



Sustainable Purchasing — The Walk the Talk Filter

Background

The AEC uses a lot of “stuff” to carry out its daily activities and all of that “stuff” has an impact on the planet. The more stuff, and the more damaging the stuff, we buy and use, the bigger the impact. So... we need to practice what we preach and “*Walk the Talk.*” Below is a step-wise process for *everyone* to think through before they ask someone to purchase something or purchase it themselves. We need everyone involved with the AEC to *buy* into this. It has to be part of the organizational culture.

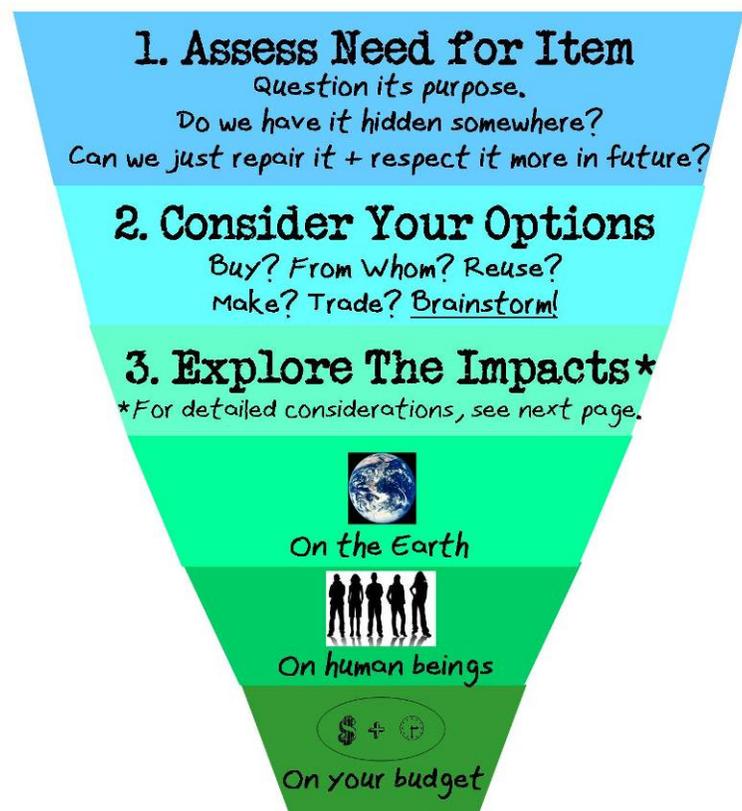
The core concept is the *Law of Limits*. The AEC lives on a *limited* planet with *limited* resources, it has a *limited* budget, and staff have a *limited* amount of time to do their work. What does this mean?

- Given a *limited* planet, every time we use something that has an environmental impact we are sacrificing something somewhere (healthy air, water, soil, etc.), even if we cannot see it. We have to absolutely reduce and minimize this impact.
- Given a *limited* budget, every time we pay for something, we are *taking* money from some other program or service or person’s salary.
- Given *limited* staffing, every time we ask paid staff to spend time to get something, or to take time to make an alternative, we are taking staff time from some other program or service.

The best solution is not to purchase something. But we also have a job to do and we do need some things. We can pay more to protect the planet, and we need to, but we also have to realize that if we pay lots more in time or money, we will do lots less somewhere else.

Where are the trade-offs and what is the balance? This is where we need a dialogue among everyone to justify how we “Walk the Talk” in an honest, meaningful and transparent way.

Walk the Talk Filter



Choose the Best Option

The Filter



Step 1. Assess Need for Item: Ask yourself...

- Do we really need it?
- What real service does it provide?
- Have you checked to make sure we do not have it?
- Can we repair what we have and take better care of it in the future?
- Can we use/reuse something else we have instead?

If I am still committed to obtaining it, then...

Step 2: Consider the Options: Beyond the specific purchase options, include...

- Borrowing or sharing it but consider the time
- Renting it but consider extra time or cost
- Making it, or buying as a service from others but consider extra time or cost

Step 3: Explore the Impacts

For each option, some important considerations are:

<i>Impact on the Planet</i>	<i>Impact on People</i>	<i>Impact on Budget</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Reused Products:</i> Maximize amount % of reused or recycled material. • <i>Longevity/Quality:</i> Pay more for longevity, avoid products that don't hold up. • <i>Local:</i> Choose local over distant products. • <i>Certified Products:</i> Choose certified products: organic, fair trade, energy smart, FSC — over new, non-certified products. • <i>Natural Materials:</i> Choose products with natural materials produced in environmentally responsible ways without toxic substances. • <i>Minimal Packaging:</i> No packaging is best. • <i>Waste:</i> Minimize it & consider its disposal impact. • <i>Minimize Carbon Footprint:</i> Choose products low on the food chain, energy efficient. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Fair Wage:</i> Purchase items where producer has received a fair wage (no sweat shops). • <i>Aesthetics:</i> Choose products that add to beauty and appreciation of each other and the earth. Items or design elements that create a sense of professionalism. • <i>Small Producers:</i> Choose people in community/co-ops/small businesses over large multi-national corporate products and systems. • <i>Health & Safety:</i> Choose products safe for consumers and producers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Cost:</i> If it costs lots more, where does the money come from? How can we save elsewhere? • <i>Salary:</i> Does it need lots more staff time to use/service it? If so, who's time and does that mean less time for something else? • <i>Long Term Savings:</i> Does it save money in the long term through reduced energy, maintenance or replacement costs?

Step 4: Choose the best option (discuss with others if you are perplexed!)

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