

# Step by Step Guide to Purchasing Residence Hall Furniture

Are you planning a furniture installation in your residence hall anytime soon? Whether you're new to this process or if you've done it before, there are a lot of details to juggle.

So we created a checklist to help you navigate the process and hopefully reduce your stress levels. We've provided furniture to hundreds of institutions over the last 40 years, and we know every step you need to take.

Here's the summary list of steps you need to take in chronological order. Below the list, we've expanded on each step to provide you with specific details and some guiding questions to ask yourself.

Remember, this is just a guide. Adapt it as necessary. Every purchasing process has its own unique set of considerations, requirements, challenges, and appropriate solutions.

1. **Figure out** your timeline and consider manufacturer lead times
2. **Determine** your project scope and budget (including long-term maintenance expense & future costs)
3. **Determine** what services you want included
4. **Find** the right manufacturer
5. **Get budget** quote estimates
6. **Research** furniture sustainability
7. **Research** specifications and furniture construction
8. **Gain** a consensus on design
9. **Establish** versatility and interchangeability with current stock
10. **Get** room measurements and develop room layouts
11. **Request** sample furniture from manufacturer
12. **Request** furniture layouts and 3D designs from manufacturer
13. **Finalize** design and pricing
14. **Submit** your purchase Order

## 1. Figure out your timeline and consider manufacturer lead times

First, you need to understand the lead times involved in this process. How long do you need to start planning? What are your needs and how can you be sure to align those needs with the needs of your manufacturer?

It may be obvious, but you can't start planning too soon.

### Your Planning Lead Time

Before you submit your purchase order, a lot needs to happen on your end. Research, selection, budgeting, and much more. Ideally, you should give yourself 90 days to get this done before submitting your purchase order.

*Here's a tip: If you want to do a summer installation, don't start your research in March or April. That's a guaranteed recipe for stress and frustration.*

### Manufacturing Lead Time

At DCI, we need a minimum 90-day lead time from order to installation. That means once you submit your purchase order, we'll swing into action and deliver the installation by the end of three months.

In an ideal world, you'd submit your purchase order 120 days (4 mos) before installation.

We can deliver in less time but 90 days is the ideal. For example, if you only have 30-60 days before you need your furniture, you can still call us! We can work with you.

## 2. Determine your project scope and budget

This is pretty self-explanatory. First, you need to be clear about scope. How big is the project? How much furniture do you actually need? Get very specific about all the numbers including pieces for dorm rooms and common areas.

Second, be very clear about your budget targets. How much do you have to spend? How long do you need to get your budget approved? Who are all the stakeholders that need to sign off?

Third, how should you think about long-term budgeting? There's a simple distinction to help you. If you buy furniture intended for residential use and made from less durable materials, you should budget for long term maintenance. If you buy furniture engineered for heavy use and made from solid wood, then long term maintenance is negligible.

And finally, you need to budget for attic stock. If you have space for 100 beds in your building, you'll need 105 on hand for replacements and to fill in the gaps. Attic stock accounts for between 5-10% of your order.

### **3. Determine what services you want included with the project**

Do you want turn key installation and project management where your supplier coordinates all aspects of delivery and installation? DCI has an experienced team that is dedicated to installing and servicing our products, enabling us to have total control of the project from start to completion.

Do you have old furniture that you need to dispose of? If so, we strongly recommend that you embrace a sustainable approach. Here are your options. You can throw it out. You can donate it. You can resell it. And in some cases, you can recycle it.

At DCI, we have a robust furniture repurposing program. As part of the project, we can design a tailored and sustainable solution for your old furniture. Over the last several decades, we have repurposed enough furniture to fill over three hundred 53-foot containers. All of this was solid wood furniture that we rescued from the fate of the landfill.

### **4. Find the right manufacturer**

Partnering with the right manufacturer is key. You need to have total confidence in the company who's making your furniture. Here are a few things to consider.

You should make sure they've been in business long enough. What is their track record? Who have they worked with?

What kind of warranty do they offer? Make sure that your furniture is guaranteed for at least 20 years. Are you confident that they will honor your warranty?

If this is a really big contract, do a site visit to other universities to look at previous installations.

You may want to consider visiting their manufacturing plant and getting a tour to assess their manufacturing process. For example, clients will visit our sawmill and factory to witness our cutting edge vertical integration process. This allows them to witness each step in the manufacturing process, from harvesting and milling the sustainably managed hardwood trees to furniture assembly and finishing.

## 5. Get Budget Quote Estimates

Roughly identify the items and quantities you need for your project. From there, ask for a rough estimate based on the various furniture options you've selected for the project. Keep in mind that this is a ballpark figure.

