

Questions to Ask an AI Vendor

[Name of Nation] | Bring this to every AI sales meeting

How to use these questions

- Ask for written answers before you sign anything. A good vendor will answer every question.
- Use the same questions for new AI (artificial intelligence) tools and for AI features being switched on inside software you already pay for.
- Attach the answers to the AI Use Review Checklist for this tool.
- This is a sample list. Have your tribal legal counsel review any contract, including how it treats tribal law, jurisdiction, and sovereign immunity.

Does it work for us?

Question	Why it matters	Vendor's answer
Will you test the tool on our own documents and show us the results?	A brochure is not proof. No AI is always right.	
How often is it wrong, and how will we know when it is?	AI can sound sure and still be wrong.	
Does every answer show where it came from?	Staff need to open the source and check.	
What can a person override, and what happens if they do?	A trained person must stay in the loop.	

Our data stays ours

Question	Why it matters	Vendor's answer
Will you use our data to train or improve your AI, or anyone else's?	The contract should say no.	
Where is our data stored, and in which state or country?	We decide where our information goes.	
How long do you keep our data, prompts, and results?	Short, written limits protect our people.	
Who at your company, or your subcontractors, can see our data?	Fewer people means less risk.	
Can our Sacred or Regulated information be kept out of your system completely?	Some information never leaves tribal control.	

Security

Question	Why it matters	Vendor's answer
Has the tool had an outside security review? May we see a summary?	Ask for proof, not promises.	
How do you protect against hidden instructions (prompt injection)?	Security agencies warn this may never be fully fixed, so limits on what the AI can do matter.	
Can the AI send, pay, delete, or change records on its own? Can we turn that off?	Nothing should happen until a person approves it.	
How quickly will you tell us about a breach or an incident?	Get a number of days in writing.	

The true cost

Question	Why it matters	Vendor's answer
What is the full monthly cost, including licenses, per-use fees, and data fees?	The price is only part of the cost.	
What will training, support, and setup cost?	Count staff time too.	
How much can the price go up each year?	Avoid surprises at renewal.	
Can we start with a small pilot before a long contract?	Start small, measure, then decide.	

A way out

Question	Why it matters	Vendor's answer
How do we get all of our data back, and in what format?	Avoid vendor lock-in.	
Will you confirm in writing that our data is deleted when we leave?	This is Gate 5: Retire.	
What happens to our data if your company is sold or closes?	Our data stays ours.	

AI already inside

Question	Why it matters	Vendor's answer
Which AI features are already in software we pay for, and are they on by default?	Many vendors are adding AI to existing products.	
Can we turn each AI feature off, for everyone or for some staff?	Apply our rules before it is used.	

Power and water

Question	Why it matters	Vendor's answer
Where does the AI run, and is a smaller tool enough for our job?	Big data centers use a lot of electricity and often water for cooling.	

Red flags

- "Our AI is always 100 percent accurate."
- The vendor will not let you test the tool on your own documents.
- Vague answers about training on your data, or where your data is kept.
- No way to get your data back, or no written promise to delete it.
- Pressure to sign quickly, or a long contract with no pilot.

Our decision

Vendor and tool: _____

Meeting date: _____ Answers received in writing: ☐ Yes ☐ No

Recommendation: ☐ Move to a pilot ☐ Ask more questions ☐ Do not buy

Reviewed by: _____ Date: _____

References

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