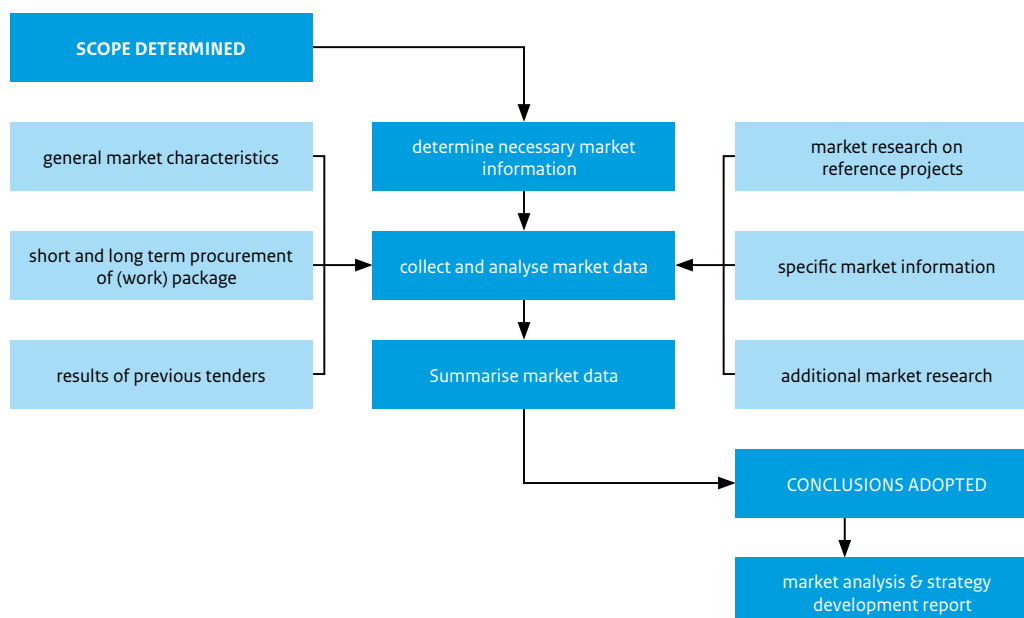
Questionnaire for market data

Conducting a market analysis begins by clearly defining the market and determining the scope and depth of the analysis. Having a clear understanding of the market and its dynamics is of great importance. It is sometimes said: ‘You do not know what you do not know.’ This saying is certainly true for knowing and understanding the market. A market analysis shows which sustainability requirements in the tender are realistic. In a continuous process, the most recent developments in the functional specification can be included herein.

Dialogue with providers/market consultation/market research

It is important to inform potential suppliers about the sustainability goals of a tender in advance. This creates room for suggestions about the formulation of the specification and provides insight into the effectiveness of the related criteria. For legal reasons, it is recommended to invite the relevant industry organisations, instead of the individual companies, for such a dialogue to avoid making companies feel overlooked. A dialogue is also a way of bringing the underlying social issues in supply chains to the attention of companies. Over time, this can affect the companies' attitude towards their suppliers in a decisive way. It also provides a good opportunity to discuss the legal framework, because even though the Public Procurement Act allows for the addition of social value and the European directives explicitly allow the inclusion of sustainability criteria in tenders, it is still unclear just how far the powers of purchasing government organisations extend in this area.

Example of market research approach



An effective market analysis requires more time and is more difficult than you might think. Depending on the type of purchase, a determination needs to be made as to how broadly, deeply or narrowly the market needs to be analysed. If you are dealing with production from low-wage countries, you will conduct a different type of market analysis with a different level of depth than you would for entering into a new cleaning contract for your office premises. Determining the necessary type and depth of analyses, is an issue that will need to be determined separately within each organisation.

Breadth and depth can be further achieved with specialised market analyses, for this see also the knowledge banks of www.pianoo.nl and www.nevi.nl

Questionnaire for sustainability data

To start the development of the sustainable functional specification on the right track, it is important to have insight into the nature (type of products, complexity, etc.) and size of the supply chain.

The following questions offer a practical approach to engaging in dialogue with suppliers on this matter:

- What are the latest general sustainability developments in the industry?
- How are themes such as social return, social conditions, environmental criteria, etc., dealt with?

- How flexible is the approach to dealing with the streams of products, services, payments and information by the supply chain?
- What external influences affect performance in the supply chain?
- Is it possible to purchase alternative products or services that are better in terms of sustainability?
- Is it possible to formulate the demand in a more general way, so that suppliers are given room to provide sustainable solutions?
- Is procurement necessary at all or are there other possible solutions, such as reuse or shared use?
- ...

