



Sustainable promotional materials toolkit

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Starting with a purpose

Arizona State University is committed to sustainable operations and inspires individuals, institutions and corporations to adopt eco-friendly practices.

Reducing our environmental impact starts with **rethinking the purpose** of purchasing for university, department or work-related needs.

Before making a purchase, consider the following:

- Can the goal be met without a physical item?
- Does the item promote Sun Devil® spirit and provide long-term value?
- If using an ASU Logo, is the vendor listed on the [licensee search](#) that verifies [Fair Labor](#) practices?
- Is the product reusable, valuable and relevant?
- What is the item's purpose, and does it enhance the recipient's experience?

Encourage sustainable purchasing by:

- Collecting sign-ups to order accurate quantities.
- Informing recipients on proper disposal or recycling.
- Offering items selectively, allowing recipients to opt-in.
- Providing a variety of options to ensure usefulness.
- Highlight the product's sustainability features when distributing items.

[Refer to ASU's sustainable purchasing guidelines](#) for more information.

[Email University Sustainability Practices](#) for additions and improvement ideas for the sustainable promotional materials toolkit.

Best practices — materials and features

Choose promotional items that prioritize quality, longevity and sustainability.

Common product features

- **Avoid:** Single-use, disposable, trendy or event-specific items that quickly end up in landfills.
- **Good:** Biodegradable items — but only if disposed of properly.
- **Better:** Compostable or recyclable products that can fully break down or be processed into new materials.
- **Best:** Reusable, evergreen, locally sourced and practical items that provide long-lasting value.

Common product materials

- **Avoid:** Plastic, mixed materials, or electronics—less than 9% of plastic is recycled, mixed materials are difficult to separate, and electronics require energy or batteries.
- **Good:** Sun protective factor products — opt for mineral-based sunscreens in refillable packaging.
- **Better:** Recycled content or natural fibers reduce demand for raw materials but can still cause harm in landfills.
- **Best:** Certified, infinitely recyclable materials like [Forest Stewardship Council-certified](#) paper, organic or [Fair Trade](#) fabrics, glass, stainless steel or aluminum.



Incorporating sustainability in vendor selection

Licensing

Purchasing promotional items designed with an ASU logo or wordmark [requires a licensed vendor](#). A common misconception is that ASU's licensing requirements limit purchasing options. However, when vendors become licensed through the [Collegiate Licensing Company](#), they must meet ASU's requirements.

These requirements include their ability to meet graphic standards and compliance with ethical and socially responsible business practices, including environmental stewardship and the [Fair Labor Association Code of Conduct](#).

[Visit the trademark and licensing webpage](#) for more information about ASU's trademark management.

ASU's licensing team helps reduce single-use plastics by encouraging departments to choose branded products made from organic, recycled or upcycled materials — promoting more sustainable purchasing habits across campus.

The following licensed apparel contractors can provide you with quotes, samples, artwork, availability and delivery of any apparel:

- [Anton Sport, Inc.](#)
- [ASU Print and Imaging Lab.](#)
- [B.C. Graphics.](#)
- [University Tees.](#)
- [X-treme Apparel.](#)

Please [reference ASU RFP contract 202101](#) with quotes and invoicing as a reminder. You can choose any of the contractors listed above.

Any promotional items beyond apparel can be acquired from any listed internal licensees. All [ASU licensees](#) found in the [CLC](#) have met the requirements for obtaining a license.

Manufacturers are legally bound to obtain a license to produce items containing ASU's logos and trademarks. Please [contact the trademark licensing team](#) if verification of a vendor's status is needed.

Single-use plastic reduction guidelines

ASU is committed to reducing single-use plastics to protect our oceans and natural areas from litter and pollution. Single-use plastics are disposable items made from fossil fuel-based chemicals, including bioplastics, compostable and plant-based plastics.

Follow the guidelines for departmental buyers and event managers:

- Avoid single-use items — choose products made from **organic, compostable materials** compatible with ASU's diversion programs.
- Offer swag, gifts and office supplies **only upon request** to minimize waste.
- Prioritize **durable, reusable and refillable** items made from evergreen materials.