## 6. Research furniture sustainability

What kind of sustainability standard are you looking for? Before you finalize your manufacturer, you need to make sure they can meet your sustainability requirements. Students are generally concerned with the ethical credentials of their furniture and it's important to make sure your dollars aren't contributing to the degradation of the biosphere.

Residence hall furniture is made from different materials and some are much more environmentally friendly than others. When it comes to sustainable furniture, marketing spin is in plentiful supply, so you need to ask specific questions to get at the truth.

In short, locally harvested and sustainably managed solid hardwood is the greenest furniture material. It goes downhill after that but next is furniture made from rubberwood (imported from Malaysia) and finally, at the bottom, is wood laminate furniture (imported from China).

Here are some key questions to ask your manufacturer. Manufacturers with genuine sustainability values can answer these questions in detail.

1. Do they have an environmental policy statement? Do they have an environmental management system to implement, monitor, and report on that policy?
2. What is the life-cycle analysis of the furniture? Is it recyclable?
3. What is the warranty? (DCI guarantees our furniture for 25 years)
4. What is the carbon footprint of their manufacturing process?
5. Is the furniture made in the United States and are the materials sourced in the U.S.?

6. Do they have third party certifications like: GreenGuard, MAS, FSC Chain of Custody (This is the Gold Standard)
7. Will you gain LEED certification credits by using their furniture?
8. Do they use renewable resources over non-renewable resources?
9. Do they have a zero waste policy? How do they manage their waste? What kind of waste do they create?
10. Can the products be refinished or refurbished?

Learn more about DCI's industry-leading [FSC CoC Certification](#), our [MAS certification](#), and our [green materials sourcing](#), sustainable [manufacturing](#), and our unique zero waste Vertical Integration Process (VIP). Download the DCI Sustainability Pledge and our Environmental Policy here ([link to the PDF](#)).

## 7. Research specifications and furniture construction

It's time to drill down into the details of the actual furniture you need. What kind of material do you want? You can choose a variety of different furniture materials.

How do you want it to be built? Do you need to customize it or will the standard sizes work for your residence hall?

## 8. Gain a consensus on design

When you're choosing your residence hall furnishings, it's important that you really love the look and feel of the furniture.

Do you want contemporary furniture or something more traditional? Also, you need to consider design in the context of your existing furniture. Will it integrate with your existing furniture?

Room furniture can take on a unique identity based on various drawer styles. Are you looking for a specialized applied drawer pull or a flush pull routed into the drawer design? What color stain do you want?

You can check out our Product Customizer on the DCI website to explore the possibilities and start customizing your furniture right now.

Make sure that you get buy-in from all the key stakeholders in the design process.

## 9. Establish Versatility and Flexible Configurations for future use

Here are some key questions to ask yourself when considering the versatility of your furniture. Are you looking for adjustable beds that can be bunked or lofted? Do you need to increase occupancy?

Do you want to offer students maximum flexibility to rearrange their rooms? Do you need wardrobes or do you have built in closets?

**Beds** - Maximum adjustability and bunkable or fixed height? What are your safety considerations? Do you need added guardrails and ladders on your lofts and bunks?

**Workstations** - Are you looking for traditional pedestal desks or flexible designs with mobile pedestals?

**Storage** - Do you want traditional drawer storage or do you prefer a functional stackable option to maximize your residents' ability to customize their living environment?

**Wardrobes** - If you need a wardrobe, does it need to fit under a loft to maximize storage space? Are you looking for enhanced features like built-in USB ports or LED lighting? Do you want to add other features like built-in mirrors, towel hanging rods, and whiteboards?

**Chairs** - Do you want a traditional student chair, a multiposition chair, or an ergonomic task chair?

## 10. Get room measurements and layouts

This is a very collaborative stage of the process where the experience of your provider meets your unique requirements.

First, it's time to enlist the assistance of your manufacturer to do field measurements. Based on those measurements, they will generate CAD renderings of the floor plans.

From there, your manufacturer will provide you with different layout options that you can work with and adapt.

## **11. Request furniture samples from manufacturer**

You need to be happy with your furniture and you want to make sure it's well made. So it's important for you to see samples of the furnishings and test them out.

This is also important because it allows you to see the pieces in the actual spaces they will furnish. This can reveal new space considerations and other insights. It's also the best opportunity to finalize your design in case you need to make any last modifications.

## **12. Finalize Product & Final Pricing**

Now you want to request final price quotes and specifications. Review this and make sure it exactly reflects what you want.

If you need full service installation, have your supplier do a project walk-through to get a thorough understanding of site conditions and project parameters.

## **13. Submit your purchase Order**