

Thematic guide



Adopting and Implementing a Responsible Purchasing Policy in an Institution of Higher Education

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LEGAL DEPOSIT AT THE BIBLIOTH QUE NATIONALE DU QU BEC, DECEMBER 2008

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■ INTRODUCTION

Québec's institutions of higher education purchase more than a billion dollars in goods and services every year.¹ However, very few of these establishments have developed the ability to use this major financial leverage in a responsible manner. Our CEGEPs and universities frequently support companies doing business in ways that severely threaten the environment, violate human rights and breach the most basic labour standards. Although these negative consequences do not always unfold directly before us, the ways in which CEGEPs and universities conduct their purchasing have a definite impact on the living conditions of thousands of workers and their families around the world.

Recognizing the significance of these social and environmental problems, many public institutions have already adopted policies regarding sustainable development or social responsibility. CISO, CQCAM and CÉTAR hope that this constitutes the first step towards adopting responsible purchasing policies (RPP), thus effectively demonstrating these organizations' commitment and operationalizing their determination to contribute to sustainable development.

Although responsible purchasing at Québec's institutions of higher education is still in its rudimentary stages, there is an increasing awareness of its significance which may, over time, bring about meaningful changes to the way in which many of these institutions' vendors provide their goods and services.

“Will you be a part
of this exciting
new movement?”

About This Thematic Guide

In spite of the momentum this recent interest has been gathering, the adoption and effective application of an RPP in an institution of higher education represents a major challenge that demands both imagination and perseverance. The objective of this document is to facilitate your efforts by providing clear and pertinent information concerning the implementation of an RPP within an institution of higher education. **This subject guide therefore caters to all players in the field of education who are interested in these issues.** In other respects, we would like to mention that this initiative was conceived to complement the Guide de mise en place d'une politique d'achat responsable, published by CISO, CQCAM and CÉTAR in 2007, which provides more general information necessary to implement an RPP.²

What is a Responsible Purchasing Policy?

A responsible purchasing policy is a policy that an organization adopts to encompass and supervise all purchases of products and services made on its behalf. Guided by a sustainable development perspective, such a policy will ideally reference the conventions of the International Labour Organization (ILO) as well as sections of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), and include the most pertinent environmental standards applicable to the procurement sector.

Seven fundamental labour standards to include in an RPP according to the CQCAM

- ▶ Freedom of choice of employment and abolition of forced labour (ILO Convention 29);
- ▶ Freedom of association and right to collective bargaining (ILO Conventions 87 and 98);
- ▶ Abolition of child labour (ILO Conventions 138 and 182);
- ▶ Non-discrimination in employment (ILO Conventions 100 and 111) ;
- ▶ Right to decent working conditions (ILO Convention 155);
- ▶ Right to non-excessive working hours (ILO Conventions 1, 30, 31, 46, 49, 51, 57, 61, 67, 109, 153 and 180);
- ▶ Right to remuneration covering the fundamental needs of the family (UDHR, Article 25)³.

In order to guarantee compliance with these social and environmental standards, an RPP should also include follow-up processes to enable an evaluation of the various suppliers' performance.

A RESPONSIBLE PURCHASING POLICY IN AN INSTITUTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION

In Québec, the term “institution of higher education” essentially refers to two types of well-known institutions: CEGEPs (collèges d’enseignement général et professionnel) and universities. Private colleges and affiliated universities are also included in this group.

The Social Role of Québec’s CEGEPs and Universities

The primary mission of institutions of higher education is the training and education of Québec’s population. However, this is not the sole function of these institutions, which also assume a number of responsibilities for social innovation and involvement in the community. In this regard, the Parliamentary Committee on Education’s Consultation Paper on the Quality, Accessibility and Funding of Universities points out, in particular, that these institutions “harbour conditions conducive to innovation, are recognized as playing a role in local and regional development, and ensure our participation in international circles of learning. The roles of universities are of undeniable, strategic importance to social, cultural and economic development. Society’s expectations of universities are in line with the responsibilities they assume.”⁴

In the same light, the Québec government recently adopted the Sustainable Development Act (Bill 118)⁵ which is designed to establish a new management structure for all the government’s ministries and bodies based on the principles of sustainable development. Consequently, Québec’s institutions of higher education are now also linked to the government’s new objectives, which have been designed to incorporate social, environmental and economic criteria into day-to-day management decisions. Adoption and implementation of an RPP are inescapable steps for any organization seeking to concretely improve its performance in the area of sustainable purchasing.

Large Consumers of Goods and Services

Institutions of higher education are collectively responsible for huge purchasing budgets. Québec universities alone spent more than \$770 million during the 2004-2005 fiscal year.⁶ In this context, the term “purchasing” refers to any expenditure on goods, services or construction work.



► Examples of Services

Accident insurance (students)	Food and catering services
Construction	Office cleaning and groundskeeping
Fire, accident and risk insurance	Recycling collection
Fire alarms	Telecommunications
	Waste collection

► Examples of Goods

Athletic equipment	Office supplies
Audio equipment and supplies	Office machines (photocopiers, printers, fax machines)
Coffee	Paint
Computer supplies	Printing paper
Computers	Promotional clothing
Electrical supplies	Software
Fluorescent lights	Radioactive products
Food and beverages	Videocassettes and batteries
Fuel	Working apparel
Laser cartridges	
Modular furniture	

Re-engineering Purchasing

Establishing an RPP requires modifying the organization’s purchasing structure and, more importantly, a new outlook on purchasing methods. For example, from an environmental perspective, the best purchases are sometimes those we simply avoid, a strategy that can often make sound economic as well as environmental sense.

Along the same line of thought, it is interesting to note that environmental analysts are increasingly studying supply chains. By focusing on **product life cycles**, these studies quantify the environmental and social impacts linked to their usage. They achieve this by closely examining the various steps in the manufacturing process, use of the product and its subsequent disposal. While such studies are complex and expensive, they provide important insight into the types of initiatives that can associate with and support responsible purchasing policies.