The kinds of issues that play a role in sustainable procurement depend on the type of product, country of origin and the type of suppliers. These issues play an important role in economic, social and environmental development, especially when determining the urgency of the demand.

Example of overview of sustainability issues

Economic

- Vulnerability of suppliers (in terms of whether or not customers will make purchases)
- Dependence on suppliers (who, e.g., supply a critical product)
- Reliability of suppliers
- Unreasonable or unfair payment conditions for business partners
- Supplier diversity & local procurement
- Bribery & corruption

Social

- Freedom for trade unionism and right to collective bargaining
- Forced and bonded labour
- Child labour
- Discrimination
- Fair labour contracts
- Living wage
- Working hours
- Working conditions, such as health and safety
- Impact on local community/human rights
- Consumer rights

The environment

- CO₂ emissions and other greenhouse gas emissions
 - Structural or incidental contamination/spills
 - Damage to biodiversity
 - Use of water and other natural resources
 - Energy efficiency
 - Scarcity of raw materials
 - Waste (processing)
 - Animal welfare
-

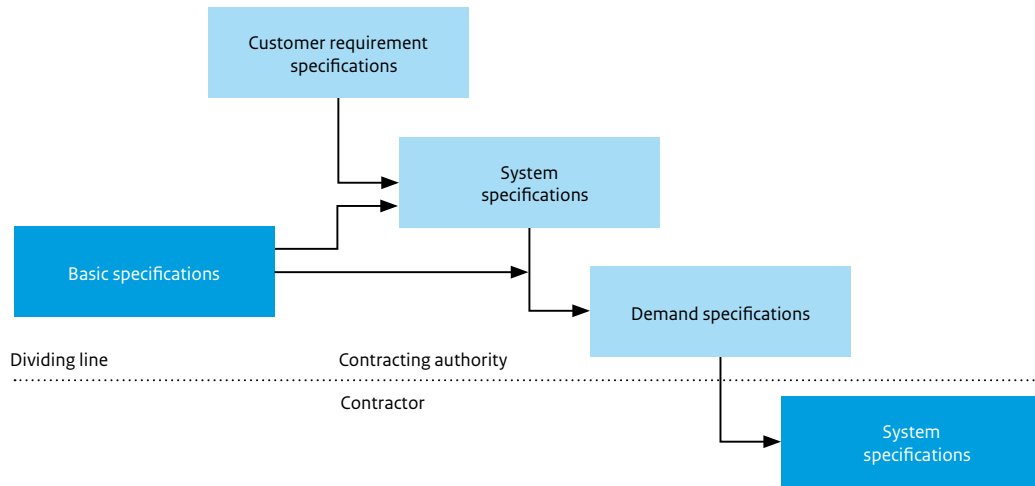
Practical example

In the work description of the Systems Engineering system of Directorate General for Public Works and Water Management, basic specifications are provided as a tool in the specification process.

Basic specifications can help the project teams in developing system specifications. These system specifications then serve as input for a Demand Specification. (See the figure below)

An explicit distinction is drawn between the term system specification and Demand Specification. A Demand Specification is part of the contract and relates to the contract scope. A Demand Specification is developed from different system specifications and can therefore include a subset of different system specifications. The latter is the case with projects where multiple products are integrally tendered (e.g. line infrastructure with crossings).

Basic specifications therefore serve as indirect input for Demand Specifications (contract documents) and can be used for various contract types.



Click [here](#) for more information.

Step 3

Conclusions

After conducting all the analyses, a first check takes place. Have we conducted all the analyses we identified in the preliminary phase? Which (sub)analyses were not conducted and why? Depending on the relevance and the availability of data, you can still decide to conduct these (in-depth) analyses and add them to the other analyses that have been conducted.

An integrated assessment framework is then set up to summarise all data from the analyses and translate them into conclusions and the desired types of specification.

Conclusions

A number of conclusions can be drawn from the analyses; it would be efficient to organise these conclusions into a clear framework. .

sample summary of the conclusions

Analysis	Conclusions
quantitative analysis	
qualitative analysis	
market analysis	
sustainability analysis	

To translate these conclusions into the desired type of specification, a brief explanation about the different types of specification is provided below.

The specification types

A specification is a description of the properties to be met by the products or services to be purchased in order to fulfil the designated use. A complete specification gives the potential suppliers all the information needed to make a good offer. The complete specification is made up of several parts, for example: technical, commercial, logistics, quality, legal, and, of course, sustainable.

Types of specifications

We distinguish three main types of specifications: the functional specification, the concept specification and the detailed specification (Fout! Verwijzingsbron niet gevonden.).