Questions to ask vendors




When requesting a quote from a supplier, include these sustainability questions to guide the vendor in providing the most sustainable product offerings.

ASU's sustainability commitment	Sustainability questions to ask vendor
<p>"ASU aims to be a fully sustainable university and follows sustainable purchasing guidelines. When preparing a quote, please address the sustainability-related questions."</p>	Are the product materials recyclable or compostable?
	How can I find sustainable products in your catalog?
	I am considering this [product]. Do you have similar eco-friendly recommendations?
	Is the packaging designed to reduce waste and be recyclable or compostable?"










Always ask vendors for this information to show ASU's commitment to sustainability. Your interest encourages vendors to offer more sustainable options, helping us fulfill the [ASU Charter](#) by inspiring our community to invest in sustainable practices through purchasing.

Top picks: Material swag

This guide recommends sustainable swag items that minimize waste, avoid single-use products and promote long-term use. The goal is to provide practical, reusable and environmentally friendly alternatives for students, faculty and staff.

Drinkware		
Good	Better	Best
<p>Reusable plastic or silicone bottles.</p> 	<p>Recyclable aluminum bottles.</p> 	<p>Stainless steel or glass water bottles.</p> 

Bags		
Good	Better	Best
<p>Reusable plastic tote bag.</p> 	<p>Tote bags made from recycled plastic or organic cotton.</p> 	<p>Durable, high-quality tote bags like canvas or RPET fabric will be used regularly.</p> 
Apparel: Sourced from licensees		
<p>Standard cotton shirts.</p> 	<p>Shirts made from recycled or organic cotton.</p> 	<p>Upcycled or secondhand apparel rebranded for events to reduce new material use.</p> 
Sunscreen		
<p>Individual sunscreen packet. Choose reef-safe and biodegradable formulas.</p> 	<p>Small refillable sunscreen tubes made from recycled plastic or aluminum.</p> 	<p>Sunscreen dispensers at events with refillable stations.</p> 

Lip balm		
Good	Better	Best
<p>Standard plastic tube lip balm.</p> 	<p>Lip balm in a compostable paper tube made from recycled plastic.</p> 	<p>Refillable lip balm containers with natural, organic ingredients.</p> 
Décor		
<p>Foil balloons can be deflated and reused. However, they are not biodegradable, and they are difficult to recycle.</p> 	<p>Paper decorations are made from recycled materials, such as banners or garlands.</p> 	<p>Reusable fabric banners, flags, or signage can be used for multiple events.</p>  <p><small>Art Scaled to 12%</small> ● PMS 208 C ● PMS 123 C</p>
Other		
<p>Seed paper giveaways include growing flowers or herbs when planted.</p> 	<p>Other reusable items like reusable utensils.</p> 	<p>Experiences or digital swag like event access, e-gift cards or downloadable resources.</p> 

Consider the following when purchasing material swag:

- **Emphasize sustainability in branding:** Use messaging that encourages sustainable behaviors.
- **Limit single-use items:** If an item must be disposable, ensure it is recyclable or compostable.
- **Prioritize function over novelty:** Choose items that attendees will use beyond the event.



Visit the [sustainable purchasing webpage](#) for more ideas on sustainable swag products. You can also contact [University Sustainability Practices](#) for specialized assistance in determining a sustainable swag option.

Top picks: Non-material swag

- Consumable items, such as food.
- Lunch and Learn with a dean or executive vice president, which can be virtual.
- Offer secret word promo codes or coupons for Sun Devil rewards points.
- Professional development opportunities or meetings.
- Special digital badge to share on social media, such as LinkedIn.
- Subscription, such as for a meditation or yoga app, audiobooks or a news outlet.
- Tickets to events, such as ASU sporting events or Gammage shows.