For example, more and more educational institutions are attempting to cut back on purchasing and reduce consumption by extending their computers’ life expectancy. It becomes possible to prolong the usefulness of each computer by providing the most powerful machines to groups whose applications require them and re-assigning the computers thus replaced to groups whose computing needs are less demanding. Combined with the principles of the **4 Rs (Rethink, Reduce, Reuse and Recycle)**, this type of initiative supports the considerations guiding an institution to commit to a responsible purchasing program.

4 Rs	Applying the principle	Example of criteria used in selecting products
Rethink	Study the organization’s needs and the way products are used by the organization so as to optimize their utilization.	Evaluate with greater accuracy the quantities necessary to meet the organization’s needs. Consider renting or sharing certain products rather than purchasing them. Think of acquisition and disposal of goods in terms of their life cycles.
Reduce	Diminish acquisition of materials and consumption of resources.	Use higher-quality goods with a longer life expectancy, fewer toxins/pollutants, reusable/rechargeable. Reduce, if possible, the amount of packaging consumed.
Reuse	Use over again, acquire used or repair.	Prioritize products that are easy to use and repair, reusable and/or returnable.
Recycle	Acquire recycled or recyclable products, while making sure to implement adequate recycling methods for the disposal of purchased goods.	Consider the proportion of recycled or recyclable material in a product and its packaging.

The Internal Structure of Purchasing

Promoting the implementation of an RPP requires a sound understanding of the purchasing structure of Québec's CEGEPs and universities. Depending on the institution, its size, complexity and particular needs, it will have a purchasing structure built around one of three models:

- **Centralized**, with a small group specifically dedicated to purchasing activities;
- **Decentralized**, where each academic and non-academic department or unit makes its own purchases;
- **Hybrid**, the most frequent, where certain items will be acquired by their immediate users while the larger purchases, in terms of size, volume or capital, will often be effectuated by means of a tendering process supervised by and centralized under the general management of the institution.

The Role of the Purchasers

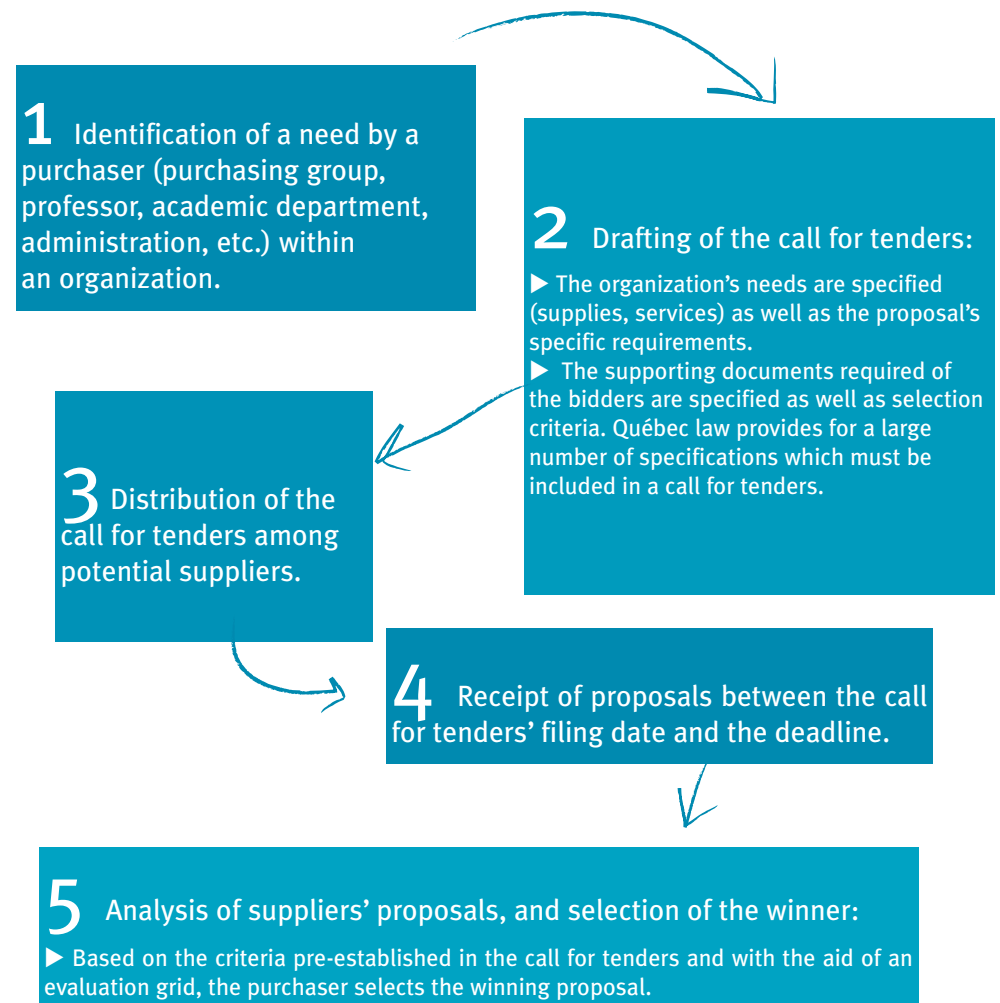
It is important to realize that even when an organization has a centralized purchasing department, the purchasing officers continually work with individual purchasers. These purchasers, including any staff member wanting to make a large purchase, play a major role throughout the purchasing process. They can exercise a great deal of influence on choices made throughout the tendering process and therefore also share in the moral responsibility.

The Tendering Process

Generally speaking, calls for tenders are the primary procedure for the allocation of any major contract. In fact, the law requires organizations to use this procedure for any contract that exceeds a total value of \$100,000.⁷

A call for tenders can be defined as a process whereby a purchaser initiates a competition between several potential suppliers (of goods, services or construction work) through the complete disclosure of its needs in a formal, public and detailed manner, with the objective of obtaining the most advantageous contract possible.

