



GREEN BUSINESS CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

Green Purchasing

Why Important

Understanding your supply chain—what you purchase, who you purchase from, and how things are delivered—is a fundamental and important way an office can directly reduce its environmental impact.

Beyond reducing your “footprint,” setting green purchasing criteria communicates your commitment to sustainability and puts pressure on your vendors to follow suit. Their desire to keep your business is a powerful leverage point. Just ask big suppliers like Walmart and IBM! These giants have been leading the way on green procurement for several years, changing the paradigm and making it commonplace for customers to ask their suppliers to green their products and services.

Overview

Environmentally preferable purchasing (EPP), or “green purchasing,” is the procurement of goods and services that cause less harm to humans and the environment than competing goods and services serving the same purpose. While cost remains a priority, EPP suggests that decision makers look at the “triple bottom-line” of people, planet, and profit.

When comparing options, you’ll want to consider—individually and in aggregate—their impacts throughout the lifecycle:

- Up-stream –sources and content of raw materials, production processes, packaging, shipping, etc.
- Usage – impact on employee health, energy and water efficiency, durability, reusability, etc.
- Down-stream – reusability of component parts, recyclability, biodegradability, toxicity, etc.

Step by Step Implementation Instructions

1. Commitment – Discuss the plan to rewrite your purchasing policy with upper management and get buy-in for changing practices at the policy level.
2. Green Team – Delegate responsibility for the project to a member of your Green Team—preferably someone with administrative responsibilities who works in procurement—and recruit a few volunteers to help.
3. Basic Principles – If your organization has not developed basic principles of sustainability to guide decision-making now would be a great time to do it!



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4. Policy Review – If you have a formal purchasing policy, review the document—looking at it through the “lens” of sustainability. Ask whether the policy conforms with your principles of sustainability, such as:
 - Eliminating or minimizing the use of raw materials from nature
 - Avoiding the creation of emissions, toxins, or non-biodegradable materials
 - Preventing the destruction of ecosystems and habitat
 - Consideration of human rights, basic human needs, and support of your community
5. Assess Practices – To determine where your greatest impacts are, evaluate how your business uses materials and resources in the course of operations using an input/output map as the basis for developing four lists:



- *Activities* engaged in during the course of business (e.g., printed materials, airline travel, overnight courier service, catered events, furniture and supplies, landscaped area, etc.) Cast a wide net, as there many opportunities ranging from how you run your holiday party to the contents of your uniforms, to rethinking your marketing strategies and products.
- *Resources* required for these activities (e.g. raw materials such reams of paper or food, various forms of resources such as electricity, gas, water, or aviation fuel, financial such as money, etc.)
- *Products & Services* produced for customers and clients (e.g. brochures, training, software, reports, etc.) from knowledge-based businesses or computers, buildings, furnishings, etc. from manufacturing-based businesses)
- *Waste* generated (e.g. paper, electronic equipment, empty bottles, emissions from using fossil fuels, etc.)

An analysis of how you use resources will highlight where your greatest impacts lie and identify areas where you could eliminate resources usage entirely.



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6. Develop Policy – Having mapped your resources usage, you are ready to develop an EPP that reduces your costs along with your impact on the environment. Your policy will need to address the specifics of your operations, but will likely include guidance on:
 - Product Content – set parameters for the materials that you find acceptable.
 - At a minimum, select remanufactured, recycled, non-toxic, and biodegradable materials.
 - Eco-labels that provide a level of assurance as to environmental claims (www.ecolabelindex.com/ecolabels/).
 - Traditionally, materials are used once and discarded. This is known as cradle-to-grave. Instead, look for cradle-to-cradle products that keep materials out of the landfill and instead utilize discards in a closed-loop in which waste becomes new resources. (www.c2ccertified.org/)
 - Packaging – evaluate product packaging for quantity and quality of materials used.
 - Lifecycle Costing – include the full cost—including capital, operating, and disposal costs—when analyzing the financial aspect of the purchasing decision.
 - Services – give preference to rentals or service contracts with take-back option over outright purchase
 - Labor – ensure healthy working conditions and trade
7. Business Benefits - Be sure to keep the business benefits of green purchasing in mind to ensure buy-in from upper management:
 - Highlight items that should no longer be purchased, produced, or practiced and how that will save money (e.g., bottled water; throwaway kitchenware, printing single sided, hard copy filing, etc.)
 - Identify greener products that are fiscally neutral (e.g., EPEAT registered computers) or that can actually save money (e.g., remanufactured toner cartridges, used furniture, etc.)
 - Highlight possible increased productivity and reduced sick time resulting from the elimination of toxic cleaning products or off-gassing products and paints.
8. Green Suppliers – Based on your new EPP, your team should prepare an approved vendors list following these steps:
 - Collate a list of approved suppliers, known to provide products and services that meet your specifications.
 - If any of your existing vendors fall short of your new expectations, work with them to determine whether they can accommodate your needs.
 - Make this list readily available and keep it up-to-date as your needs evolve over time.



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Build on Your Success! Keep the Process Going

- Track & Adjust – Measure the environmental benefits and costs savings associated with the changes and make adjustments as needed. You can use the [Green Purchasing Metrics](#) we have developed or make your own.
- Report – Let your stakeholders know what you're doing. This explicit communication will help you stay on track and boost confidence for new initiatives.
 - Celebrate success and tell your sustainability story.
 - Show how cutting waste and inefficiency saves money, benefits the environment and conveys efficiency to your customers