

Sustainable Swag Guide

Introduction

The purpose of this guide is to outline recommendations for the purchase of sustainable swag items that will be valuable tools for student engagement while being useful items that contribute to a low environmental impact. Thank you for contributing to the College's commitment to Sustainability!

General principles for buying swag

Above all, swag items should be useful, with minimal to no chance of sitting on a shelf or going straight into a bin. Items that promote a sustainable lifestyle are especially encouraged.

Main considerations

- Distribute fewer items overall (less is more).
- Provide experiences through consumables, DIY activities, raffles/draws, tickets and discounts.
- For physical items, choose useful, durable long-lasting designs.
- Where possible, support local, intersectional, Indigenous, and other equity-deserving vendors. Purchase from suppliers that offer social value, such as nonprofits, social enterprises and diverse suppliers (i.e., B Corp certified).

Mohawk's Sustainable Purchasing Guide

Our Sustainable Purchasing Guide can be found within the 'Employee' section of [MyMohawk](#), under 'Purchasing Services' and is a useful tool for purchases across all categories. It can be used as an addition to this guide when purchasing swag items. The guide provides information on eco-labelling for different types of purchases, so that you know what labels to look for and which ones to avoid.

Questions to consider before buying swag

The following questions will help you assess the sustainability of a swag product:

- Will the item actually be used by the recipient (consider testing/asking your audience)?
- What need does the product fulfill?
- Does it contain little to no plastic (including the packaging)?
- Does it promote sustainable lifestyle changes?
- What material is the product made of?
- How was it made?
- Where was it made and by whom?
- How long will it last? Is it durable?
- How will it be packaged?
- How far will the product travel to get to you? (Note: The company head office may not be the same as the location of production.)
- Can we reduce the number of shipments?
- Can we buy in bulk, to reduce packaging?
- Can we use a shipping method that embraces sustainable practices?
- How will it be reused, recycled or disposed? ⁱ

Suggestions and examples of swag items

Suggestion	Examples	Things to Consider
Provide reusable items that replace single-use items in daily life.	Items such as reusable mugs, straws, cutlery, grocery bags, mesh produce bags, dryer balls, bamboo toothbrushes, natural floss in bamboo container, reusable gift wrap, silicone snack bags.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Should be good quality, convenient items that students will be able to easily incorporate in their daily life
Consumables, such as food items.	Apples, popcorn in paper bags, cotton candy with a paper cone, fair trade coffee or hot chocolate, provide a meal in place of an item - "win lunch on us!"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try to avoid plastic packaging • Food items can often be purchased from local producers • Avoid environmentally damaging ingredients such as palm oil
Consider holding a raffle/draw for a higher-value prize or prize pack, instead of giving away lower-quality items to everyone. This provides the opportunity for student choice in selecting useful items.	Mohawk hoodie or backpack, Bluetooth speaker, tablet. Consider items that make students' lives more affordable, such as: funds for textbooks, money on ONE Card for food purchases, gift card to the campus store, public transit funds (i.e., loaded Presto Card, Bikeshare membership).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For purchasing apparel and textiles, opt for water or vegetable-oil based inks instead of the commonly used dye plastisol which is known to have harmful effects on the environmentⁱⁱ

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Reuse items already in excess on campus.	Good On One Side (GOOS) paper bound notebooks - collect single sided printed paper that is no longer needed and bind together blank sides up to create notebooks for students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The cover can be branded for promotional/marketing purposes.
Run a short DIY activity with a sustainability message as the takeaway.	Planting herbs, DIY heating pads, create art out of plastics that would otherwise go to recycling/landfill, make a natural lip balm, bath bomb or soap, DIY painted plant pots from old metal cans (coffee/soup), natural dye painting, sustainable gift wrapping, seed paper or wildflower bomb workshop, mason jar salad.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage reuse by collecting items such as empty coffee tins, soup cans, plastic bags, egg cartons, newspaper, etc. that can be used for these activities. • If you are buying Seed Paper or Wildflower seeds, ensure that the seeds are native and do not contain any invasive species.
Provide experiences instead of physical items.	Coupons/gift certificates for local farmers' market/Farm Stand, small-businesses, restaurant/café, tickets to conferences, paid or discounted tickets to College events, memberships (local tool library, conservation area, Ontario parks, etc.).	

Note: Where relevant, aim to choose products with Third Party Certifications as outlined in Mohawk College's Sustainable Purchasing Guide.

Here is a sampling of vendors that specialize in sustainable/ethical products. (Note: this list is non-exhaustive and is not an endorsement of any of these vendors)

- [Fairware](#)
- [TruEarth](#)
- [Etee](#)
- [Ethical Swag Inc.](#)
- [Patagonia](#)
- [Beam Paints](#)
- [Birch Bark Coffee Co](#)
- [Raven Reads](#)
- [Peace By Chocolate](#)
- [Reimagine Co](#)
- [Pretty Clean Shop](#)

A note on product samples and testing

If timelines allow, it is a very good idea to request a product sample. This allows you to test a product for quality and test it with your audience to assess the likelihood that the product will actually be used. Piloting a small first order is another good option.

Tips for communication during the swag interaction

- Explain how to use the item and its purpose (if it is replacing a single use item, etc.)
- Encourage the recipient to not take the item if it is not useful to them
- Explain how to dispose of the item when the recipient is done with it (i.e. recyclable, compostable)

Contact information

sustainability@mohawkcollege.ca

Please reach out with any questions, concerns or suggestions for this guide.

References

ⁱ This list of questions was adapted from [UBC's Sustainable Purchasing Guide](#) and [Queen's Sustainable Procurement Guidelines](#)

ⁱⁱ [Equiterre's Guide to Sustainable Promotional Products](#)

Acknowledgements

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Additional Resources

- [UE Communications – Sustainable Swag](#)
- [University of Saskatchewan - Sustainable Purchasing Guide, Promotional Materials](#)
- [UBC \(University of British Columbia\) Social Ecological Economic Development Studies \(SEEDS\) Student Report: An Investigation into Sustainable Swag \(2015\)](#)