FIVE STAGES OF THE TENDERING PROCESS



As previously mentioned, these steps are compulsory if the value of the goods or services ordered by the public institution exceeds \$100,000. In any case, governmental purchases of this order do not represent the majority of those made by all public institutions. The procedures for purchases of less than \$100,000 vary according to the institution. Thus it is important to review your organization's purchasing policy in order to become well acquainted with its particular provisions. Usually, procedures become more delineated as the value of the contract becomes greater. For example, purchases of less than \$2,500 may be secured in a relatively decentralized process with few constraints, while purchases of a greater amount are performed by means similar to the tendering process.

Purchasing Associations

There are university and collegial purchasing associations in Québec and Canada that work to secure economies of scale from certain suppliers. These groups' purchasing power enables them to obtain the most advantageous rates for certain types of products and services such as paper, gasoline, heating oil or fluorescent lights. In addition, these associations serve as information exchanges, promoting the adoption of uniform effective practices across the entire network.⁸ The potential exists for these associations to become a clearing house for experience and ideas on the subject of responsible purchasing. The most important associations include:

- ▶ Regroupement des gestionnaires en approvisionnement des universités du Québec (RGAUQ);
- ▶ Centre collégial des services regroupés (CCSR);
- ▶ Canadian Association of University Business Officers (CAUBO) (l'Association canadienne du personnel administratif universitaire) (ACPAU), procurement section;
- ▶ Centre de services partagés du Québec (CSPQ).

It is interesting to note that the RGAUQ is currently partnering with the CÉTAR to conduct research into purchasing alternatives for universities (work uniforms, lab coats, promotional clothing, etc.), for the purpose of concretely improving purchasing practices in this sector.

As well, the CSPQ, in addition to having already adopted a responsible purchasing policy, has posted on its Web site a list of its most recent sustainable development initiatives.⁹

Other Groups Likely to Adopt a Responsible Purchasing Policy

In CEGEPs and universities, most purchasing is centralized in purchasing departments. For decentralized purchases, it is important that the provisions of the RPP be written in sufficiently general language that the various services, departments and sectors can agree with and endorse the principles of their institution's RPP. It is also possible that some groups within an institution will develop their own RPP. Some important organizations to consider include the following:

- ▶ student co-operatives (independent or members of COOPSCO);
- ▶ food services, photocopy services, day care centres, sports and recreation facilities;
- ▶ student associations and their student cafés;
- ▶ unions operating at the institution;
- ▶ academic departments and university research chairs.

THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR RESPONSIBLE PURCHASING

Before initiating a responsible purchasing process, the legal framework which governs public sector purchasing has to be examined. This includes relevant Québec laws and regulations, as well as the potential impact of interprovincial and international trade agreements on purchasing activities.

The Sustainable Development Act (Bill 118)

Assented to on April 18, 2006¹⁰, The Sustainable Development Act (Bill 118), establishes a new management framework which allows the government to exercise more responsibility in the area of sustainable development. The bill incorporates two fundamental elements of the definition that is generally associated with the concept of sustainable development: intergenerational equity, an effort to respect the development capacity of future generations, and the integration of social, environmental and economic criteria in the analysis of development activities.

The Québec government has included among the 16 key principles underlying the Sustainable Development Act the idea of “responsible production and consumption.” This is also one of the three priority orientations presented in the Government Sustainable Development Strategy 2008-2013: Québec will “integrate environmental and social accountability criteria into its procurement and contract allocation processes.”¹¹

It is also anticipated that the principles embodied in this law will eventually be applied to all of Québec’s public institutions (municipalities, schools, etc.), in addition to enterprises subsidized by the Québec government.

To realize this priority, the government commits to “apply environmental management measures and an ecoresponsible purchasing policy within government departments and agencies,” as well as to “provide the reference points required to make enlightened, responsible consumer choices and, if applicable, promote goods and services certification.”¹² It appears that the Québec government intends to demonstrate leadership by enacting the legislative changes necessary to integrate environmental and social responsibility criteria into its procurement processes and in the awarding of contracts.

While Bill 118 outlines the main aspects of the Québec government’s intervention strategies, it is nevertheless necessary to examine in greater detail the actual regulatory framework governing public bodies.

Act Respecting Contracting by Public Bodies (Bill 17)

The Québec Act Respecting Contracting by Public Bodies¹³ encompasses all contract processes between Québec’s public bodies and their private contractors. Procurement is defined as including three types of exchanges: the supply of goods, services and construction work which can be authorized by these public organizations. This law therefore applies directly to questions related to responsible purchasing.

Why is a law regulating the procurement processes of public institutions necessary and what should its objectives be? In general, the legislation attempts to ensure that the management of Québec’s public institutions is guided by a sound and diligent management framework oriented towards promoting the following objectives:

1. transparency in contracting processes;
2. the honest and fair treatment of tenderers;
3. the opportunity for qualified tenderers to compete in calls for tenders made by public bodies;
4. the use of effective and efficient contracting procedures, including careful, thorough evaluation of procurement requirements that reflects the Government’s sustainable development and environmental policies;
5. the implementation of quality assurance systems for the goods, services or construction work required by public bodies; and
6. accountability reporting by the chief executive officers of public bodies to verify the proper use of public funds. (Art. 2, Chap. 2, L. 17)

IMPACT OF BILL 17 ON RESPONSIBLE PURCHASING POLICIES

Recently modified,¹⁴ this new legislation addresses and alleviates some of the deepest concerns raised in opposition to the establishment of an RPP. In the past, managers and purchasing departments have discretely pointed out the possible contradictions between the principles promoted by responsible purchasing and those of sound management and economic efficiency. According to the fourth objective of Bill 17, the legal framework now tends to confirm that the principles governing an RPP form an integral part of sound procurement management.

