

# Advancing Responsible Consumption: A Sustainable Purchasing and Reporting Strategy at the University of Calgary



UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY  
Campus as a Learning Lab

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## Research Question

*How can The University of Calgary advance its sustainable purchasing and reporting strategy?*

## Abstract

This capstone study investigates what strategies the University of Calgary can adopt to advance its sustainable purchasing and reporting. While the university has outlined sustainability goals in its Institutional Sustainability Strategy (ISS), there are gaps in procurement processes, data collection and reporting systems that limit the university's ability to measure progress and align with its goals. Existing frameworks such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the AASHE STARS™ inform the research along with a review of internal university documents. A thematic analysis of semi structured interviews identifies barriers and opportunities according to current University of Calgary employees and highlights key themes such as the lack of clear policy or guidelines, gaps in training and capacity, and structural disconnect between departments. The research demonstrates that while there may be openness to advancing sustainable procurement, meaningful progress requires clear criteria, top-down leadership, and improved data collection.

## UCalgary's ISS Metrics

The University of Calgary’s Institutional Sustainability Strategy (ISS) was published in 2016 to present a roadmap and their commitments to advancing sustainability. In this study, the review focused on the framework for administration and operations as it covers the university’s sustainability strategy in areas such as buildings, procurement, and reporting. Regarding purchasing, the University of Calgary’s broader objective is identified as being a best-practice leader in environmentally and socially responsible supply chain management, which is supported by trying to increase two indicators:

1. Per cent of institutional purchasing by total annual spend on non-service goods that meet *formally identified sustainability criteria*
2. Per cent of institutional service purchasing by total annual spend that *includes sustainability criteria* and evaluation in vendor selection and ongoing vendor performance evaluation

*But what exactly IS sustainability criteria?*

## Interviews

Primary data was collected through semi structured interviews with University of Calgary staff from supply chain, procurement, and sustainability operations. The objectives of the interviews was to identify how sustainability is currently integrated in purchasing and reporting at the university, what barriers exist, and then provide recommendations on how to advance these initiatives by aligning with best practices.

Theme	Code(s) assigned	n of transcript annotations assigned
Absence of clear policy and guidance	No clear standard	32
	Needs adoption from-down	
	Subjective/unclear scoring of sustainability	
Cultural & priority-driven barriers to change	Added workload	12
	Cost and budgeting	
	Vendor resistance to change	
	Employee openness to change	
Gaps in capacity, training, & knowledge	Need for more training	7
	Lack of data	
	Unfamiliar or unsure how to implement	
Structural & collaborative disconnect	Departmental silos	12
	Differences in purchasing areas	
Vendor inequities	Vendor capabilities	16
	Evaluation weighting	

The first and most frequently occurring theme in interviews with UCalgary employees was the absence of clear policy and guidance at an institutional level regarding sustainability. Participants consistently pointed out the lack of formal criteria within their units for sustainability and purchasing, and continuously highlighted the need for an institution wide, top-down mandate in order for sustainable purchasing strategies to be material and effective.

## Developing Sustainable Purchasing Criteria

An example of a sustainable purchasing criteria for paper and office material purchases is to report on the level of recycled or Forest Stewardship Certified content in the materials purchased.

Data collected from UCalgary (2018):

Level of recycled or FSC certified content	% of expenditure
10-29 per cent	0.0%
30-49 per cent	95.9%
50-69 per cent	0.0%
70-89 per cent	1.9%
90-100 per cent	1.4%

An example of a sustainable purchasing criteria for electronics purchasing is to report on the percentage of annual spend that meets an Electronic Product Environmental Assessment Tool (EPEAT) certification level.

Data collected from UCalgary (2018):

EPEAT Certification Level	% of electronic expenditure
Bronze	0.0%
Silver	< 1%
Gold	~ 99%

To address the most pressing theme that there is an absence of clear policy or guidelines, the university can align with best practices regarding electronics purchasing. UCalgary can mandate all procured electronics must be Electronic Product Environmental Assessment Tool (EPEAT) registered at a level of silver or higher and measure their performance by the percentage of spend that meets or exceeds this criterion.

As for aligning with and reporting building and construction criteria, UCalgary can add criteria within their construction RFPs or purchase agreements with contractors that they must disclose their Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) rating or equivalent certification. The university can then track and report what floor area percentage of new construction or renovation meet their certified sustainability standards.

## Conclusion

All of the university’s purchasing requests and procurement processes are handled electronically through the PeopleSoft eProcurement software which presents an opportunity to create a repository and embed the defined sustainability criteria in the school’s purchasing data.

Fields could be added to the requisition forms like LEED certification status for construction requisitions, EPEAT certification status for IT requisitions, or the FSC recycled content percentage provided by vendors for office materials. By embedding the sustainability criteria within the university’s eProcurement software, a data repository is created of the school’s sustainable purchases, which then allows for the software to also generate reports on their performance

## Works Cited

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