



Insider tips on
*running a hard
waste recovery
program*

How to be circular without re-inventing the wheel

In the journey to a climate resilient circular economy, you can never underestimate the power of community action.

Community efforts to tackle climate change and create a sustainable future are on the rise, and if you are inspired to be part of this movement, this guide is for you.

In this guide you will find practical information and key learnings for groups and organisations that want to establish a community-based hard waste recovery initiative, including how to approach the critical planning, implementation and evaluation phases. There are also useful resources and networks to support your planning, knowledge building, and communications.

The knowledge in this guide comes directly from the experiences of local community groups, social enterprises and other not-for-profits who were supported by Sustainability Victoria's [Circular Economy Communities Fund](#) – we will refer to them as our “CE insiders” throughout this guide. The communities fund, delivered on behalf of the state government, challenged local communities to explore creative solutions for waste management with activities that built local skills, encouraged social connections and created new social enterprise opportunities.

There is no single solution to any challenge or opportunity. Your initiative should take into account your stakeholders and communities, sector, resources, capacity, and overarching goals.

About Sustainability Victoria

Sustainability Victoria shapes Victoria's circular economy on behalf of the state government. We partner across industry and the community as a transition broker for the circular economy. Our goal is to reduce or stop waste before it starts, in every part of the system.

Sustainability Victoria leverages community and industry action to reduce emissions. Whether we are creating education campaigns to deliver better recycling, investing in repair cafes, embedding sustainability across Victorian schools, or providing solutions for the safe disposal of e-waste and chemicals, we empower Victorians to design their own circular future.

You can also download guides for other types of community-based circular economy initiatives:

- Bicycle repair/recyclers
- Repair hubs and cafes
- Food rescue and distribution
- Food waste organics/composting
- Textile waste
- Special waste streams

Hard waste recovery

Hard waste initiatives collect, repair and restore useful business and household goods and then re-distribute or sell them so they remain in use for as long as possible.

It's important to consider all of the following steps on your path to success. For hard waste recovery initiatives, we have highlighted specific key learnings that are worth further consideration because they may present more challenges and opportunities along the way.

Phase 1: scope and plan

Establish baseline community need and capability

CE insiders recommend learning about your volunteers, the people making donations, the people receiving donations, and the waste collection partners in your target area. Find out about their knowledge of and buy-in to circular economy ideals, and attitudes and behaviours regarding buying and repairing goods.

Plan your program

Think about what kind of activities you want to run that match your community's need. Articulating what drives you will also help connect others to your vision. Then you can think about the activities that will help you achieve it.

Consider some of these activities that our CE insiders are doing:

Tick those that apply to your program

Organise pop-up exchange and donation events.

Arrange collection and delivery of unwanted goods, which may include running and maintaining vehicles, organising a pool of volunteer drivers, or partnering with other organisations who already have this infrastructure.

Run a drop-off centre or warehouse to collect unwanted goods.

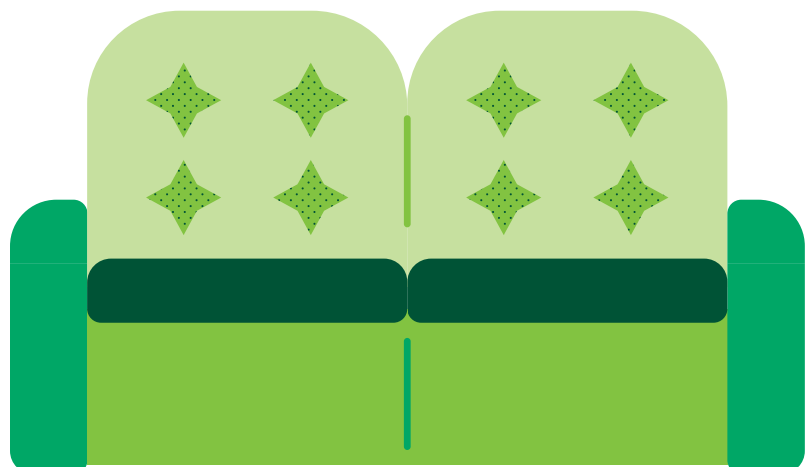
Assess and repair donated goods.