The functional specification

The functional specification describes the functions that the product or service must fulfil for the user, in other words: what must the product do? Functional specifications say nothing about “how” this need should be met. A functional specification can be very general, brief and concise, and allows significant freedom for suppliers. The functional specification says nothing about the appearance of the product, just about the functionality (functionalities) of a product.

Functional specification is possible only if the tender is awarded on any number of criteria other than just price (= MEAT; most economically advantageous tender).

Practical example

The functional catering

An example of a technical, functional specification: food facilities for the staff. The offer may therefore consist of a food and beverage vending machine up to complete catering with hot meals.

A logistics, functional specification may be: environmentally-friendly packaging.

Commercial functional specifications may be: within the available budget.

The concept specification

The concept specification gives a more accurate description as to how the requirements can be met. The concept specification translates the functional specification for the most critical or strategic aspects. Thus, the concept specification of a new, fast personal computer will determine the processor around which the product will be built. The concept specification translates the functional specification up to the actual development. Although, you will not specify any details in it. Organisational aspects also play a role in a concept specification. The time plan and development of a target budget are examples of issues that co-determine the further implementation.

With the concept specification, the purchasing organisation makes the first move towards the actual solution to the procurement problem. This is done, in particular, if it is difficult (or even impossible) to work exclusively with functional requirements.

The detailed specification

The detailed specification, often also called the technical specification or schedule of requirements (SoR), outlines in minute detail how the concept specification should be further developed. A detailed specification allows for significantly less freedom for the party responsible for the implementation. A detailed specification, for example, can describe the technology to be used, even though a better result could be achieved with alternative technologies. It also outlines the exact delivery times, complete legal conditions, exact technical descriptions and even product names.

Where detailed specification is used, the suppliers cannot differentiate themselves in their offer from the competition. After all, everything is already determined. A tender based solely on detailed specifications cannot be awarded on anything other than the lowest price. Per the Public Procurement Act, this is not possible, unless justified by well-founded reasons.

Practical example

Do not develop a functional specification for Social Return (source: Dutch Association of Construction and Infrastructure Companies (Bouwend Nederland))

Social return may pop up in different ways in a tender, such as specification requirement, award criteria or in section on social issues. Bouwend Nederland believes that the use of social return should not be used as an award criterion. This may cause the commitment of the target groups to compete with other aspects, which in turn may lead to unexpected and undesirable outcomes. Formulating social return as a detail requirement will result in the same outcome for each tenderer.

Click [here](#) for more information.

Step 4

Determining functional sustainability

Translating conclusions to specifications

A crucial phase is the moment when we translate the conclusions from the analyses into the specification process and specify the main considerations. The main considerations or criteria in the specification process are translated into building blocks, which are the elements that substantively relate to and therefore affect the specification process. They are also the critical elements that contribute to the achievement of results. The building blocks can be linked to and compared with the organisational policy and goals, one of the building blocks is the considerations in the specification.

To translate the conclusions from the analyses into the specification, we can by way of a questionnaire determine per analysis and per conclusion what this conclusion really means for different specification types and/or specification parts. A generic questionnaire serves as a tool for this exercise as well. It helps you get to the essence of the specifications. The questionnaire is a first draft and nothing more or less than a supporting tool. You may need to, and, in fact, must ask additional questions in terms of your own situation.

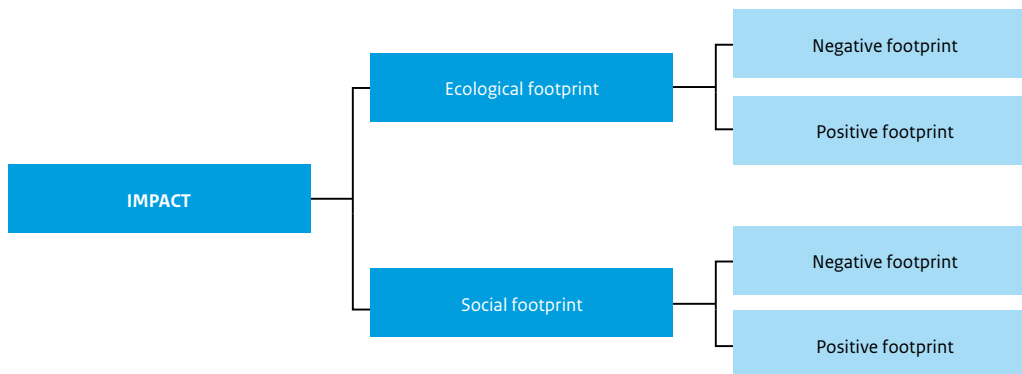
Questionnaire

- What are the minimum quality requirements for the products or services (= detail)?
- What are the minimum sustainability requirements for the products or services (= detail)?
- What are the minimum additional quality and/or sustainability needs (= concept)?
- What is the (internal) sustainability ambition (= functional)?
- How flexible is the market in terms of sustainable innovation or sustainable modernisation?
- What sustainability risks are at play in this market?
- ...

