# Barriers to sustainable food choices on campus– project proposal for SEI Collaborative Grants Scheme

## Applicant details:

**Sustainability team:**

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* Laura Minchella, Project Manager
* Madeleine Culp, Engagement Specialist

## Project summary:

The Sustainability Team seeks to understand, and ultimately remove, the barriers to sustainable food choices at University of Sydney campuses. This project seeks analysis and consultation with subject matter experts and relevant University stakeholders to inform engagement and behaviour change initiatives to both improve the availability and variety of sustainable food options, and the uptake of these by students, staff and the university community on our campuses.

Analysis of current state and sourcing of relevant case studies, including from comparable university settings, will help guide recommendations to support the University’s commitment to *provide affordable, healthy and culturally acceptable food and beverages that are accepted to all and aligned with recognised sustainable procurement practices*. Specifically, work completed under this project will inform a roadmap (key output) towards achievement of the goal of *100% of food and beverage items sold in University owned or leased outlets to be ethically and sustainably sourced by 2025, including promoting purchasing relationships with, and support for, local food producers, and expanding the availability of vegan and vegetarian options,* identified in the University’s Sustainability Strategy.

## Project description

This project seeks analysis and consultation with subject matter experts and relevant University stakeholders to inform behaviour change initiatives and engagement with the academic and broader University community to remove barriers to improved availability and variety of sustainable food options, and the uptake of these by students, staff and the university community on our campuses.

Strategy 12 in the University’s Sustainability Strategy commits us to “*provide affordable, healthy and culturally acceptable food and beverages that are accepted to all and aligned with recognised sustainable procurement practices*” with a target of *“100% of food and beverage items sold in University owned or leased outlets to be ethically and sustainably sourced by 2025, including promoting purchasing relationships with, and support for, local food producers, and expanding the availability of vegan and vegetarian options”.*

A key foundation of this project will be to gain a better understanding of the University’s current state – including food choices of students and staff, preferences, motivations and choices behind current purchase and consumption practices, and identification of any barriers that exist (within the University, the sector, environments etc.) which slow down or prevent sustainable behaviours and choices. Identification of our future state – defining how we want to act and conduct business in future (including purchasing relationships), will also be supported by current research and best practise models and practises that are currently being trialled and implemented within the sector, or other industries more broadly.

Some initial, basic considerations and questions raised within Sustainability team discussions include:

* How do we define ethical and sustainable food choices?
* How do choices between home and work differ, and what are the factors and motivations that contribute to this?
* How can producers and suppliers support efforts on campus? How does the University currently procure its food supply?
* What changes have already been made on campus for food choices to be more sustainable? How effective have these initiatives been?
* What are the most compelling considerations within student and staff cohorts which determine their food purchasing on campus (For example: health, wellbeing, environment, convenience, social, financial, taste), and how can these be harnessed in a behaviour change approach?
* From what other means do students and staff purchase or consume food on campus other than from shops, cafes and vending machines? For example, student society/staff events, colleges/student accommodation, market stalls, freebies/promotions etc. What efforts/considerations could be made to encourage sustainable food options from these sources?
* How much of a barrier to students (particularly) and staff is the increased cost associated with ethical and sustainable choices?
* How have other universities instigated change in this space?
* What role can marketing, engagement and promotion play in changing behaviour?
* How do we extend the life of food and reduce the amount of food waste on campus (from events, cafes, colleges etc.) to ensure that safe edible food can be resold or given to those in need in our community?

**Project Impact:**

Anecdotally, the availability of and awareness around sustainable food choices is a key concern for our students. The issue is regularly raised with the Sustainability Team at face -to-face consultation sessions, and at events such as Welcome Week and Open Day. At a macro-level, [new University of Sydney research finds](https://www.sydney.edu.au/news-opinion/news/2022/06/21/fifth-of-global-food-related-emissions-due-to-transport.html) a fifth of global food-related emissions is due to transport food transport, equivalent to 6 percent of emissions from all sources. Using their own framework called FoodLab, Dr Mengyu Li from the School of Physics and co-author Professor David Raubenheimer from the Charles Perkins Centre, have estimated global food systems due to transport, production, and

land use change, contribute about 30 percent of total human-produced greenhouse gas emissions.

Efforts made by the University to identify and reduce barriers to sustainable food choices contribute towards public leadership and commitment towards sustainable practise, aligning with the research strategies of Sydney Environment Institute, in particular the [Transition and Transformation](https://www.sydney.edu.au/sydney-environment-institute/our-research/transition-and-transformation.html) research stream. Questions explored within this project will navigate around the stream’s core question: “How do we navigate to a more sustainable future?” Collaboration with the community and the translation of current research in food procurement and effective interventions will assist with decision-making and implementation of strategic initiatives, and lead to better-informed community discourse, University culture, innovation and impact.

**Project Outputs:**

The proposed outcome of this project is the development of a roadmap to assist the Sustainability Team to implement practical change, and remove barriers towards, more sustainable food options on our campuses. Activities to inform recommendations set out in the roadmap could include the following:

* **Literature review and case studies:** Identifying opportunities and best practice through case studies in what other Universities and industries are doing successfully in this space.
* **Articulation of rationale**, value and responsibility at an individual, department and University level to promote sustainability and ethics in food supply chains and retail options. **University policy and procedure context:** Review as relevant.
* **Comparative data:** Report recent food purchase trends, and comparison to available public data from other universities.
* **Current state vs future state analysis** of behaviour and activities, current motivations and barriers towards behaviour change. A clear understanding of baselines will be useful to measure new interventions.
* Completion of a University **stakeholder map and engagement model**, and **definition of boundaries** and definition of boundaries as relevant, to determine scope and priorities areas for the roadmap.

It is envisaged that the roadmap and recommendations proposed will be guided by and implemented by a University working group or Community of Practise.

**Budget:**

Proposal for Sustainability Team to allocate up to $50k to support a fellowship grant to progress the project. Potential for SEI to contribute in-kind support and/or a seed grant to the successful fellow if required.

**Contributors:**

The following stakeholders should be considered in preparing a stakeholder map and engagement model, consistent with the project approach:

* University’s Sustainability Team
* University of Sydney Centre for Advanced Food Engineering
* Early or mid-career academic/s
* University of Sydney Union food/ beverage management
* Private café owners and retailers
* University procurement
* FGM or school manager/s
* Representative/s from the Research Portfolio (inc. Office of Global Engagement)
* Representative/s from the Operations Portfolio
* Representative/s from the Policy Lab
* Researchers and subject matter experts on sustainable food choices, and behaviour change within academics communities.
* External sustainability contacts from other leading national or international universities in this space.
* Data custodians: TBC

**Timeline:**

**TBC, with input with SEI:**

* **October 2022:** Scoping meetings with Sustainability team and SEI.
* **November 2022 – January 2023:** Literature review and development of case studies.
* **February 2023:** Presentation of findings.
* **February – March 2023:** Comparative data analysis, University policy and procedures context and articulation of rationale.
* **End of March 2023:** Presentation of findings.
* **April – May 2023:** Commencement of current state vs future state analysis, interviews with key university stakeholders. Presentation of summary findings.
* **June 2023:** Development of roadmap, stakeholder map and engagement model. Presentation of roadmap and proposed next steps.