

## Ethical Metalsmiths Condensed Gemstone Supplier Conversations

### Explainer

The questions in this guide are intended to begin, or continue, a dialogue with a supplier of gems or minerals. If you are reading this, it is probably because you care about how a material came to market, and how you might talk about that to your audience or customers. Please also read page 2 which gives more insight into the why and how of asking these questions and interpreting the answers. Ultimately, you will filter the responses from a supplier – and the action you take – through your own experience, mission, and values.

- Having a shared vocabulary is a great place to start; check out the [JewelryGlossaryProject.com](http://JewelryGlossaryProject.com) for definitions of key jewelry-related terms.
- Create context for the conversation you're about to have: Share with the supplier that you are interested in what they have, and what is important to you/your brand, like: "I am interested in your beautiful \_\_\_\_\_, and I'd like to learn more about these, like where they came out of the ground and how they came to market. My customers are asking me these questions and so I'm asking you."

### Keep in mind:

- This is a dialog, not an interrogation or gotcha game (lines of questioning can feel to the supplier like you are trying to denigrate their product to get a better deal).
- Try not to phrase questions that can be answered with a 'yes or 'no', like "were the working conditions at the mine safe?"
- Avoid asking "where is this from?" Vendors will frequently respond with where it was purchased, which is often a different country or even continent from where it was mined; for example most gems from Madagascar are brought to Sri Lanka.
- "I don't know" is a great response! Thank them for it. It is honest, and a great incentive for them to learn more about their supply chain, and build a relationship by getting back to you.
- \*Note: If a vendor throws shade in response to your questions, try not to take it personally. This is an industry that is changing slowly and some are resistant to change.

### Basic questions:

1. Where on earth did your gems / stones / crystals / rocks come out of the ground? *Alt: In what country did this \_\_\_\_\_ come out of the ground?*
2. Can you tell me about the mine, who the miners are, and what it's like for them?
3. What do you know about how the gems / stones / crystals / rocks got here? *Alt: Can you tell me what you know about this gem's / stone's / crystal's / rock's journey from the ground to this table?* Note: You aren't trying to steal their sources, you just want to understand the path this stone has taken. How many hands? Which countries?
4. Can you tell me where the stone was cut?
5. Can you tell me what the cutting workshop or factory is like?

Bonus Question: Are you as a supplier looking at trying to support the supply chain? How? What have you done in this regard as a company in the last 5 years.

The **Ethical Metalsmiths Condensed Gemstone Supplier Conversation Guide** is intended to help assess the environmental, labor, and human rights practices of suppliers in the mining and gemstone space.

This condensed version of the complete companion guide places yourself and your business in the ecosystem of that supply chain and reminds you to approach your research with both kindness and a level of industry knowledge that will help foster better communication up and down the supply chain.

We hope to inspire emerging designers to ask the sorts of questions that will evolve both your own practice as well as the industry as a whole to greater equity, labor rights, and environmental justice.

**How to interact in a trade show environment /how to frame the comprehensive questions in the conversation guide for quality answers and better business relationships:**

- Treat your own business as an integral part of the supply chain. If you weren't buying, they wouldn't be selling.
- Be willing to learn. The concentration of knowledge here is world class. If you find someone willing to talk, listen. (Even if you think there are inconsistencies, listen to the story. Look for patterns. Look for what's missing. Be discerning. Be patient.)
- Nurture long term connections. Relationships matter in this old school, slow to change industry. If you show an interest in something deeper than a single fast transaction, you may (eventually) get nuanced/quality responses to your questions, and open doors to better conversations about how your values inform your buying decisions. Keep track of what sellers you want to continue the conversation with, then reach out at a less hurried time for them. Many will be happy to sell/talk to you later in the year.
- Show you are interested in developing professional relationships with people with track records of continuously improving environmental and human rights practices, or a willingness to evolve.
- Be street smart. Your intuition is a superpower. Take a beat and listen to it. What is it saying? Does what you are hearing ring true?
- Do not lecture anyone in a sales booth about the state of the world. Consider what it might look like to a seller for you as a buyer to hold them responsible for the whole complex system.
- Appreciate the wide range of cultural assumptions others (and you) bring with them. If you're taking up a lot of someone's time, especially if they are the only seller in the booth, they might reasonably assume you are committed to a purchase.
- Be precise with your language/ask quality opening questions. "where did this come from?" is not precise. Try, "where on earth did this stone get pulled from the earth?", "where was this cut?", "what do you know about this stone?"
- Know that the person in the booth might not be the most knowledgeable. Figure out who to contact at that business who is, and reach out.
- After you ask a question, stop talking and listen to the response.
- Be curious about your suppliers. Ask questions about their values: How did you get into gemstones? What are you most proud of in your work? What would you like to change but don't see an easy way through? What's up next in your business? What do you think are some challenges in the gemstone space? Do you believe jewelry as an idea has merit? Is there anything about it you think is silly?
- Drink water. Make friends. Learn as much as you can. Be kind. Be curious. Have fun.