



Dining Services Proposal for Sustainable CU funding – Phase 1

Introduction:

Dining Services at CU Boulder has been working for many years to continually increase the sustainability of its operations, introducing new initiatives and making new strides each year. Dining Services has addressed issues in a wide range of areas within the realm of sustainability, from water and energy conservation to waste management to customer and staff education. The department has a track record of reacting to opportunities to increase its sustainability as they arise, including introducing pre- and post-consumer composting, recycling commingled and cardboard packaging generated by its vendors, and holding customer education events such as Scrape Your Plate Day and Fall Harvest Fest, just to name a few! Dining Services also recognizes that the field of sustainability is an ever-changing and developing field, with new information and innovative ideas constantly emerging. It finds itself in an exciting and challenging position...

Description of Project:

Deliverable: Sustainable Food Purchasing Best Practices Guide and Strategic Plan

It is time for Dining Services to move past the low-hanging fruit, and take on a whole new level of initiatives. The department has undertaken a strategic planning process in order to more concretely identify its goals and objectives for moving forward on sustainability. One of the areas that Dining Services has chosen to focus on is that of bringing in an increased amount of sustainable food. Members of the department have begun the task of developing a CU Boulder-specific Best Practices Guide in order to outline this process. Here is where Dining Services requests the Environmental Center's assistance. Dining Services respectfully submits this request for Sustainable CU funding to enlist the services of a graduate student to serve on a consultant basis to help complete the Best Practices Guide and spur the strategic planning process by providing frameworks/models that would serve as helpful guides given CU Dining Services' operational environment. Ideally, this process would also help Dining Services assess baseline measurements of steps already taken and help put into place monitoring and evaluation tools that would aid in the timely collection and analysis of data for purposes such as complying with STARS objectives and getting certified by an organization such as the Green Restaurant Association. The completion of the Best Practices Guide and the kick-off of the strategic planning process will be central to Dining Services' ability to move forward on the majority of its sustainability initiatives in a well-conceived and efficient manner.

Student Involvement:

Dining Services is interested in gauging student demand for sustainable food and has solicited information from students about their interest in this area in a variety of ways.

1. We have had an ongoing relationship with Dr. Lisa Barlow and her Sustainable Solutions class, which undertakes one or two projects in conjunction with Dining Services each spring. This semester, one of the class groups is putting together a Food for Thought meal highlighting various aspects of sustainability (or not) in our supply chain, both at CU specifically and as part of the larger food system. As part of this project we have asked the students to help us collect information from their peers about how much they know about food sustainability (to enable us to know how to target educational/awareness activities) and what areas of food sustainability they are most interested in (what they would most like DS to focus on). The students are working on a survey that Dining Services will then send through Student Voice to conduct the data collection. We hope to be able to incorporate the results of this study into our strategic plan for sustainable food.
2. Also, Dining Services initiated a meeting with CU Going Local and UCSU Sustainability Coordinator Dan Omasta prior to their trip to the Real Food Conference in Montana in mid-February to talk with them about their interests in sustainable food and share with them our progress in terms of coming up with goals and strategies for bringing in more sustainable food. We asked them to "keep an eye out" for particular types of information that would be helpful for us to press forward in our mutual goal of increasing sustainable food options in Dining Services. Dining Services also contacted CUGL representatives to schedule a follow-up meeting to find out what they learned at the conference and to brainstorm ways that we could collaborate in the future.



University of Colorado at Boulder

Housing & Dining Services

In summary, Dining Services has been active in seeking student input about sustainable food in order to guide this strategic planning process. We intend to continue these important collaborations with student groups and work together to bring more sustainable food to campus.

Budget:

The graduate consultant sought has already been working with Dining Services, thus is familiar with its unique challenges and opportunities and has been integral in bringing the Best Practices Guide to its current status. Dining Services will continue to fund her activities to the extent possible, but the department does not have the budget to cover the total expense that it would require in order to complete the project in the timeframe necessary to capitalize on some unique opportunities that have just arisen. Therefore, you will see that we are requesting funds in the amount of \$2400 to match the equivalent amount that we are able to provide.

Budget: Consultant fees of \$20/hr. x 240 hrs. = \$4800

Requested funding from SCU: \$2400

Matching funds: \$2400 from Dining Services

Feasibility:

We believe that the feasibility of this project is quite high, given our demonstrated commitment to working both internally and in collaboration with interested groups to make this happen. We feel that we are reaching a "critical mass" of interested parties who are able to make significant contributions, both in terms of various Dining Services staff working on the operational side as well as students interested in giving input/ideas. Receiving SCU funding will ensure that the time necessary to complete the project will be provided for and should happen by early summer. We would like to position ourselves to be ready in the fall to pursue at least the major elements of our new strategic plan.

Student Impact:

The potential student impact of this project would be all of the residents on the CU Boulder campus who eat in the dining halls (~6000 students) having access to more sustainable food. Additional student impact would pertain directly to those students who are most engaged in issues related to sustainable food and who are working with Dining Services to achieve its goals, for example those students involved in CUGL and in Dr. Lisa Barlow's classes. Through the opportunity to work directly with Dining Services to carry out events such as the Food for Thought meal, students gain experience in dealing with the professional realities of our food system, from the local to the international, and have the opportunity to interact with both the challenges and opportunities that this system presents.

Note: CUGL has recently formed a committee to work specifically with campus entities to bring sustainable food to campus, which will be helpful in terms of providing additional time and energy to research relevant models.

Sustainability:

Dining Services' approach to its responsibility to its customers is to provide the best possible product at an affordable price, thus taking into consideration the financial reality of its customers who are the basis for its own financial sustainability into perpetuity. Dining Services offers its service to its (largely) student consumer base at a fair price, often making "sustainable" food difficult to purchase, quite honestly. But it is because of its belief in the importance of high quality, nutritious, healthy, humane food that Dining Services has made a commitment to purchasing sustainable food when possible - local, organic, natural, fair trade and fair trade foods can all be found in our offerings. Often, in taking advantage of the meals served in the dining halls, it is some students' first experience eating never ever burgers or drinking fair-trade coffee because they have never been affordable options when offered in other venues. We hope to be able to continue to offer a range of sustainable food options for our patrons!

Innovation:

Though it is becoming more common, we have found that it is still fairly innovative to commit to developing and instituting a plan for bringing sustainable food to a university of CU Boulder's size and scale of dining services, dealing with a plethora of procurement and financial realities.