

Guidance for the School Sustainability Champion



Using the Green Schools Alliance Purchasing Solution to save schools money, improve access to quality products and services, and simplify purchasing.

I. Introduction

As a School Sustainability Champion – the official or unofficial leader forging sustainable learning and solutions in your school community – you know how it is important to save precious school money, ensure quality in what you provide to students and your school, and keep things as easy as possible in a complicated school system.

The GSA Purchasing Solution is your answer to bringing affordable, sustainable products and services to your school step-by-step.

The GSA Purchasing Solution is a procurement tool that can make it possible to save money on supplies needed at school, purchase products and services that are high quality, and use a procurement platform that is easy and user-friendly.

Green Schools Alliance recognizes that school sustainability champions include a variety of different people, like sustainability coordinators, students, principals and heads, faculty, facility managers, business officers, procurement professionals, and other administrators and staff. Furthermore, we know that there are differences in how much, if at all, purchasing authority you as a Champion have in your school.

This Guidance is meant to help you navigate your purchasing scenario so that a school begins using the GSA Purchasing Solution. We know that some schools are just beginning to consider how to transition to using more sustainable products and services. Purchasing *anything* through the GSA Purchasing Solution helps schools on this path - even if it takes a while to work up to purchasing the desired sustainable options.

Through talking with many school sustainability champions, we know that the procurement process can be complicated and it often takes time to see change happening. But change *is* already happening in schools! Read on for guidance on how to work step-by-step to identify your purchasing landscape, craft the case for using the GSA Purchasing Solution to purchasing authorities, and make that first order!

Read on for step-by-step guidance on how to get started with the GSA Purchasing Solution:

1. Review the resources in the GSA Purchasing Solution Toolbox
2. Understand the procurement process in your school
3. Talk with the people involved with procurement
4. Make the case for using the GSA Purchasing Solution in a way that meets your school's priorities
5. Place your first order

II. Getting Started with the GSA Purchasing Solution

1. Review the resources in the GSA Purchasing Solution Toolbox.

Our Toolbox is designed to support you in making the case that the GSA Purchasing Solution will offer savings, quality, and ease to the procurement process.

View the GSA Purchasing Solution Toolbox at www.greenschoolsalliance.org/purchasing

Here you will find:

- one-page flyer
- Purchasing Solutions Summary
- FAQs
- links to case studies
- Guidance for Sustainability Champions (this document)

2. Understand the procurement process in your school.

You will need to determine how the GSA Purchasing Solution aligns with the purchasing officials' and school priorities. For instance, if saving money is the highest priority, you'll need to put in the forefront the Purchasing Solution's ability to garner savings - the focus on quality and ease may be less enticing. Also, you might consider how purchasing with the GSA Purchasing Solution can support your school-wide initiatives, goals, mission or vision.

It will be most helpful to have the answers to the following questions so you know the context within which you are working as you advocate for using the GSA Purchasing Solution. Here are suggested Discovery Questions to guide your analysis:

- a. Who has purchasing authority in your school? Can you identify purchasing allies who can help you to implement change?
- b. Is purchasing centralized (i.e., done by a central office) or decentralized (done by each school)? What is the preference of staff, and are there desires to change or streamline your current system?

- c. What is the annual cycle of procurement? How are budgets distributed?
- d. Does your school have an approved vendor list from which purchases must be made?
- e. What vendors does your school currently work with, and have contracts with?
- f. Are there specific products that your school would like to purchase?
- g. Consider ranking the important criteria that are used to make purchasing decisions for your school?
 - Cost
 - Supplier / Sourcing (preferred types of vendors)
 - Quality
 - Sustainability (if different than quality)
 - Vendor Relationship
 - Delivery (reliability, relationships, dependability)

3. Talk with the people involved with procurement.

- A. Invite your procurement official(s) to an initial conversation. Consider using this language:

