

Request for Proposals

Middleware Requirements and Procurement Consultancy

RFP n#: 2026-4-DE-MIDDLEWARE

Location: Remote/London

Start date: 1st June 2026

End date: 2nd October 2026

Technical Team: IT and Data,
Traceability team, D&E, and
Impact team



All applications must be submitted via this [form](#).

You may submit questions to tender@bettercotton.org – RFP n# **2026-4-DE-MIDDLEWARE** until 29 April 2026, noting that the **final submission deadline for bids is the 6 May 2026**.

Questions, requests and applications sent after the deadline will only be considered in exceptional circumstances.

Important Submission Process Information:

After submitting your details through the [form](#), you will receive a separate email to upload your supporting documents to a secure platform.

Description

The Better Cotton Initiative (BCI) is the world's largest cotton sustainability programme. Our mission: to help cotton communities survive and thrive, while protecting and restoring the environment. Through our network of field-level partners we have provided training on more sustainable farming practices to more than 2.9 million cotton farmers in 26 countries. More than a

fifth of the world's cotton is now grown under the BCI Standard and our membership network includes more than 2,400 members.

More information about BCI can be found on our website: www.bettercotton.org

Background

We are seeking proposals from skilled individuals or organisations interested in leading a comprehensive requirement gathering process for BCI's planned middleware layer.

This initiative is a core component of Better Cotton Initiative's future data strategy and architecture, designed to futureproof our systems and establish a scalable, secure, and standardised integration framework.

Better Cotton Initiative requires a middleware layer capable of handling diverse inbound and outbound data flows across more than 100 anticipated connections, spanning sustainability schemes, retailers, traceability partners, governmental cotton systems, customs authorities, and compliance, impact, and risk analytics platforms. The middleware must be able to translate disparate data formats into a unified structure aligned with BCI data model and provide a secure, governed interface that prevents external parties from connecting directly to the Better Cotton Platform (BCP), thereby protecting system integrity and ensuring a consistent user experience.

This work represents the preparatory phase for the next stage, in which Better Cotton Initiative will move toward acquiring and implementing the selected middleware solution(s). As part of this preparatory work, the consultant will be responsible for developing a structured system or framework to assess and match Better Cotton Initiative's requirements against available middleware and integration technologies. This will ensure that the subsequent procurement process is targeted, evidence-based, and aligned with industry-appropriate architectural options.

We are specifically seeking experts with demonstrable experience in selecting and implementing middleware technologies; however, they must not be employed by a technology or software company and must declare any potential conflicts of interest.

Scope of Work

The expected output will be:

1. **Requirements documentation:** Gathering and drafting a requirements document for the middleware layer, based on desk study and consultation with internal and external key stakeholders:
 - Review internal relevant documentation.
 - 5 Internal teams: IT and Data Team, Traceability Team, Demand and Engagement Team, Impact Team and the Certification Team. We expect the consultant to interview at least 2 respondents per internal stakeholder group, 1 hour per interview.

- 8 different stakeholder groups: including, traceability solutions providers, retailers' and suppliers, compliance and risk solutions, and industry data standards. We expect the consultant to interview at least 2-3 respondents per external stakeholder group, 1 hour per interview.
- For our largest stakeholder groups: retailers and suppliers, surveys may also be used to obtain a sufficient sample

Activities:

- Develop interview questionnaires for each stakeholder group to ensure structured and consistent collection of information about middleware-related data flows, integration requirements across all eight internal and external stakeholders.
- Prepare materials and facilitate interviews (with BCI handling scheduling)
- Capture stakeholder integration needs, including required data inputs and outputs, relevant workflows, system touchpoints, and interoperability considerations across all stakeholder groups.
- Categorise requirements into internal and external integration needs aligned with the objectives of the middleware layer.
- Document functional and non-functional middleware requirements, including data transformation, routing, validation, performance, availability, scalability, and security expectations.
- Prioritise requirements based on integration impact, feasibility, stakeholder influence, and alignment with strategic goals.
- Review existing requirements and architectural plans and validate with BCI which components remain relevant for the future middleware environment.
- Consolidate all findings into a comprehensive Business Requirements Document (BRD) to inform the next stage of middleware solution evaluation and procurement.

