



THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

Sustainability & Climate Action Plan

Eliminate Prison Labor in Supply Chains

SUSTAINABILITY COMMITMENT(S) THIS INITIATIVE SUPPORTS

- **6 - Responsible Sourcing**

INITIATIVE ALIGNMENT WITH THE CHARGE

- **Eliminate Emissions:** [Increases in incarceration](#) have been found to closely correlate to increased industrial emissions. Underpaying inmates through common prison labor practices allows for rapid industrialization and can lead to an increase in industry-related emissions.
- **Build Community:** By supporting ethical procurement decisions, the University can demonstrate its commitment to our shared community values.
- **Be Actionable:** Prison labor is only identifiable in very few purchasing contracts and partnerships, which is why the extent of this issue does not appear to be far-reaching and therefore will not require many steps to fully address this issue.
- **Be Data Informed:** Data included in this recommendation shows that there are many negative impacts to prison labor, therefore the University should eliminate its contributions to this harmful system.
- **Inspire Adaptive Management:** The issue of prison labor is a complex topic and addressing this issue within the University should take a nuanced approach that prioritizes the values of social and economic sustainability.
- **Demonstrate Leadership:** By eliminating prison labor in our campus-wide supply chain, the University can lead all departments across campus to reassess their vendor contracts.

INITIATIVE DETAILS

Initiative Summary

This initiative proposes eliminating the use of prison labor in the University of Arizona's purchasing supply chain by 2026. By updating the university's purchasing policies with clear language that prohibits purchases from vendors using prison labor, the university will align its procurement practices with shared campus values and ethical standards. This change will demonstrate the university's commitment to sustainable and responsible sourcing. Actionable items include:

- Form a task force to create and regularly update a list of prohibited vendors with ties to prison labor or other unethical labor sources.
- Review all current campus purchasing contracts to identify and eliminate those involving prison labor.
- Implement this policy update as part of the broader initiative to enhance the Green Purchasing Policy.

Proposed Initiative & Background

As found in the University of Arizona [Design & Specification Standards \(DSS\)](#), the University of Arizona purchases from Arizona Correctional Industries which employs the use of prison labor in its supply chain for several important goods, most notably campus bicycle racks. Prison labor in the United States has been repeatedly criticized by researchers, unions, and human rights organizations. The predominant concern is often the consistent underpaying of inmate workers. According to extensive state wage data presented by [PrisonPolicy.org](#), Arizona inmates make between \$0.30 to \$4.90 an hour—most make less than a dollar (Arizona’s minimum wage is \$14.35 as of January 1, 2024). Prisoners are often expected to pay for utilities, personal hygiene, phone calls, and visits, among other essentials. On top of outstanding court fees, fines, and other debts many inmates build as they enter the criminal justice system, living as a prisoner can be incredibly expensive, a cost of living that regularly cannot be met through one’s wages. Additionally, inmate workers lack workplace benefits, the ability to collectively bargain, and standard regulatory protections. The University of Arizona’s reliance on prison labor for anything it procures presents conflict with the university’s mission and values.

As a large, public university, the University of Arizona holds considerable purchasing power, and any changes made to purchasing policy to reflect high ethical standards and our shared community values have the potential to influence other universities, as well as express the university’s disapproval of unsustainable procurement practices.

To align the university with shared campus values, the University of Arizona should completely eliminate the use of prison labor in our purchasing supply chain by 2026. To do this, the university should update official Purchasing Policies with clear language that prohibits all purchasing from vendors that use prison labor to manufacture items. This action overlaps with recommendation RSI 10, “Update Green Purchasing Policy and Improve Enforceability,” which recommends that the university update the current Green Purchasing Policy to a more substantial Sustainable Purchasing Policy. This recommendation could be implemented as a part of initiative 6.1.

As found in the campus Design & Specification Standards, the university currently sources all bike racks from Arizona Correctional Industries, which uses labor provided by inmates to manufacture a wide variety of products. Arizona Correctional Industries pays inmates anywhere from [\\$0.40 - \\$2.00 per hour](#) for work done on items sold to government entities. The University of Arizona should find a new supplier for all items currently purchased from Arizona Correctional Industries and should no longer contract any items from this supplier.

Additionally, initiative 6.1 recommends forming a task force to create and regularly update a list of vendors that all campus departments are prohibited from purchasing from. This task force should analyze all sourcing and procurement contracts to determine the extent of prison labor in our supply chain. All current campus purchasing contracts should be reviewed by this committee and all vendors found to have ties with prison labor or other unethical labor sources should be added to this list.

Data Analyses to Support Initiative

Currently, there is no existing data on the percentage of vendor contracts that include items manufactured using prison labor. There are no figures that provide an accurate understanding of the pervasiveness of prison labor in the university’s supply chain. There are also no formal policies that

forbid the procurement of items manufactured using prison labor. These are all areas where further data is needed to understand the extent of this issue in our supply chain.

Faculty Senate has previously convened a University Committee for [Monitoring Labor & Human Rights Issues](#), which may support this effort.

The University of Arizona is also a member of the [Fair Labor Association](#), which supports the university's efforts to raise labor standards for merchandise bearing the University of Arizona logo, in line with the goals of this recommendation.

Resource Requirements & Return on Investment

Resource Requirements

- Breaking any existing contracts with vendors could result in a [variable fee on the university](#). Alternatively, the university could wait until individual contracts expire and choose not to renew these contracts.
- It is likely that prices for items bought from new vendors would be higher than the cost of items manufactured using prison labor, due to the inequitable payment of inmates.

Return on Investment

- This initiative is unlikely to have a positive return on investment.

Potential Funding Sources

- Departmental funds

Accountable Division(s) & Department(s)

- Procurement & Contracting Services
- Financial Services

Partners & Collaborators

- Office of Sustainability

Implementation

Length of Time to Implement

- Less than one year
- One to five years
- More than five years

Difficulty of Implementation

- Low
- Medium
- High
- Extremely High

Relative Timing

- Begin within two years
- Begin in three to five years
- Begin in six years or later

Metrics for Success

- Percentage of vendor contracts that meet the requirements outlined in the initiative “Update & Enforce the Green Purchasing Policy” (6.1) or other campus-wide ethical purchasing policy.
- Completion of procurement policy updates.
- Percentage of campus furnishings sourced from vendors that use prison labor.