THE OBLIGATION TO BE TRANSPARENT

Another important aspect of Bill 17 that promotes responsible purchasing in public administration concerns transparency. Section 22 of chapter VI of Bill 17 says:

“A public body must, in the cases, on the conditions and in the manner determined by government regulation, publish information on the contracts it has entered into which involve an expenditure over \$25,000.”¹⁵

Together with the provisions of the Act Respecting Access to Documents Held by Public Bodies and the Protection of Personal Information,¹⁶ Bill 17 provides a powerful means of evaluating the character as well as the allocation of Québec CEGEP and university procurement budgets.

The Regulation Respecting Supply Contracts of Public Bodies

In comparison to a law, which must be adopted by the National Assembly, a regulation is normally put into effect through governmental decree, most often to clarify legislative guidelines' overall objectives.

How do the regulations promoted by Québec enable social and environmental criteria to be included in purchasing? This is addressed in the clarifications to the provisions on public calls for tenders, which appear in the Draft Regulation Respecting Supply Contracts of Public Bodies. Section 36 of the regulation states:

“A public body may require a quality assurance system, including the ISO 9001:2000 standard, or a specification relating to sustainable development and the environment for the carrying out of a contract. The public body must specify the requirement in the tender documents. If such a requirement unduly reduces competition, the public body must allow any supplier to submit a tender and grant to a supplier that fulfills the requirement referred to in the first paragraph a preferential margin not exceeding 10 percent. In the latter case, the price submitted by such a supplier is, for the sole purpose of determining the successful tenderer, reduced by the preferential margin, without any effect on the price for contract awarding purposes. The percentage of the preferential margin to be applied must be indicated in the tender documents.”¹⁷

IMPACT OF THE REGULATION RESPECTING SUPPLY CONTRACTS OF PUBLIC BODIES ON A RESPONSIBLE PURCHASING POLICY

An analysis of Section 36 provides a clear indication of the importance of applying social and environmental criteria to calls for tenders exceeding \$100,000 issued by Québec's institutions of higher education. The following orientations can be determined:



1. The use of social and environmental criteria is allowed. While there are no legal obstacles to proceeding in this manner, it is not obligatory to do so. Therefore, it is all the more important that institutions of higher education create an RPP in order to demonstrate their commitment to sustainability. This is an essential step toward implementing credible changes in terms of responsible purchasing, and to provide support to personnel in charge.

2. These criteria must be applied in a measured way. To apply sustainability criteria in a way that determines the outcome of the tendering process, there must be a sufficient number of suppliers to ensure that there is meaningful competition. If the desired environmental and social characteristics cannot be met by a sufficiently large number of suppliers, the purchasers may not make such criteria obligatory.

3. The relative weight given to the criteria is limited. Where applicable, the public body responsible for the tendering process may not apply a preferential margin of more than 10% of the total points on the tenderer's evaluation grid to social and environmental characteristics.

Although it is possible to view the regulation's contribution as relatively modest, it nonetheless represents an important step towards an increasingly systematic incorporation of social responsibility indicators in the conduct of public affairs. Not so long ago, these same criteria were just plain ignored. In addition, it should be remembered that variations of as little as 2 or 3% in the evaluation grid sometimes suffice to determine the winning candidate.

Interprovincial and International Trade Agreements

Interprovincial and international trade agreements are free trade agreements that reduce trade barriers between provinces, states, and signatory governments. In particular, they enable Québec suppliers to bid on tender offers from public bodies of other provinces, states, and signatory countries, and vice versa. These agreements are generally framed by the four following principles: non-discrimination, transparency, reciprocity, and settlement of disputes.¹⁸ Free trade agreements that can influence the purchasing activities of Québec's institutions of higher education include the well-known North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the Agreement on Internal Trade (AIT), as well as a series of free trade agreements with Ontario, New Brunswick and New York State.

IMPACT OF FREE TRADE AGREEMENTS

In practice, interprovincial and international free trade agreements do not greatly affect procurement managers' work. Firstly, these accords only apply to contracts exceeding \$100,000. In addition, their main impact is to require procurement managers to publish their calls for tenders on the Québec government's official Web site dedicated to requests for proposals, the SEAO (Système électronique d'appel d'offres, www.seao.ca) for a period of at least 15 days. This provision's objective is to provide entrepreneurs of all regions covered by the free trade agreements with the opportunity to bid on these projects.

Since these agreements also seek to eliminate geographic discrimination, procurement managers must clearly specify their selection criteria in the spirit of transparency. If a tenderer experiences discrimination due to non-objective factors, there is legal recourse to sue the responsible body for damages and interest. Even though such cases are rare, the agreements require procurement managers to act transparently by publishing their needs and their evaluation criteria clearly and precisely.

STRATEGIES FOR CREATING A RESPONSIBLE PURCHASING POLICY

The principle objective of an RPP is to foster greater accountability in an organization's purchasing activities. Adoption and implementation of this policy is dependent on the development of a political commitment by your community and its leaders. Accompanying practical mechanisms will help enable a progressive transformation of the way in which purchases are made.

A Question of Political Commitment

A responsible purchasing policy is a formal document which has been adopted by the highest authorities of a CEGEP or university, affirming the organization's commitment to responsible purchasing. The authorities of an institution, as well as their assistants, can offer concrete support of an RPP if they are persuaded that the program is well-founded. **In practice, strong support from management and leading authorities of an institution greatly facilitates creation and effective application of an RPP.**

Even if there is no disagreement on the principle of an RPP, the project can run into the obstacles of indifference or outright opposition of key people. The management of a CEGEP or a university sometimes perceives an RPP as a source of additional costs, and procurement personnel can view the changes to their work as creating additional tasks. Other employees, who can potentially offer vital support for the implementation of an RPP, might not view the successful completion of such a project as a priority. They may also argue that an accurate evaluation of suppliers' social responsibility would demand too many resources, and squander too much time and expertise.

IN SPITE OF THE OBSTACLES, A
MOVEMENT IS UNDER WAY
AND AN INCREASING NUMBER
OF UNIVERSITIES AND CEGEPS
ARE DEVELOPING RPPs.