Practical example

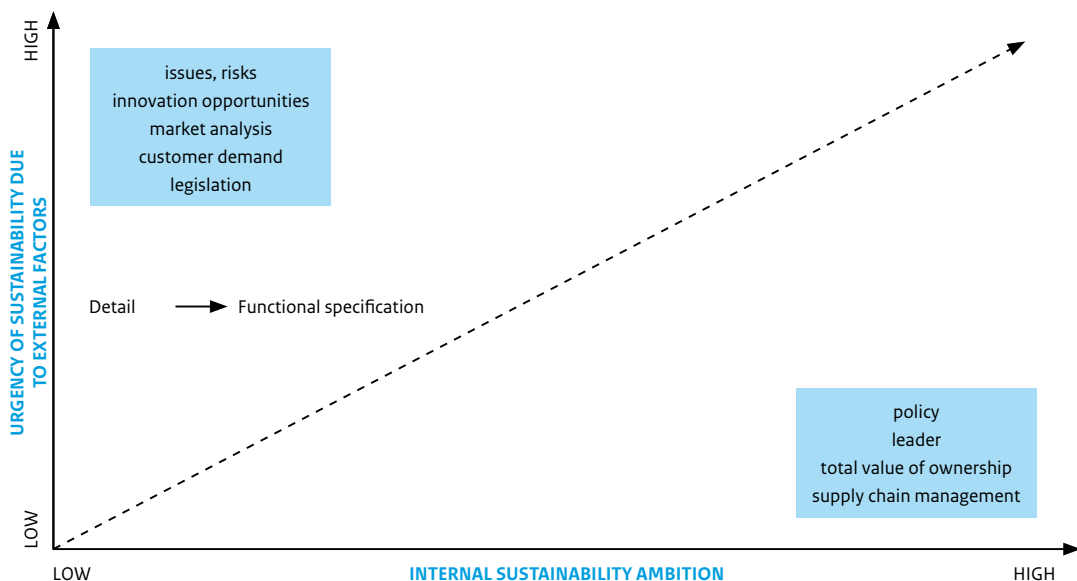
Sustainability conclusions

The conclusions concerning sustainability may relate to reducing a negative footprint as well as expanding a positive footprint, both in terms of environmental and social themes.



The assessment model, functional or technical

Subsequently, by assessing the conclusions for each part according to the following model, it will be possible to determine the extent to which this part of the specification qualifies for a functional or detailed specification, both from the perspective of need determination and internal and external analyses. The higher the internal sustainability ambition (policy, TCO, integration with other projects) and the urgency of external sustainability (in terms of risks, innovation, market, etc.) the more possible it is to develop a more functional specification.



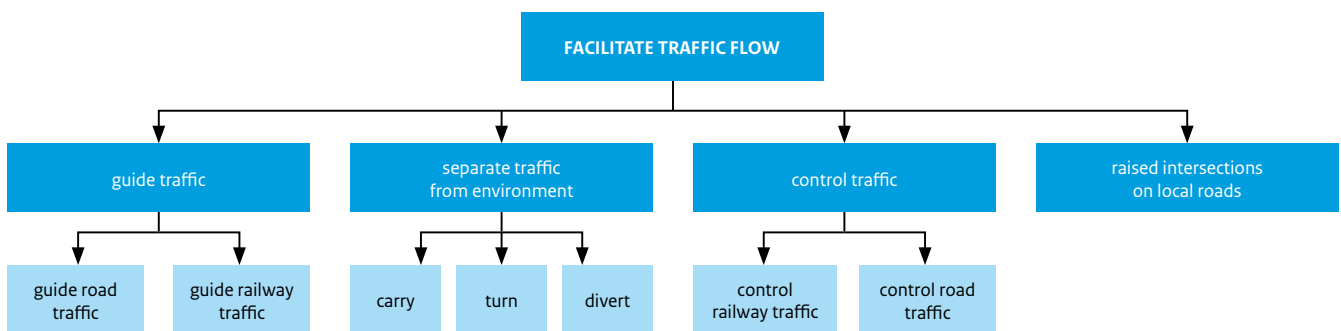
Practical example

The work description of the Systems Engineering system describes the following steps for developing a functional specification:

- Start the functional analysis at the highest level of the system structure;
- Check other documents and requirement specifications for basic functions. If necessary, formulate the basic function yourself.
- Then perform a functional analysis at system level (of the system).
- Formulate functions that fulfil the parent function. New (secondary) functions can also be identified from the common external factors that emerge (what should the component do with the common factor or input from the environment) and adopted design decisions.

