

# A New York State Nonprofit Audited Discarded Fabric Samples to Divert Textile Waste from Landfills



**Awardee:** FABSCRAP Inc.

**Outcome:** Performed an analysis of discarded fabric swatches to better understand the types of textile waste being created by New York City’s fashion industry.

**Why:** To collect data to inform sustainability recommendations that textile mills can use to make and supply fabric samples to designers that are easier to recover or recycle.

**Where:** Brooklyn, New York

**Award Amount:** \$20,000

## Project Highlights at a Glance

**7,500**

lbs of pre-production textile waste were analyzed.

**10**

common types of fabric samples provided data that will help inform the development of sustainability recommendations for the fashion industry.

**~3.5**

lbs of samples were sorted and separated by hand, and categorized, every hour.

In 2023, FABSCRAP Inc. was awarded \$20,000 through [the NYSP2I Community Grants Program](#) to analyze the composition and distribution of fabric samples discarded by the fashion industry. The Sample Overhaul and Audit Project (SOAP) examined the material makeup of 7,500 pounds of fabric sample swatches, their headers and labels, and how they are distributed by textile mills.

### Turning the tide on textile waste in the fashion industry

The project embodies two key pollution-prevention goals of the NYSP2I Community Grants Program: eliminating waste at the source by modifying production processes and reusing materials rather than putting them into the waste stream. The samples audited by FABSCRAP represent pre-consumer textile waste, meaning the material or fabric is discarded before reaching customers. The project’s goal was to generate research that could be used to develop more sustainable practices for fabric mills and the fashion and interior design industries they supply. In so doing, FABSCRAP aimed to increase reusability of fabric samples and mitigate waste.

**“Keeping this fabric from landfill has some really important environmental benefits in that we’re not needing to create new fabric, which is a resource-intensive process. And we’re also keeping microplastics and dyes from our landfills and waterways.”** *Jessica Schreiber, founder and CEO of FABSCRAP*

FABSCRAP, a nonprofit organization headquartered in Brooklyn, New York, works to redirect commercial waste produced by the textile industry by providing salvaged supplies and resources to local artists through the resale, reuse, and recycling of discarded textiles. The organization currently receives around 6,000 pounds of commercial textile waste per week—approximately 74 percent of which is in the form of fabric samples, swatches, and headers.

The samples are collected from brands and businesses in New York City, who receive the samples from textile mills without request and ultimately dispose of them. The samples are typically small, around six square inches in size, and generally unusable. Disassembly of the samples by hand is time- and labor-intensive because of the diverse techniques used to attach materials together, such as staples and adhesives like stickers and labels.

The negative economic and environmental impacts of wasted fabric samples reflects today's linear economy, sometimes referred to as a "take, make, waste" economy. Textile mills lose money and consume considerable natural resources producing and distributing samples that do not lead to purchases. Fashion brands pay by weight to have the discarded samples they accrue collected and transported for recycling. In turn, recyclers like FABSCRAP spend considerable time and effort processing the samples that could be otherwise applied to recovering greater volumes of textiles from the waste stream.

### The audit process

FABSCRAP staff and volunteers sorted the fabric headers and samples for this project, and established a categorization system to identify source characteristics of the samples, such as proprietary or non-proprietary material, volume, and market type. Every hour, approximately 3.5 pounds of discarded samples were sorted, separated, and categorized, all thanks to volunteer assistance. The disassembly provided data on material characterizations of the 10 most common header types (i.e., hanging, paper back, or binder) and components (i.e., a plastic hanger with metal grommet or a cardboard hanger). The analysis also looked at the packaging aspect of the samples, including header material composition and size, the recycling or reuse potential of the material, and the separation process and time required to disassemble the header.

### Next steps

FABSCRAP has developed an educational presentation of the research findings from the sample audit and plans to publish a whitepaper in the near future. Looking ahead, Schreiber stated, "We hope to share our findings with others and provide more sustainable options and innovative ways for fabric mills to provide samples to the fashion industry."

"The work FABSCRAP does helps keep valuable resources in use for longer and out of landfills," observed Ambika Walker, who leads NYSP2I's community grants program. "The audit project supports pollution prevention efforts by working to change unsustainable processes that are happening in the fashion industry."



### The material make-up of the audited waste samples included:

- 50% fabric scraps
- 20% paper
- 14% reusable fabric
- 10% denim
- 4% trash
- 2% non-recyclable textiles

### Partners



### For more information please contact us:

585-475-2512

nysp2i@rit.edu

rit.edu/nysp2i

111 Lomb Memorial Drive, Bldg 78  
Rochester, NY 14623