2. Technology landscape analysis:

based on our requirements the consultant should provide an overview and evaluation of the different type of middleware strategies and corresponding technologies, and vendors, and a recommendation on the suitability of a specific strategy and corresponding vendors, suitable for BCI's need, technology stack and organizational capacity.

3. Implementation Roadmap:

Based on the agreed requirements and the technology landscape assessment, the consultant should develop a high-level implementation roadmap outlining the recommended sequence of activities, key decision points, dependencies, indicative timelines, and expected cost ranges. This roadmap will guide Better Cotton Initiative in preparing for the subsequent procurement and implementation phase.

4. RFP Development and Procurement Support

To prepare Better Cotton Initiative for the middleware procurement phase, the consultant will draft the RFP and provide expert guidance throughout the evaluation process:

- Draft the middleware procurement RFP in line with the BCI procurement templates and guidance.
- Prepare tailored interview questions and scoring criteria to assess the suitability and fit of prospective middleware vendors.
- Support Better Cotton Initiative throughout the procurement process by participating in vendor interviews, reviewing submissions, providing independent technical insight, and ensuring an objective, evidence-based selection.

In addition to skills, competencies and expertise, we will consider value for money and demonstrable commitment to the sustainability field to evaluate applications.

High-level Timeline

29th April 2026	<p>Questions deadline</p> <p>All questions must be sent only to tender@bettercotton.org with the RFP Reference in the Subject line.</p>
6th May 2026	<p>Applications deadline</p> <p>All applications must be submitted via this form.</p>
7th May to 18 May 2026	Applications review & shortlisting / Interviews
By 18th May 2026	<p>The successful applicant will be notified</p> <p>Unsuccessful <u>shortlisted</u> applicants will also be notified</p>
1st June 2026	Start of the consultancy
By 5th June 2026	Interview questionnaire and content
By 10th July 2026	Draft requirements, and landscape analysis
By 17th July 2026	Implementation roadmap and final requirements, draft RFP
By 24th July 2026	Final RFP
By start of October 2026	RFP process concludes

Required Skills & Knowledge

Skills, Knowledge and Experience
Essential
Proven experience designing and delivering middleware or integration platforms supporting 50-100+ system integrations and a mix of real time, batch and event driven flows
Requirements gathering at enterprise scale; running multi stakeholder workshops, capturing functional and non-functional requirements, prioritisation
Hands on knowledge of leading middleware platforms demonstrating breadth and neutrality
Experience conducting structured market scans, evaluating vendors and analysing the tech landscape
RFP authoring and support
Experience in implementation roadmapping; ability to define roll out, migration and governance
Excellent written and verbal communication skills and the ability to engage with varied stakeholders
Fluent English: BCI's language of operation is English
Optional
Others
Experience with standards and traceability.

Application Requirements

Please note that we have changed our RFP submission protocol, and this is now in two phases;

- **Phase 1: Initial details will be submitted on the form found in this [link](#).**
- **Phase 2: You will receive an email with live links to upload relevant documents (please check your Spam and Junk folders)**

Proposals responding to this Request for Proposals should be a maximum of 12 pages (excluding CVs), and include the following:

- Overview of relevant experience
- Case study examples of previous middleware or integration projects
- Proposed methodology and timeline
- Detailed and transparent budget, in EUROS, including time allocation and day rates

We thank all applicants for their interest; however only shortlisted applicants will be contacted.

BCI is committed to good practice and transparency in the management of natural, human and financial resources. All applications will be reviewed under the principles and subject to BCI's policies on equal opportunity, non-discrimination, anti-bribery & corruption and conflict of interest.

Evaluation Criteria

Proposals will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

Technical Evaluation Criteria

- Demonstrated understanding of this RFP
- Quality and clarity of the proposed approach and methodology
- Feasibility of the proposed activity plan and timeline, and appropriateness of time allocated to delivering each task
- Relevant professional experience of the proposed consultant(s)
- Quality and relevance of the sample work submitted

Financial Evaluation Criteria

- Quality and clarity of budget provided, and level of detail included
- Alignment of the budget to the activity timeline detailed in the technical proposal
- Value for money
- Adherence to the available budget