Click [here](#) for more information.

Indicative example of function tree, as a result of a functional analysis



Step 5

Developing the questionnaire

Now that the choices are made, it is time to invite the supplier to submit a tender. The functional specification can be used for the entire or for one or more components of the system, on which input from the supplier is required and more, often innovative, solutions are possible. Functional questions to the supplier must therefore be SMART:

SMART objectives

- **Specific:** Describe the goal in clear and concise terms. It should describe a detectable action, behaviour or outcome to which a number, amount, percentage or other quantitative data is linked.
- **Measurable:** A system, method and procedure must be in place to determine the extent to which the goal is achieved at a given time.
- **Achievable:** Is there support for what we are doing? Is it in accordance with the policy and objectives of the organisation? Are the stakeholders willing to commit to the objective?
- **Realistic:** Is the goal feasible?
- **Time-based:** A SMART objective has a clear start and end date.

Sustainable functional questionnaire

The tender document often includes an appendix in which the supplier must indicate whether it meets the requirements and how it will fulfil the MEAT criteria (requirements), as well as the functional sustainability requirements. The inclusion of a questionnaire related to the sustainability award criteria with the request for explanation and evidence gives the supplier the means to remain concise and clear, but also enough room to come up with different solutions. A sustainable functional questionnaire is customised and may therefore vary in terms of questions about how the offer can contribute to reducing waste, CO₂ emissions, etc., to improving working conditions in the country of origin.

Sustainability section

Besides the usual topics in a tender document, such as process description, schedule of requirements, procurement conditions, etc., it is advisable to include a sustainability section specifically for the sustainability ambitions of the organisation as well as the sustainable functional requirements such as sustainable detailed requirements. This will show the “social value” per tender, which is required by the Public Procurement Act.

Practical example

Sustainable functional specifications according to the Green Case (NEVI-PIANOo congress):

- Performance-based consumption, from product to service
- Do not buy desks, sit
- Innovative solutions for water treatment, De Dommel Water Board
- Day cleaning
- Carpet into raw material for road construction

Step 6

Assessment

The response to the functional questions will then be evaluated and assessed using the MEAT (most economically advantageous tender) criteria. Behind every demand is a need (= award criterion).

Assessment of the tenders received for functionally specified contracts is rather more difficult (they are less easily comparable). That is why the award criteria should be considered carefully before they are finalised, this requires extra time.

Functional demands are translated into award criteria

Take the following elements into consideration when formulating the award criteria:

- Measurability, are the criteria sufficiently SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-based)?
- Consistency with the project goal.
- Consistency with the critical success factors, the output specification and the contract.
- Are they minimum requirements or award criteria?
- How effectively should the various award criteria be considered in relation to each other? What is (more) important for the contracting authority?

It is recommended to calculate a number of possible scenarios - once you have developed the draft award criteria. These include scenarios such as:

- A very high tender price.
- A very low tender price.
- Good, moderate or poorly fulfilled sustainability aspects.

The purpose of calculating these scenarios is to determine whether the intended award criteria are developed in a way that the best tender is identified as the most economically advantageous. Based on the outcomes - is the outcome consistent with the 'ideal picture' (to be determined from the objective and the critical success factors of the project)? - can you adjust the award criteria if necessary and recalculate them (according to the so-called Plan-Do-Check-Act circle).

Also bear in mind not to formulate too many award criteria. The more award criteria there are, the more likely it is that outcomes will be (very) similar with each other. Matrices in which many elements of a criterion are assessed separately have this levelling effect.

Practical example

example of award criteria (shown in abbreviated form)

QUALITATIVE ASSESSMENT OF TENDERS FOR PPS TAX OFFICE DOETINCHEM	
Elements	Aspects
architecture (15%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the extent to which an 'appropriate' office building is built.
functionality (50%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> housing concept: the extent to which an 'appropriate' housing concept is developed logistics and accessibility: the extent to which the office supports effective logistics
sustainability (10%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the extent to which further sustainability measures are taken than requested in the output specification
services and monitoring (25%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> services: the extent to which the services concept matches the desired model of collaboration between contracting authority and contractor monitoring: the extent to which the monitoring system contributes to the fulfilment of the service requirements and needs quality management: the extent to which quality management by the contractor contributes to the fulfilment of the requirements and needs in the service provided by the contractor

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