Hello! As the [Facilities Manager / School Sustainability Coordinator / lead Volunteer for the school Green Team, etc ...] I have learned about an exciting Purchasing Solution offered by Green Schools Alliance, that will save our school money, improve access to quality products and services, and simplify purchasing. I would like to explore this option for our school and then share information with you for further consideration. Can we please arrange a time for a brief conversation so that I can learn more about the priorities for purchasing in our school? This will help me tailor my research towards what can specifically help us. I am available

- B. Have the initial discovery conversation about procurement. The goal of the conversation is not necessarily to convince purchasing officials to use the GSA Purchasing Solution just yet - it's to understand their priorities and what is possible in the current procurement framework. Knowing their priorities is critical for how you will next present the GSA Purchasing Solution to fit their identified needs. Here is a suggested flow for your initial conversation:
 - a. Use the Discovery Questions above to gather details.
 - b. Capture what questions your official has so you can find the answers.
 - c. Request a list of currently procured items and/or a wish list of new items so that the GSA Purchasing Solution can run a free price analysis.
 - d. Close by saying that you will follow up with a proposal on how the GSA Purchasing Solution could specifically support your school.

A note about systems and policy change:

Sustainability Coordinators are often people looking at the macro level picture. That's fantastic! However, at the outset especially, it is helpful to start with small steps - especially when trying to educate others about the value of using the GSA Purchasing Solution. Plans for systemic change - that can include centralized purchasing, policy changes, or using more sustainable products - may be overwhelming at the outset. Start with small steps, find your purchasing allies, and work up to the larger macro-level change. We'll be there to support you when the time comes!

4. Make the case for using the GSA Purchasing Solution in a way that meets your school's priorities.

At this point, you will hopefully have a lay-of-the-land of your purchasing situation. Now it's time to put together hard information to make the case for transitioning your school to begin using the GSA Purchasing Solution. Following is information and resources for you to do so:

- A. Submit the list of items that you obtained from your purchasing official to Green Schools Alliance for analysis. The magic of the GSA Purchasing Solution happens when we can review a significant amount of purchasing in order to create scenarios where currently purchased items are found at a less expensive price. Having a list of items can allow Green Schools Alliance to create scenarios that bundle purchases to get the best possible price.

Furthermore, this decrease in cost can then mitigate the purchase of desired, but previously too-expensive items, ultimately saving schools money. Note that when transitioning from less expensive to more expensive items, the cost may be cost neutral or better.

Here is what to include in the list of items to send to Green Schools Alliance:

- Product names
- Specifications
- Purchase history (quantity and current price)
- And list of any vendors on contract or regularly used

Once you have this list, send it to zgarippa@greenschoolsalliance.org.

- B. Schedule a follow-up conversation with your purchasing official to review the data we've analyzed and suggest next steps.

5. Place your first order.

Once you receive your analysis from Green Schools Alliance, decide which items you would like to purchase and a realistic timeframe. There are several ways to place your order:

- Use our easy-to-use, online purchasing platform: <https://gsa.negotiatus.com/>
- Contact Zach Garippa, GSA Purchasing Coordinator, to personally place your order via email or over the phone.

Transitioning to using the GSA Purchasing Solutions has happened quickly for some schools, and over several months for others. Your patience and perseverance is needed to keep moving the process forward! Sometime change takes time.

Recognize that the first purchases through the GSA Purchasing Solution may be for conventional products and services, and that is OK. We recognize that as a School Sustainability Champion, you'd like to make your school as sustainable as possible. However, the Purchasing Solution is designed so that even baby steps of purchasing conventional, already-used items at schools will lead to familiarity with the tool, which can then open the gates toward transitioning to sustainable options. If you can start with moving toward sustainable options at the outset, of course that is wonderful.

Keep in touch with Green Schools Alliance to share feedback and receive customer service.

We want to hear from you as you use the GSA Purchasing Solution, including about your successes in using the solution, and about the challenges you face and how you are addressing them.

Please contact our Green Schools Alliance team when you need us:

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