The establishment of responsible management regimes increasingly reflects the community's moral expectations; issues and challenges related to sustainable development will continue to fuel debate for many years to come. Most often, these policy changes are enacted following campaigns or other pressure tactics applied by students or staff. Once an RPP is adopted, it can often provide extra inspiration to procurement personnel not only by sending them new challenges, but also by enriching their day-to-day activities. It is also important to note that the people of Québec are increasingly demanding that their institutions of higher education use their expertise and resources to demonstrate leadership in the areas of social and environmental development.

Nevertheless, it is entirely possible that an RPP be adopted and published on an institution of higher education's Web site and never be implemented. **Without a strong political commitment from all representatives of their respective communities, procurement managers are often left on their own without the necessary resources to successfully implement a conclusive process resulting in responsible purchasing.** It is imperative that the various stakeholders honour their commitment to be involved throughout the entire process, and that they provide appropriate follow-up to guarantee that the RPP becomes effective.

Official Adoption of a Responsible Purchasing Policy

As previously stated, an RPP is an official document involving and resulting from a formal decision that was approved by the institution of higher education's relevant bodies of authority. To ensure that the document is finally adopted as policy, you will have to know who are the main collaborators and stakeholders you need to persuade, as well as the structure of your institution.

Analyzing the Situation

Before undertaking any policy initiative, a thorough understanding of all factors influencing the final decision is a must. In order to achieve this, you have to:

- ▶ catalog the decision-making processes which must endorse your project before it can become officially accepted;
- ▶ determine the main stakeholders at your institution of higher education (students, professors, support staff, purchasing managers, upper management, Board of Governors);
- ▶ delineate the key people active in relevant groups and committees (elected student representatives, union representatives, management personnel, etc.);
- ▶ initiate discussions with these people and seek out their views on the issue;
- ▶ form an interest group to clarify and promote the issues linked to responsible purchasing;
- ▶ identify the chain of command for institutional purchases and develop an understanding of who buys what.

The Key Governing Bodies of Your Institution of Higher Education

In general, there are three kinds of governing bodies that exercise authority over the adoption of an RPP, whose names vary according to the institution's culture:

The executive committee is the working committee of the institution's management. Most often reserved for officers, this committee considers current business as well as CEGEPs' and universities' priority projects. It is important to note that this committee is where management prepares and sets the agenda for the two other bodies.

The representative assembly is often the most democratic body at a CEGEP or university. It is usually made up of representatives of the entire community: executives, faculty members, union and student representatives. It is sometimes made up of many subcommittees, (academic committee, environmental committee, etc.), mandated to carry out more specialized tasks and which report to the assembly. It is quite possible that a proposal for the adoption of a policy of general interest such as an RPP would be brought before this assembly.

The Board of Governors is usually the highest authority of an institution of higher education. The board oversees the institution's financial management. According to the institution's official structure and internal culture, the board can ultimately be responsible for approving an RPP which has been proposed by the representative assembly.

Principle Political Actors at Your Institution

ACTORS	DESCRIPTION ▼	CHARACTERISTIC ▼
Students	Student body of an institution of higher education.	Students often act as the spark, the driving force. Their involvement is often intense over a relatively short period of time.
Student representatives	Students who have been elected by their student body governments or by their general assemblies to represent them on the official governing bodies of their institution.	They represent the views and wishes of other students. Their presentations to the representative assembly can be of great importance in supporting official adoption of an RPP.
Environmental and social interest groups	Students who meet periodically to plan and execute activities which promote social and environmental causes.	Generally small groups of students motivated by social and environmental causes who can be called upon to act as a spearhead in the context of an action or educational campaign at your institution.
Professors and Teaching	Teaching personnel at an institution of higher education.	In contrast to students, the teachers' involvement generally is for a longer period of time. They provide continuity and can contribute to developing an RPP by sharing their knowledge and expertise. In addition, their union representatives have an important role to play in assisting the official adoption of an RPP.
Assistants Support staff	Includes all the non-teaching personnel at your institution, from secretaries to office cleaners to event organizers.	The support staff plays a large role in the life of an institution. They use a large quantity of the supplies and services purchased by universities and CEGEPs. They are often represented by different unions. Their support in the elaboration and implementation of an RPP is essential.

ACTORS	DESCRIPTION ▼	CHARACTERISTIC ▼
Unions	The unions and associations who represent the various tradespeople working at your institution, and their duly elected representatives.	The role of unions and their representatives is especially important within the context of your institution's governing bodies. As well, in some cases, unions are in a position to carry out and provide certain studies whose results demonstrate the significance and support adoption of an RPP.
Purchasing managers	Persons responsible for purchasing at your institution.	Considering that they will probably be the ones at the heart of the RPP's implementation process, their involvement in the RPP's development and adoption is absolutely fundamental.
Management	Administrative personnel responsible for managing a CEGEP or university.	In practice, these actors possess a great deal of influential power, which can either help advance an RPP project within the governing bodies they participate in, or on the contrary, delay its acceptance and implementation.
Sustainable development advisors (or another title according to the institution)	Staff responsible for supporting the institution's sustainable development initiatives. Inasmuch as such a position exists, this person is usually responsible for reporting on the institution's social and environmental performance.	If in fact such a position exists, this person could become a cornerstone of an RPP project by dedicating a certain part of his/her activities to searching and providing the most current information available in the area of responsible purchasing. This person could also play the role of expert adviser to and trainer of applicable staff and the RPP's steering committee.

Develop a Convincing Argument

Before proposing the official adoption of an RPP, you must develop a convincing argument that can win the support of the largest number of actors possible. It is important to be able to demonstrate that:

1

- ▶ your educational institution holds a significant purchasing power;

2

- ▶ the purchasing practices of your educational institution can be improved upon (by providing concrete examples);

3

- ▶ an RPP established in a gradual and strategic manner can contribute to improving disadvantaged workers' quality of life, as well as reduce your institution's environmental footprint;

4

- ▶ an RPP is an indispensable component of implementing a coherent approach to sustainable development.