Create an inventory and store rescued goods.

Liaise with case workers and donor organisations to assess what recipients need.

Pick and pack relief.

Run a physical and/or online store to sell items. Selling online can grow your income and reduce your reliance on grants and government funding.



Set your boundaries

To help you refine the scope of your program, you should consider what you have the capacity and need to run.

Whether you choose a pop-up model or to run regular activities, you should take into account:

- The hard waste collection requirements of your local government area. Understanding these will define your collection approach and help to identify strategic partnerships.
- The equipment and facilities you have access to, as well as your location. Visit other warehouses first to see what you need.
- The space. It should be fit for purpose, secure and accessible to the community. There should be access for donations. It will help the donation process if your warehouse or collection point has parking or drop-off zones with room for a car to reverse. It will also help if you have suitable shelving.
- The preferences of your local demographics for donating and purchasing.
- What kind of donations your community needs and what kind of repair work is available.
- The availability of volunteers, warehouse staff and repairers.
- What to do with items that can't be repaired. Can you, or another organisation, ethically recycle the items to keep them from landfill?
- Risk assessments for each equipment category, for example, testing electrical equipment, managing furniture.

Manage risk and maintain memorandums of understanding (MOUs)

Assess your risks

Understand the risk profile of your intended activities and take steps to mitigate risk through appropriate insurance, disclaimers and management processes. Mitigation could include volunteer training, induction, and registration or certification.

Understand your agreements

MOUs are the agreements you have with your key partners, such as business donors and volunteers. They are useful in establishing clarity around everyone's roles and responsibilities to help you minimise risk and build productive partnerships.

To ensure compliance, you should make sure your staff and coordinators are aware of any contractual and MOU arrangements relating to their facilities, tools and equipment.

Design activities to change behaviours

Your community's engagement and behaviour is so important to the success of your program.

The aim of a hard waste recovery program is to encourage behaviour change in relation to waste, so it helps to think about how all aspects of your activities contribute to this goal.

Your activities could include:

- Teaching people to safely store and donate unwanted items.
- Teaching people to repair and maintain their items.
- Encouraging people to correctly dispose of items that you can't repair or accept.
- Creating clear guidelines for donation to avoid dumping and contamination.
- Changing purchasing behaviour, i.e. buy second-hand not new and/or cheap.
- Using education resources to promote the above, e.g. workshops and posters.

Try to design your engagement activities, programs and initiatives in a way that you can evaluate their effectiveness in impacting behaviour change. This will also help you demonstrate your value to key stakeholders, including funders.



Phase 2: implement the program

Run an efficient program

You will rely on volunteers to help run your events, so make the most efficient use of their time.

CE insiders recommend processes to manage repair events such as:

- A concierge to meet and greet guests and assess goods as they arrive.
- Activities to keep guests and their children occupied.
- Considering the user experience for volunteers, repairers, and visitors.
- A record-keeping system to keep track of repairs and collect data to demonstrate your repair activity's value.

Engage diverse communities

Consider the most appropriate platforms for communicating about your programs and whether or not you plan to target certain groups – different demographics use different media types. If you understand the demographic profile of your local community, you can improve information about events and using second-hand goods so that it's accessible to groups like migrants and refugees.

Set your team up for success

When engaging volunteers, CE insiders recommend having clear position descriptions that outline their roles, responsibilities and required skills.

Ensure that staff and volunteers who run events and receive donated goods have the appropriate training processes for:

- Accepting goods. Know what you will and will not accept. Consider if you need personal protective equipment (PPE) for your volunteers. If you are accepting toys, you will need to keep up to date with product recalls and safety standards. The St Kilda Mums organisation has a toy information app that you can use.
- Assessing goods. Is the donation in acceptable condition, and is it repairable?
- Diverting donations. Is there a more appropriate place to send the donation if it isn't something you accept.