Post-event reflections

Take stock of your success by considering the following reflective questions:

- Did the swag engage your audience the way you envisioned?
- Which items were most popular or well-loved?
- If you find an outstanding item, share it with a colleague.
- Which swag items were left over from the event or not taken by guests?
- Check the trash to see if any swag was thrown out at the event.
- We have given Refried Apparel a license for any leftover apparel, misprints, or damaged fabric that can be repurposed. You are welcome to send items to [ASU Surplus](#), tagging the items for use in the Refried Apparel program.

Swag purchases may seem small, but they have a significant impact. 75% of all transactions at ASU are under \$10,000, meaning these smaller purchases contribute to our environmental footprint. In fiscal year 2024, ASU made \$4.2 million in purchases, totaling 987,709 branded products.

Each purchase presents an opportunity to embrace sustainability. Considering the products and tips in this toolkit, we can make thoughtful purchases that strengthen our community's connection to the ASU brand while protecting the planet.

Sustainability terms

The definitions below are drawn from the [Environmental Protection Agency](#).

Biodegradable: Ability of a substance to be broken down physically and/or chemically by microorganisms. Biodegradable products and materials can decay naturally and in a way that is not harmful to the environment. **Note:** all compostable items are biodegradable, but not all biodegradable items are compostable because they don't always break down into the soil.

Compostable: Compostable items are made from organic material, which allows them to naturally decay in a process that produces nutrient-rich soil that can be used to grow more plants and food. Certified compostable products have been tested to ensure they break down into soil.

Ecolabel: Ecolabels are marks placed on product packaging or in e-catalogs that can help consumers and institutional purchasers quickly and easily identify products that meet specific environmental performance criteria and are deemed environmentally preferable.

- Examples include: [Electronic Product Environmental Assessment Tool](#), [Green Seal](#), [FSC-certified](#), [Cradle to Cradle](#), [EPA Safer Choice](#), [GREENGUARD](#), [Global Recycled Standard](#), etc.



Fair Trade: Rigorous Fair Trade-certified standards ensure safe and healthy working conditions, the elimination of forced child labor, fair and consistent compensation, environmental protection and product traceability. [Refer to the Fair Trade website](#) for more information.

FSC-certified: FSC certification ensures that products come from responsibly managed forests that provide environmental, social and economic benefits. FSC forest management certification confirms that a specific forest area is being managed per the [FSC principles and criteria](#).

Mixed materials: These are manufactured with components made of different materials that cannot be easily disassembled without effort. Mixed materials are challenging to recycle because they must be separated into individual components before recycling, which is not always possible.

Natural fibers: Natural fibers are simply fibers that are not synthetic. They can be sourced from plants or animals. Examples include linen, which is made of flax, bamboo, wool, cotton, etc.

Organic: A term signifying the absence of pesticides, hormones, synthetic fertilizers and other toxic materials in the cultivation of agricultural products.

Recyclable: The process of converting waste into a reusable material or returning a material to a previous state in a cyclic process. Recycled materials can be transformed from waste streams into new products, reducing the need for virgin — new — raw materials to meet consumer demands.

Recycled content: Manufacturing goods from recycled content often results in lower greenhouse gas emissions and helps conserve energy resources because of reuse. **Note:** Investigating the exact percentage of recycled material is good practice. Sometimes, this language is misleading because the actual rate of recycled material is too small to impact. A compostable product could have a lower environmental impact in this case.

Sustainability: A concept based on the principle that humans depend on the natural environment for survival and well-being and that humans and nature can exist in productive harmony. Sustainability is the conditions that ensure that human impact on the environment is sufficiently mitigated in pursuit of the protection of natural resources and of future generations' access to water, materials, resources, and social and economic requirements.

Third-party-certified or verified: An entity is assessed against a standard by an independent or third-party organization independent of the entity being certified or first party and from the program that sets the standard or second party. Examples: Fair Labor Association. Eco-labels are a visual communication tool that represents third-party certification or verification. **Note:** All eco-labels are third-party verifications, but not all third-party verifications are shown using eco-labels.

Zero waste: A system-wide approach that seeks to maximize recycling, minimize waste, reduce consumption and ensure that products are designed to be reused, repaired or recycled back into the environment or marketplace.