Education and Involvement

- 1 ▶ In the process of establishing an RPP, the community will need to be educated about the importance of this issue. For example, if you are a student or professor and would like your association or union representatives to speak on behalf of an RPP in front of your institution's governing bodies, it will probably be necessary to first educate your colleagues
- 2 ▶ This will facilitate your assembly in passing a motion mandating the proposal of an RPP to management. Initiate discussions with individuals at your institution and create opportunities for exchange, whether through kiosks, films or informal get-togethers. These are all ways in which you can help change the consumer culture and inform your community about the issues and the challenges related to the establishment of an RPP. These activities will provide a good opportunity to recruit allies ready to help you gain official support.
- 3 ▶ Subsequently, an effort will have to be made to take a public stand on the issue, gradually promoting the idea until it becomes widely supported. There are many ways in which you can do this:
 - ▶ official meetings;
 - ▶ open letters;
 - ▶ petitions;
 - ▶ speaking and making proposals before official meetings;
 - ▶ research repository;
 - ▶ rallies;
 - ▶ exposure in local media.



Implementing a Responsible Purchasing Policy

Once it appears that there is a political commitment on the part of the various interest groups and that enough actors agree on the necessity of adopting an RPP, it is time to take concrete action. This stage of the process demands both rigorousness and collaboration, since there will be several aspects to address in order to initiate a responsible purchasing process in a coherent manner. It is strongly recommended that you consult pages 14 to 18 of the *Guide de mise en place d'une politique d'achat responsable* available on CISO's and CÉTAR's Web site.

Form a Multiparty Steering Committee

Experience has shown that in matters of responsible purchasing, the involvement of a multiparty committee greatly enhances the potential impact of an RPP. In fact, organizations that have adopted RPPs without endeavouring to create such follow-up committees have most often obtained disappointing results. **To take a dynamic approach to responsible purchasing, it is important that the interested parties, representing different perspectives, meet frequently in the context of a multiparty committee.**

Such a committee will take responsibility for:

- ▶ developing the RPP and its code of conduct;
- ▶ determining the social and environmental standards that will govern the RPP;
- ▶ developing an annual action plan and timetable targeting the list of products identified by the RPP for the year in progress;
- ▶ evaluating the human and financial resources needed and making sure that both are allocated;
- ▶ designating the person(s) responsible for tracking and following up on the RPP;
- ▶ determining corrective actions to be applied upon receipt of negative evaluations and providing co-ordination with the person in charge of these measures.

Questions for the Suppliers

The previous examination of Bill 17's provisions on public administration provided a precise frame of reference as to the weight that can be assigned to social and environmental criteria within the tendering process. Thus, allocation of points obtained by your suppliers for responsible social and environmental criteria can vary according to their answers to questions such as the following:

- ✓ Do you have a policy on social responsibility and/or sustainable development?
- ✓ How do you apply it?
- ✓ What concrete results have you obtained up to now?
- ✓ Do you have a code of conduct regarding respect for human rights and international labour standards?
- ✓ Have your suppliers also committed to respecting this code?
- ✓ Are you evaluated and certified by a credible independent organization?
- ✓ Are your suppliers evaluated and certified by a credible independent organization?



Code of conduct

In a complementary manner, some CEGEPs and universities have developed a code of conduct that requires suppliers, as well as their subcontractors, to respect certain social and environmental standards. Incidentally, a code of conduct can send a strong message to suppliers, particularly if non-compliance with the code suffices as cause for cancelling a procurement contract. However, in the absence of any external verification, these initiatives are difficult to apply in practice.



Monitoring and Verification

In matters of responsible purchasing, **the ability to obtain effective results depends on the quality of information.** Presently, there are a variety of means enabling you to evaluate your suppliers' conformance to social and/or environmental practices.

Certification is a process undertaken by a third party in order to demonstrate respect for social and/or environmental standards. The certification's credibility depends on the certifying organization's reputation. Reputable certifying organizations include: Transfair Canada,¹⁹ the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)²⁰ as well as the EcoLogo brand.²¹

Let us point out that only certifications awarded by independent organizations are usually considered credible. The certifying organizations must also be transparent in divulging all their evaluation criteria in detail and by proving their use of credible verification processes.

Monitoring is a process whereby an organization or business audits its own activities and produces a report on its sustainable development practices. Monitoring is a useful practice, but it must be examined self-critically. Indeed, at times, it can serve as a more or less convincing marketing exercise, rather than provide evidence of a real effort to transform the organization's practices.

External verification provides the most detailed and accurate examination of an organization's true social responsibility practices. Although some verification providers are more credible than others, external verification nevertheless provides the most thorough and trustworthy information possible. Multiparty verification organizations, consisting of corporate representatives, unions, NGOs and workers are currently considered the most credible. For more detailed information on the three types of approaches, see pages 16 to 18 in the *Guide de mise en place d'une politique d'achat responsable*, available on CISO's and CÉTAR's Web site.

Infractions and Corrective Measures

Although your suppliers have demonstrated respect of certain social or environmental standards through their signing a code of conduct or by means of certification, monitoring or external verification, it is possible that some of their statements prove to be partially or totally false, or that the standards they have claimed to respect have been disregarded during the execution of a contract. An RPP's impact can be severely undermined if such infractions are not treated seriously. It is therefore important that there be provisions which:

- ▶ demand transparency of your suppliers (especially concerning their own local and international suppliers);
- ▶ provide verification mechanisms;
- ▶ establish clear corrective procedures for non-conforming suppliers requiring them to adopt corrective measures;
- ▶ determine the limit past which your institution will no longer do business with a non-conforming supplier.

Ongoing Evaluation of Your Responsible Purchasing Policy

An effective RPP requires continual evaluation by a multiparty committee. Rather than trying to accomplish all of the responsible purchasing program's objectives immediately, it is more realistic to try to make progressive improvements. The extent of the changes effectuated in responsible purchasing have to be reviewed on a regular basis. An annual evaluation should be performed, and a mechanism put in place whereby different institutional stakeholders can provide feedback on any problems they have encountered in applying the RPP.

