

Project Title

A Zero-Waste Hygiene-Equity Program

Person who proposed it

Montana Bailey '24 (Community and International Development major and Eco-Rep) and Caylin McCamp, Office of Sustainability

Decision

Funding Approved

Budget

\$4,000

Project explanation

Financial accessibility is a barrier to more sustainable options for many. A “green” lifestyle can sometimes represent financial security more than an interest in sustainability. It's more expensive to get solar panels, purchase an electric car or buy local produce at the store. These sustainability inequities exist at UVM as well. Financial barriers to entry into the sustainability movement often make it more difficult for first-generation and low-income (FGLI) college students to have access to more environmentally conscious lifestyle choices.

One such area of sustainability inequity that is especially relevant at a student scale is the intersection of a zero-waste lifestyle and access to hygiene products. 58% of low-income individuals cut back on food in order to afford hygiene products, making many expensive zero waste alternatives even less accessible. 70% of waste processing sites are within one mile of communities of color, meaning those communities are directly impacted by the negative externalities of unsustainable product choices regardless of their personal choices. Our campus can combat these two inequities directly with a zero waste laundry detergent dispenser.

A company known as Generation Conscious (GenC0) has developed a refillable laundry detergent sheet dispensing machine specifically for college campuses. C0-founder and CEO, Greg Genco, created the system to make sustainability more accessible and affordable to FGLI students by partnering with them and their campuses to distribute laundry detergent sheets through a small touch-screen machine.

The laundry detergent sheets dispensed are hyper-concentrated cleaning ingredients on a dissolvable fabric that, when one sheet is thrown in with a load of laundry, can have the same cleaning power as normal detergent alternatives. GenCo's laundry detergent sheets use 97% less water and produce 95% less CO₂ during production and transportation compared to leading pod detergents. The machine dispenses 10 laundry sheets at a time.

A core value of GenCo is supporting FGLI students within their sustainability efforts. As part of having this machine on campus, GenCo will hire 5-8 FGLI students through their Workforce Development Program and teach them about circular economic practices and how to maintain and service the station. These UVM student interns are paid \$20/hour by GenCo directly and manage the program completely. The Office of Sustainability is committed to liaising with GenCo in an ongoing capacity.

I am proposing the installation of this machine in the Davis Center, giving students access to affordable, non-toxic low-carbon hygiene products that are waste-free, while providing valuable paid internships for FGLI students at UVM. The Davis Center has approved the installation of the dispensing machine, along with the logistics of its placement. All maintenance and marketing would be performed by the student interns through training and resources provided by GenCo. This program is already launched at Rice University, Williams College, Amherst College, Connecticut College and Wesleyan University. I've contacted staff at the last two campuses and each had positive reviews of the program, machine and company.

The annual membership includes 5 refills of 10 sheets, which is on par with the average number of sheets used by students in locations of this machine on other campuses. An annual membership to this machine would be free for 300 qualified FGLI students. We have had initial conversations with the Division of DEI about getting their help to identify eligible students. Non-qualifying students could pay \$20/year or \$2/use (10 sheets). This is also a more sustainable and financially accessible option for students who won't qualify for free memberships as the cost per 10 sheets of detergent is \$1.10 less than the cost of 10 Tide Pods.

I am requesting one-time funding from the SCF for the one-time equipment and installation (\$1000) and pilot year membership subsidies for qualified students (\$3000). I am not requesting ongoing funding from SCF for the annual costs. After several conversations with various on-campus organizations, we feel

confident that perpetual funding could be sourced from different areas. UVM Recycling & Zero Waste is committed to supporting this project. Davis Center and Division of DEI have expressed interest in supporting. We will also be asking Enrollment Management, Division of Student Affairs and IRA.

We hope to install GenCo’s laundry detergent dispenser as a way to develop a zero-waste hygiene equity program that empowers all students, especially FGLI individuals, to have access to more affordable and sustainable alternatives.

Budget table

This Money will Supply	Requested funds	Justification
Detergent Dispenser Machine	\$1,000	Machine cost plus one-time shipping and installation costs
Memberships	\$3,000	300 free annual memberships for qualified students