

Sustainable Procurement at McMaster

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Overview of sustainable procurement website
 Photo credit: Sustainable Procurement webpage⁷

Overview

The UN Sustainable Development Goal for 'Responsible Production and Consumption' urges us to focus on what we buy and how.¹

McMaster has a history of sustainable procurement. In 2009, the University worked with Grand & Toy to replace cardboard packaging with reusable containers and tote bags resulting in a reduction of 10,000 cardboard boxes annually.² In 2012, McMaster worked with sustainability students to develop the University's first Sustainable Procurement Guide.³

During the 2019-2020 academic year, McMaster spent a quarter of a billion dollars on goods annually.⁴ Therefore, it is important to consider the environmental and social impacts of the University's purchases. McMaster's department of Strategic Procurement identified an opportunity to update and enhance its sustainable procurement program, and they sought support from SUSTAIN 3S03 students.

The goal of our project was to work with Procurement to develop processes and resources that would encourage sustainable procurement practices at McMaster.

Objectives

1. Highlight supplier stories related to sustainability initiatives
2. Update and enhance McMaster's Request for Proposal (RFP)⁵ template with comprehensive sustainability questions
3. Redevelop McMaster's Sustainable Procurement Guide to evaluate RFP responses

Reporting

To highlight supplier stories, we met with representatives from some of McMaster's suppliers. We learned about their sustainable practices and identified inspiring stories from each supplier. Success stories were selected based on their connection to McMaster's sustainability goals, ability to have measurable impacts, and ability to inspire action towards sustainable procurement practices.

Through updating McMaster's previous sustainability-related RFP questions, we assessed several examples and best practices. Six questions from the HP Sustainable IT Purchasing Guide⁶ were ultimately selected because responses could be measured, compared, and verified. To further align with our focus on social sustainability, we created one additional question asking suppliers if they provided paid time for their employees to volunteer.

To accompany the RFP questions, we redeveloped McMaster's Sustainable Procurement Guide for purchasers to evaluate and compare supplier responses to the RFP questions. The Guide includes 'what to look for' in supplier responses, an evaluation scale, and key definitions.

We published our work, including the supplier stories, RFP questions, procurement guide, and more, creating McMaster's first Sustainable Procurement webpage.⁷

Upon presenting our work to McMaster's CFO we shared our work with other universities to disseminate information, facilitate dialogue for potential collaboration, and inspire action towards sustainable procurement practices in higher education.

Collaborators

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