Networks Specific to Institutions of Higher Education

CEGEPS and universities share some distinct advantages when compared to other public institutions as regards responsible purchasing. In general, CEGEPs and universities have relatively similar purchasing requirements. This provides them with the opportunity to develop research initiatives and training collectives in the area of responsible purchasing. The current collaboration between RGAUQ and CÉTAR is an example.

Green CEGEPs

The Green CEGEP certification program was initiated by Environnement Jeunesse in 2004.²² The three-stage certification process has a minimum requirement that participating CEGEPs adopt an environmental policy and implement an institutional committee on the environment. While the certification does not include provisions addressing responsible purchasing, it moves in the same direction. An environmental policy can become the basis for the development of an RPP, although criteria exclusive of human rights and international labour standards do not provide sufficient justification for responsible purchasing.

L' Association québécoise pour la promotion de l'éducation relative à l'environnement (AQPERE)

Since 1990, AQPERE has brought individuals and corporations together to promote environmental education as one of the main resources leading to ecoresponsible behavior in our society. AQPERE produces and distributes information in publications and in its monthly electronic newsletter Inter'ERE.net. The organization stimulates exchanges between people interested and active in environmental education through the Colloque de Montréal en ERE, the Colloque Écodéveloppement des institutions d'enseignement du Québec and the Concours intercollégial Pédagogie-Environnement. In addition, AQPERE manages two programs that encourage environmental education among the coming generations: Communautés collégiales et universitaires pour des campus écodurables and Avenir Viable École Communauté (AVEC).²³

Sustainable campuses

Promoted by the Sierra Youth Coalition (SYC), the youth section of the Sierra Club of Canada,²⁴ Sustainable Campuses is an initiative designed to encourage sustainable development at Canadian university campuses. According to the Sierra Youth Coalition, all but five Québec universities have developed Sustainable Campuses. Some of them have established programs that incorporate student research on best practices in sustainable development. In this manner, these campuses can benefit from such experience in acquiring pertinent information in the area of responsible purchasing as part of a continuous improvement process. However, though less costly, these initiatives do not eliminate the need for professional verification processes performed by specialized independent organizations.

Research chairs

Another unique characteristic of universities is that they are highly important state-of-the-art research centres. At some universities, there are researchers who specialize in conducting research in sustainable development. Research is increasingly looking into issues regarding the environment, human rights, and labour standards, both in basic and applied research, and the humanities (law, ethics, economics, sociology). These research groups are specialized resources that can make concrete contributions to implementing and progressively improving a responsible purchasing process by writing research papers and through their participation in conferences and multiparty committees.

CONCLUSION

While the adoption of an RPP is a complex process, it nonetheless remains one of the most practical ways to contribute to respect of workers' rights and preservation of a healthy environment. In our opinion, it is probably one of the most concrete operationalization forms of all the sustainable development strategies.

An authentic responsible purchasing process will take time, lots of patience, and the ability to question and renew our way of doing things. Many organizations in Québec are already pursuing responsible purchasing, and the success of these initiatives will in all likelihood depend on a mutual commitment to sharing learning experiences, expertise and best practices. The cost of establishing responsible management systems will certainly decrease, as many institutions can share the costs of acquiring information in a responsible way.

Combining the efforts of all Québec's institutions of higher education will certainly help make it possible to contribute to the development of truly sustainable purchasing practices.

In a context in which we can no longer afford to wait before taking action, social and environmental initiatives are more than ever a necessity. The gradual implementation of responsible purchasing policies at our institutions of higher education is an excellent strategy and a necessary change.

RÉFÉRENCES

¹ According to CRÉPUQ official documents, Québec's universities accounted for more than \$777 million in purchases during the 2004-2005 academic year. See Table 5.2 (p. 86) of *Le système universitaire québécois : données et indicateurs*, available at: <http://www.crepug.qc.ca/IMG/pdf/indicateurs.pdf>

² To consult the Guide de mise en place d'une politique d'achat responsable, visit CISO's Web site at: <http://www.ciso.qc.ca>

³ The Universal Declaration of Human Rights can be accessed at: <http://www.udhr.org/udhr/default.htm>

⁴ Excerpt from the document published in 2003 by the Parliamentary Committee on Education, "For the Quality, Accessibility, and Funding of Universities," is available at: http://www.mels.gouv.qc.ca/ens-sup/ens-univ/commission-2004/document_de_consultation_anglais.pdf

⁵ Bill 118 was sanctioned by the National Assembly on April 19, 2006 and is available at: <http://www2.publicationsduquebec.gouv.qc.ca/dynamicSearch/telecharge.php?type=5&file=2006C3A.PDF>

⁶ See Table 5.2 (p. 86) of *Le système universitaire québécois : données et indicateurs*, available at: <http://www.crepug.qc.ca/IMG/pdf/indicateurs.pdf>

⁷ A synthesis of some of the legal provisions concerning Québec's public tendering process can be found on the Web site of the Conseil du trésor du gouvernement québécois at: <http://www.tresor.gouv.qc.ca/fr/marche/acheteur/accord/appeal.asp>

⁸ For more information, consult "Raison d'être du RGAUQ" at: <http://www.appro.uqam.ca/rgauq/rengen/raisondetre.pdf>

⁹ For more information, visit the Web site of the Centre des services partagés du gouvernement du Québec (CSPQ) at: <http://gestion.approvisionnement-quebec.gouv.qc.ca/portail/devdurable.asp>

¹⁰ To consult the text of Bill 118, Sustainable Development Act, see: <http://www2.publicationsduquebec.gouv.qc.ca/dynamicSearch/telecharge.php?type=5&file=2006C3A.PDF>

¹¹ Page 30 of Government Sustainable Development Strategy 2008-2013 (December 2007), available at: http://www.mddep.gouv.qc.ca/developpement/strategie_gouvernementale/index_en.htm

¹² For more information, see pages 29 to 35 of the document Government Sustainable Development Strategy 2008-2013 (December 2007), available at: http://www.mddep.gouv.qc.ca/developpement/strategie_gouvernementale/index_en.htm

¹³ The text of Bill 17 on contracting by public bodies is available at: <http://www2.publicationsduquebec.gouv.qc.ca/dynamicSearch/telecharge.php?type=5&file=2006C29A.PDF>

¹⁴ Bill 17 was officially passed and assented to on 15 June 2006.