One of the greatest challenges is unwanted donations. That is why you should:

Tick those that apply to your program

Be clear and specific about what you require and what you will reject. This will manage expectations and minimise dumping. This information could be on your website or on a poster at your collection area.

Have someone meet donors so that you can turn away the unwanted items.

Think about safety. People have been known to climb into donation bins, so having a plan for this will keep everyone safe.

Think about your insurance requirements, and what questions you may need to ask your repairers before they start work on items, and your pickers when they select items. Think about the needs of the volunteers and staff who deal with donors and what guidance they may need.

Circular collaboration

Hard waste programs are more effective when they work together. Think of other hard waste initiatives as a supportive and informative network that can help you achieve your shared circular goals.

You can also collaborate with other circular economy initiatives that work with similar waste streams such as repair hubs/cafes and bicycle repair/recyclers.

Think about how you can promote collaboration with each other, for example:

Tick those that apply to your program

Help each other with consistent messaging.

Share knowledge of public event opportunities.

Share repairers and knowledge of repair places, parts and sales.

Share knowledge of product recalls and unsafe items, especially if children may be using the product.

Provide local support to broader education campaigns.

Your program will be much stronger and more likely to achieve results if you can identify opportunities for partnership with existing organisations, such as local government, state government, bicycle recyclers, tool and toy libraries, and neighbourhood houses.



Phase 3: evaluation and improvements

Use your learnings to make improvements

Program managers succeed when they think about how they might improve future practice. This might mean sharing knowledge with your team or debriefing with other programs and providers. It could mean developing case studies for best practice.

When a new or unexpected donation issue arises, think about ways you can record or document the solution so that it can be repeated or applied elsewhere. Try to set up an easy-to-use document management system so that everyone can access information quickly. There are free document management systems that you can use, such as Google Drive and OneDrive.

Understand your finance and business obligations

A key tip from the CE insiders we spoke to is having people on your team who understand finance and the obligations of running a business. Complement strong business and finance knowledge with good financial systems that help you to understand quickly how your organisation is performing so that you can respond appropriately.

All programs rely on fundraising, grants and donations, so this will become an important part of your activities.

Financial viability is important to all hard waste programs, so think about ways you can encourage this by:

Tick those that apply to your program

Being aware of funding opportunities from philanthropic organisations and different levels of government.

Seeking out supported employment programs to help recruit volunteers.

Recording data and keeping track of your stock to communicate its value and show the quantity of goods you're saving from landfill. Your data becomes important for funding and advocacy as your program expands. You should collect the right information right from the start. While this does take some planning, you can get not-for-profit rates for stock control programs. Just be aware that there are limits on users' licences.

Teaching your volunteers and staff to write successful applications for funding.

Setting up ways to encourage donations.

Putting a dollar value on the donations you have received, especially from corporate donors.



Demonstrate your value

By collecting data on waste avoidance you can show the value of your work to key stakeholders, such as the venue, community and funding bodies. This measuring and storytelling can help you build your community and secure funding and resources for your program.

While it may be challenging to define what you have saved from landfill, if you are repairing items, you can contribute your data to global measures and help to build a stronger story around collective impact through [RepairMonitor](#).

Salvation Army



The Salvos have expanded their electronic test and tag services to increase access to second-hand electronic goods, however not all stores can sell these as working electrical items. CEO Martin Nordstrom says, "Instead, many electrical items can still be sold for 'non-electrical use' as an aesthetic item. For example, old transistor radios and lamps. This works within legislation. And we have market segmentation. If there is a really cool collectors' item, we'll sell it on eBay to maximise return."

Read more. www.sustainability.vic.gov.au/news/news-articles/re-purposing-second-hand-electronic-goods-and-reducing-textile-waste