Case Study:
ESF Green Purchasing Guide

Introduction

As a State entity, the State University of New York (SUNY) College of Environmental Science and Forestry (ESF) is required to comply with State and internal policies and mandates including: New York State (NYS) Finance Law, NYS Procurement Guidelines, NYS Executive Order 4 (EO4): Establishing a State Green Procurement and Agency Sustainability Program, SUNY Procurement Policies & Procedures, and ESF's Green Purchasing and Break Free from Plastic Policy.[1-5] The NYS Finance Law and NYS Procurement Guidelines, supported by the SUNY Procurement Procedures, require campus purchasers to prioritize the procurement of materials and services from vendors following a purchasing hierarchy 1) NYS Preferred Sources, 2) NYS OGS Centralized Contracts, 3) SUNY Contracts, 4) Discretionary. In addition to following this hierarchy, campus purchasers are encouraged to utilize Minority and Women-Owned Business Enterprises (M/WBEs) and Service Disabled Veteran-Owned Businesses (SDVOBs) whenever possible, per SUNY Procedures and Policies.[6-8] SDVOBs were not included in the first edition of the Green Purchasing Guide, but will be added in future versions. ESF's Green Purchasing and Break Free from Plastic Policy reiterates the College's commitment to meet NYS EO4 green purchasing mandates and disallows the use of State funds to purchase many single-use plastic items for use on College Property or for College events.

The EO4/GreenNY program features specifications outlining the characteristics of a green product, but does not link directly to green products. The work to identify green products must be done by individual purchasers. Compliance with these policies and procedures can be a daunting and time-consuming process for campus purchasers, whose primary responsibilities typically are not procurement related. The task of becoming familiar with the policies and applying them when purchasing products can be highly onerous and can result in non-compliance. The ESF Green Purchasing Guide contains live links to products that meet GreenNY, third-party and ESF green purchasing guidelines. This resource will save purchasers countless hours of research and will improve campus compliance with green purchasing mandates.

The ESF Business Office, Sustainability Division, and the ESF-housed NYS Center for Sustainable Materials Management (CSMM) partnered to jointly create the Green Purchasing Guide (referred to as the "the Guide" hereafter).[9] This Guide aims to assist campus purchasers as they strive to achieve compliance with NYS, SUNY, and ESF policies and mandates (Figure 1). This effort was also undertaken to support campus members in upholding ESF's Values and Commitment to Sustainability.[10] The Guide was designed to simplify the compliance process and to further campus sustainability by providing purchasers with a necessary resource that would assist them in finding products that meet policy requirements and their needs.

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Guide Development

The Guide was developed by two student assistants and was reviewed by Sustainability Division, Business Office, and CSMM staff. The Guide development process can be seen below:

- The Business Office obtained vendor purchasing data from fiscal year 2019 (FY19). Although the Guide was developed in 2021, data from FY19 was used as a proxy for purchasing trends during pre-COVID "business as usual" campus operations. This data included a comprehensive list of items, including the quantity purchased and total price paid.
- Students identified items that were most frequently purchased by members of the ESF community (by expenditure and quantity).
- To summarize the data further, each item was labeled with a Product Name and was assigned to a Product Category (Table 1). Product Names were determined by item functionality, e.g. Copy Paper, Multi-Purpose Cleaner, Compostable Takeout Containers, etc. . Product Categories were based on functional departments at the College and reflected the categories outlined by the EO4 specifications, e.g. Office Supplies or Food Service and Cafeteria.
- The data was then organized by Product Category and further summarized by product name to identify the top ten most purchased items by total

Table 1: Guide Product Categories

Product Category	Product Examples
Office Supplies	Copy paper, file folders, writing utensils, toner, etc.
Janitorial Supplies	Cleaning solutions, paper products, vacuums, etc.
Trades and Facilities	Lightbulbs, air filter panels, waste receptacles, etc.
Food Service and Cafeteria	Takeout containers, napkins, water bottles, coffee, etc.
Electronics	Computers, printers, batteries, keyboards, etc.
Apparel	Custom screen-printed, or embroidered apparel, lab coats

quantity and total expenditure for each product in the category over FY19. This two-pronged approach was chosen to encompass both short- and long-term purchases used on campus. For example, low-cost consumable items, like disposable cutlery or staples, contribute to the waste generated daily on campus, while high-cost devices, like computers or printers, are typically used for many years prior to disposal.

- It was now time to identify green versions of these commonly purchased products! Vendors were identified in each level of the purchasing hierarchy by reviewing the NYS Procurement Guidelines, NYS Office of General Services (OGS) Centralized Awards List, SUNY Contracts Search, and the NYS M/WBE Directory. [11-14]
- Green versions of the most frequently purchased products that had an associated GreenNY spec formed the basis for the Guide. Green versions of the most frequently purchased items without a GreenNY spec, but that had a 3rd-party specification, like UL EcoLogo or Green Seal were then added to the Guide. ESF developed Green Purchasing Guidelines for frequently purchased

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items that did not have a GreenNY spec or 3rd-party certification (Box 1).These items were then added to the Guide. Although verification of products was often possible by reviewing the product description on the vendor's website, in some cases it required contacting the manufacturer directly or reviewing third-party certification websites, like the ENERGY STAR Product Finder.[15]

The Guide was designed to be both functional and aesthetically pleasing to make using the Guide enjoyable for all users. The Guide is organized by Product Categories, each section starting with a products contents list, with live links that take users directly to each product. Product subsections are organized by vendor priority in the purchasing hierarchy, and contain live links to the versions of that product that each vendor offers next to an image of it. For products that have both EO4 and 3rd-party specifications, only the versions of the product that meet the highest standards (EO4) were included. Symbology was created to mark product compliance with the specifications and vendor priority (Table 2). This helps to direct purchasers to the preferred vendors first, then consider versions by other vendors further down on the hierarchy if the earlier versions do not fit their needs. After the Guide's completion, it was made compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) by AbleDocs, a document accessibility organization.[16]

Box 1: ESF Green Purchasing Guidelines

ESF Green Purchasing Guidelines
- Product is made from recycled content
- Minimal, recyclable, and/or compostable packaging
- Product is designed to be reusable and is durable
- Product uses replaceable or refillable parts

Table 2: Green Purchasing Guide Symbol Key

Priority	Contract Group	Symbol	Meets or Exceeds Specification
1	NYS Preferred Sources NYSPSP, NYSID, Corcraft	★	EO4 GreenNY Specifications
2	NYS Office of General Services (OGS) Contracts	●	3rd Party Certification
3	SUNY Contracts	▲	ESF Green Purchasing Guidelines
4	Discretionary, Open Market		

Campus Engagement and Guide Maintenance

The Sustainability Division held four training sessions to introduce campus purchasers to the Guide in March 2022. The training sessions also reviewed ESF's Green Purchasing and Break Free from Plastic Policy. Sustainability Division staff have made themselves available to assist campus purchasers identify additional versions of green products that have EO4 specifications, but were not included in the original version of the Guide. Any products that are identified through these collaborative efforts will be included in future iterations of the Guide. The Guide is to be updated quarterly to ensure the products included in it are still available, to incorporate new products that are identified and to capture changes/updates made to EO4 specifications.

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Figure 1: Green Purchasing Guide Cover

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