¹⁵ The text of Bill 17 on contracting by public bodies is available at: <http://www2.publicationsduquebec.gouv.qc.ca/dynamicSearch/telecharge.php?type=5&file=2006C29A.PDF>

16 For more information, visit the Web site of the Commission d'accès à l'information at:

<http://www.cai.gouv.qc.ca/index-en.html>

17 Consult the Gazette officielle du Québec, December 12, 2007, 139, No. 50, p. 3906 at:

<http://www.tresor.gouv.qc.ca/fr/publications/marche/infomarche/projet-approvisionnement-en.pdf>

18 For greater detail, see: <http://www.tresor.gouv.qc.ca/fr/marche/acheteur/accord/principe.asp>

19 Transfair Canada is the only Canadian organization that can apply the “Fair Trade” brand on such products as coffee, bananas, cocoa derivatives (chocolate, syrups, confectionery products, frozen desserts and cosmetics), cotton, cut flowers, quinoa, rice, sugar, tea, spices, sports balls and wine. According to the organization: “Fair Trade is an international system of doing business based on dialogue, transparency and respect. It contributes to sustainable development by offering better trading conditions for producers and workers in developing countries. Behind the principles and goals of Fair Trade is a rigorous international system of monitoring, auditing and certification.” For more information, consult the organization's website at: <http://www.transfair.ca/>

20 “The goal of the FSC is to promote environmentally responsible, socially beneficial and economically viable management of the world's forests, by establishing a world-wide standard of recognized and respected Principles of Forest Management.” For more information, consult the organization's website at: <http://www.fsc.org/en/>

21 “EcoLogo is North America's most widely recognized and respected certification of environmental leadership. By setting standards and certifying products in more than 120 categories, EcoLogo helps you identify, trust, buy, and sell environmentally preferable (“green”) goods and services.” For more information, consult the organization's Web site at: <http://www.ecologo.org/en/>

22 Further information can be found at: <http://www.enjeu.qc.ca/projets/cegepvert.html>

23 Further information can be found at: <http://www.aqpere.qc.ca/campus.htm>

24 “The Sustainable Campuses (formerly Greening the Ivory Towers - GITP - and Academia to Action - A2A) is a Sierra Youth Coalition (SYC) initiative that works to assist, empower and network university students working to make their schools more sustainable. Sustainable Campuses challenges people to make the links between university operations and their socio-economic and environmental effects - both locally and globally. This project helps students integrate sustainable operations, policy and practice into their university institutions for the long term. Sustainable Campuses works directly with students to build your skills, enhance your knowledge, and help you to succeed in institutionalizing sustainability.”
<http://syc-cjs.org/sustainable/tiki-index.php?page=Sustainable%2oCampuses>

CENTRE INTERNATIONAL DE SOLIDARITÉ OUVRIÈRE (CISO) **(INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR WORKERS SOLIDARITY)**

The Centre international de solidarité ouvrière (CISO) is a non-profit organization created in 1975 by the union workers movement in Quebec. Its mission is to promote international solidarity by reinforcing the links between workers for better working conditions and for a more democratic and fair society. For over 10 years, CISO has been concerned with the political and socio-economic impact of globalization. CISO has shown interest in the sweatshop problematic by developing projects in a number of Southern countries. Since its foundation in 2003, CISO has also been involved in coordinating the work of the Coalition québécoise contre les ateliers de misère (CQCAM). Over the years, CISO has put in place different working tools and training sessions on globalization and on its impact on workers' conditions whether in the Northern or Southern hemisphere.

ciso.qc.ca

COALITION QUÉBÉCOISE CONTRE LES ATELIERS DE MISÈRE (CQCAM) **(THE QUEBEC COALITION AGAINST SWEATSHOPS)**

The Centre international de solidarité ouvrière (CISO) is a non-profit organization created in 1975 by the union workers movement in Quebec. Its mission is to promote international solidarity by reinforcing the links between workers for better working conditions and for a more democratic and fair society. For over 10 years, CISO has been concerned with the political and socio-economic impact of globalization. CISO has shown interest in the sweatshop problematic by developing projects in a number of Southern countries. Since its foundation in 2003, CISO has also been involved in coordinating the work of the Coalition québécoise contre les ateliers de misère (CQCAM). Over the years, CISO has put in place different working tools and training sessions on globalization and on its impact on workers' conditions whether in the Northern or Southern hemisphere.

ciso.qc.ca

STUDENT COALITION FOR RESPONSIBLE TRANS-ACTIONS (CÉTAR)

Founded in 2005, the Student Coalition for Responsible Transactions aims to inform and encourage students (student unions, cafes and other groups) and administrators of Quebec's academic institutions to adopt practices of supply and disposal that are more respectful of both the environment and workers.

The Coalition conducts research on a number of relevant topics, such as alternative suppliers for student-unions and university administrators. In addition, it creates helpful, concrete tools specifically adapted for its clientele. It also organizes events and runs awareness workshops on issues including sweatshops and responsible food consumption. The Coalition is a member of the Quebec Coalition Against Sweatshops, the United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS) and collaborates with environmental organizations, such as the "Regroupement des gestionnaires d'approvisionnement des universités québécoises" (RGAUQ – a coalition of managers of supply at Quebec universities) and the Sierra Youth Coalition. To sum up, the Coalition is a place of action, dialogue, vigilance, solidarity and reflection for all those who want greater social and environmental responsibility within academic institutions in Quebec!

coalitionresponsable.org